



PROCEEDINGS OF
THE ART OF DEATH AND DYING SYMPOSIUM

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DIANE VICTOR:
ASHES TO ASHES

Although “ashes to ashes” is a familiar phrase, its source in the Anglican Church burial service, as codified in the 1662 *Book of Common Prayer*, is culturally remote today:

Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God in his great mercy to take unto himself the soul of our dear brother here departed, we therefore commit his body to the ground; earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the Resurrection to eternal life, through our Lord Jesus Christ...¹

In her *Transcend* (2010) and *Lost Words* (2011) portraits of old age pensioners, Diane Victor was concerned with “the loss of accumulated information, wisdom and narrative that occurs when someone dies,”² (and the *Book of Common Prayer* might be considered one such example). She therefore made the quite radical decision to create the images from the ashes of books that had been important to them. Rather than offering the ‘certain hope of...eternal life,’ the portraits ask us to reflect on the “ephemeral and transient aspects of human mortality”—and South African cultural history in general.

Most of the ‘sitters’ are white males, whose status in a democratic South Africa of black majority-rule has become increasingly unstable since 1994. Many white males who enjoyed secure employment during the National Party era have been made ‘redundant.’ That is, made to retire at age 60 and left in a nether world of long-term unemployment. This limbo is expressed by the isolation of the figures, many of whom appear to be floating. For example, one of the two women from the *Transcend* series, *Liz*, hovers before us, tipping slightly forward and to the side, as if she has lost her balance, (fig. 1.1). Her instability results from her ‘standing’ tip-toe on bunioned feet, and given her apparent advanced age, she by extension appears balanced equally precariously between life and death. Although her confident facial expression shows no evidence of shame or embarrassment, a scar from a mastectomy starkly reveals that she has had a previous brush with death. In addition, her knees and ankles are bound, and her nether regions are garbed in hospital-issue underpants, as if the process of wrapping the body in winding sheets has begun even before death. She is present, but constructed from ash, to which her flesh will likely soon return.

The portrait of this gangly, vulnerable woman has generated a remote connection: it reminds me of a poignant Dorothea Lange photograph from 1930s dust bowl America. The full title of the work is: *Woman of the High Plains: “If You*

FIGURE 1.1 Diane Victor, *Transcend* (*Liz*)



Die, You're Dead—that's all." *Texas Panhandle, 1938.*³ Skinny, dressed in burlap, and shielding her eyes from a blinding sun, the woman's desperation has produced a deep pessimism quite at odds with the *Book of Common Prayer* quoted above. Unlike *Liz*, she lacks even the comfort of a nursing home, and comments bitterly on the isolation of poverty: “This county's a hard county. They won't help bury you here.” With respect to the topic of the University of Houston conference, my own interest is less in death than in dying, and what is involved in facing it. How do societies deal with dying---what are the social values that will frame how society decides to treat its aging population? Victor's specters remind us that the issue of elderly care has to be faced.

Apart from our initial discomfort, how do we as viewers, of any age, respond to “...that tattered coat upon a stick, the ageing body?”⁴ The fact that we dress corpses before burial is surely in part to deny the unbearable vulnerability we see expressed in Liz’s body. As sociologist Julia Twigg has written, “Culture provides us with almost no images of the aging body unclothed, so when we do encounter the reality of such, it comes as a visual shock...Older people thus experience their bodies in the context of a profound cultural silence.”⁵ In contemporary culture, images form and often impose our identities by providing models from which we attempt to mould ourselves. The clichéd advertising image of the elderly is of healthy, active, heterosexual couples enjoying a fulfilling retirement. The figures in the *Transcend* and *Lost Words* series, on the other hand, are stripped, not just of clothing, but of context: the network of family, friends and colleagues that support a sense of self and weave the fabric of identity. This paper argues that Victor’s effort is a rare example of presenting that reality publicly. Although as both the angel of the hearth, preserving morality,⁶ and, in addition, the official mourner of death,⁷ Victor assumes roles traditionally assigned to women, she strips these conventional Victorian tasks bare of clichés and reinvents them.

In contemporary societies, where a capitalist culture of consumption and youth predominates, we are expected to push the terror of our inevitable end as far into the future as possible. Not that this is a new phenomenon. As psychologist William James noted in the late 19th century, death is “the ‘worm at the core’ of man’s pretensions to happiness.”⁸ On a superficial level, death is the reason for health clubs, for plastic surgery, for all of the strenuous, often extreme efforts people of means endure to avoid even the appearance of aging. This illusion has been supported by the removal of death from everyday life, as the aged are moved by those who can afford it into ‘retirement’ and ‘frail care’ ‘homes.’ There, they are expected to accept invisibility gracefully, and not to enact their decline in a public space. To quote art-

ist Vera Klement, “Death as a thread woven in to the social tapestry has vanished.”⁹

Victor created the six life-sized portraits in the *Transcend* series from residents in a frail care facility in the Johannesburg suburb of Turfontein, working from photographs she made “after much negotiation.”¹⁰ The images, which threaten to blow off their paper supports at the slightest movement of the surrounding air, give visibility to a rapidly-growing demographic. Because the legislated early retirement age in South Africa, the waiting lists for retirement villages and frail care homes, are long. The last of these, frail care, is for those who require full-time nursing care, and the place from which Victor drew her subjects. Viewed as a group, the images in *Transcend* explode a number of stereotypes into which society has confined the elderly. Each remains an individual, and exhibits a range of personalities, as expressed through their very specific physiognomies and body types. Jan is strong and vigorous, whereas Norman turns his back on the viewer and metaphorically to life itself (fig. 1.2). Finally, Granny Ray (fig. 1.3), appears to be floating upwards—and the religious references to suffering, death and resurrection are inescapable. Victor has noted that she was thinking of Grünewald’s *Crucifixion from the Isenheim altarpiece* (1515) as she was drawing Granny Ray’s feet. Again, the reference here is not to the ‘promise of eternal life,’ but to the resilience of the human spirit in the face of physical decline and pain. Hence the series title: *Transcend*.

The material used to create these images is essential to their interpretation. The drawings are made from the ashes of books that had personal significance for the sitters and that Victor purchased and burned. In the case of Granny Ray, Victor has recounted that she was an artist’s model who also worked in a bookshop. She has commented that “We often had long talks about books while waiting for the students to return from break- she stark naked.”¹¹ In addition to the accumulated knowledge and wisdom to which she refers, is there an implication here that the traditional academic standard of literacy, based on the

FIGURE 1.2
Diane Victor, *Transcend* (Norman)



FIGURE 1.3
Diane Victor, *Transcend* (Granny Ray)



knowledge acquired through the ‘Great Books’ of western civilization, is dying with the generation depicted in *Transcend*? Both the books and the bodies contain histories—but when they are discarded, how will those histories be passed on?

Despite the fact that the represented bodies in the *Transcend* series are created from blackened materials--ash and charcoal dust--they all appear to be unmistakably of European heritage, nominally representative of the Western tradition enshrined in the literature they themselves have cited: *Ulysses*, *War and Peace*, or *Great Expectations*. One clue to affirming their racial identification may simply be the fact that they are in institutions, as relatively few black South African families can afford such care. As she has said, “I did try extensively to persuade Black elderly people to

pose-- all refused absolutely.” (The reasons are obvious).¹²

Nonetheless, the use of ash and charcoal raises the question of the changing meanings of whiteness, as white skin is no longer synonymous with status, privilege and unilateral power in South Africa. Even though many South African whites do, in fact, retain considerable social status and economic privilege, these images suggest some of the narratives of loss that according to Melissa Steyn, whites have told themselves subsequent to the change to democratic rule in 1994, including loss of control, loss of guaranteed legitimacy, and loss of face.¹³ In South Africa today, even though both race and gender are now fluid categories, these identities remained contained socially within rigid boxes, to be checked off to con-

firm one's eligibility for various benefits of citizenship or employment, in an ironic echo of the apartheid era.

Obviously, Victor is not using these portraits simply to editorialize about the current status of whites, but at least in part is presenting these bodies as *memento mori* with which to reflect on colonial history and its complex legacies. The burned books from which their flesh is made does not suggest that these figures represent some wholesale 'decline of western civilization,' but rather, like concepts of race and gender, that a former standard of literacy, rooted in European culture, rapidly changing, in South Africa and globally. The disconcerting initial stage of Victor's drawing process, book burning, with all of its negative connotations, dramatically re-enacts this cultural flux.

FIGURE 1.4 Diane Victor, *Lost Words (Adolf)*



FIGURE 1.5 Diane Victor, *Lost Words*



The *Lost Words* series addresses this point directly. According to the artist, the four men in the series are "all ex-academics and Afrikaners and the books burned all Afrikaans...my aim was to try to source texts they had written as source ash [for my portraits]..."¹⁴ The life of the mind these former colleagues have lived in their professional careers is now visibly absent, as is the authority they exercised in a male-dominated profession. The brain of *Adolf* (Prof. Adolf Theron, former Director of the Pro Arte School at University of South Africa, appears to explode from his head ([fig. 1.4](#)). A former professor of industrial psychology, Ricky Mauer, ([fig. 1.5](#)) scratches his head in confusion while an alert-looking face, the self of a moment ago, hovers behind him: he has forgotten what he was going to say or do. In contrast with the drawings in *Transcend*, the two men do not represent physical loss so much as the decline of mental capacity. The body-mind duality, however surpassed in current theory, is brought here into sharp relief: the 'tattered coat' of the body is

insignificant in comparison to the shattered mind.

The unsettled status of whites under majority rule in South Africa is especially acute in the case of Afrikaners, those who instituted apartheid and administered its resulting crimes against humanity. If the requirement to teach all classes for secondary students in Afrikaans led to the 1976 Soweto uprisings, “...in 2002 the government decided that no university may teach only in Afrikaans.”¹⁵ Ironically, ‘the language of the oppressor’ is now spoken predominantly by coloureds, and the dominant language—“the symbol of prestige, advancement [and] the medium of business, finance, science and the internet...of government, education, broadcasting and the press,” is English, “the mother tongue of just 8% of the [South African] people.”¹⁶ If the *Transcend* series appears to embody a declining tradition of the transmission of culture through the written word, the *Lost Words* series suggests that Afrikaner culture specifically is in jeopardy. Language structures thought, and in a country where a top priority is the education of previously disadvantaged citizens, education in English could be considered a form of neo-colonialism. To quote Antjie Krog, who writes in both her native Afrikaans and in English: “English has become the language that confirms and judges our existence...But...this is absolutely the problem: English cannot tell the truth of South Africa...”¹⁷ According to South African art historian Karen von Veh, “A similar series of aging white South African men, entitled *Fader*, (fig. 1.6), refers to both the Afrikaans word for Father (denoting a strong patriarchal figure) and, again, the incremental fading away of relevance and status. Braai ash is also an appropriate medium in this context as the braai, [or barbeque] is traditionally the recreational domain of the white Afrikaans male.”¹⁸

The insistence that a population rarely proficient in English when entering the educational system, not only speak but write standard English in order to obtain an academic degree exemplifies an impregnable bastion of white power—to which the

FIGURE 1.6 Diane Victor, *Fader*



‘other whites’, the Afrikaners, and indeed the entire 92% of South Africans, are subject. The ‘Lost Words’ of the Afrikaners, or ‘Afrikaanses’ (whites + coloureds), like those of the nine official tribal languages, are vanishing into the ‘Anglosphere.’ The *Lost Words* may be truly their last words. On the other hand, with the passing of the Apartheid generation and the authority of written Afrikaans, the language is being parodied and re-written through visual art and popular culture, from the Bitterkomix of Anton Kannemeyer and Conrad Botes to the raucous, online performances of the rock duo, Die Antwoord. Puerile and stereotyped as these works can seem to be, perhaps they are clearing the ground for a revival of the language, freed from former cultural baggage.

In conclusion, the specters in the *Transcend* and *Lost Words* series confront us with urgent questions: how will society care for its elderly

and/or infirm? What is lost with their passing? What will we, the residents of a global, electronic culture, retain from the ideas and values that have shaped their lives? Although I have argued that Victor's images pose these questions, they make no attempt to answer them; in that sense, they are not 'activist' artworks. However, these images do speak to the role of memory in narrating history. As poet Mongane Wally Serote has argued, the task for the present generation is the recuperation and reconstruction of South African history, one that can reconcile conflicting historical narratives that exist only in parallel at present.¹⁹ And this is true not only for South Africa, but for the United States as well.

Notes

1 <http://www.phrases.org.uk/meanings/ashes-to-ashes.html> accessed 6/5/2011

2 Victor, Diane. Email to the author, 12/16/2010.

3 Image available at http://www.moma.org/collection/browse_results.php?object_id=56483. It was originally published in Lange, D. and P. Schuster Taylor, *An American Exodus: A Record of Human Erosion*. New York, 1939.

4 Waters, M. 1978. *The Nude Male: A New Perspective*. New York and London: Paddington Press. Cited in Andrew Blaikie, *Ageing and popular culture*, 1999. New York and Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 138.

5 Twigg, J. 2000. *Bathing: The Body and Community Care*. London: Routledge, 46. Cited in Christopher A. Faircloth, ed. 2003. *Aging bodies: Images and Everyday Experience*. Walnut Creek: Alta-Mira Press, 115.

6 Dijkstra, B. 1986. *Idols of Perversity: Fantasies of Feminine Evil in Fin-de-Siècle Culture*. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, Ch. 1: "The Cult of the Household Nun".

7 Havelock, C.M. 1982. "Mourners on Greek Vases: Remarks on the Social History of Women," in *Feminism and Art History: Questioning the Litany*. Eds. Norma Broude and Mary D. Garrard. New York: Harper& Row, Publishers, 52.

8 Quoted in Becker, E. 1973. *The Denial of Death*. New York: Free Press, 1.

9 Klement, V. 1994. "An Artist's Notes on Aging and Death," *Art Journal* 53/1, "Art and Old Age," 73.

10 email to the author, 12/16/2010

11 email to the author, 1/3/2011

12 email to the author, 12/16/2010

13 Steyn, M. 2001. *Whiteness Just Isn't What It Used To Be*. Albany: State University of New York, 155-160.

14 email to the author, 1/3/2011. Victor taught drawing and printmaking at the University of Pretoria from 1991-2007. These men are her former colleagues, several of whom she knew personally.

15 Giliomee, H. 2004. "The Rise and Possible Demise of Afrikaans as a Public Language," *Nationalism and Ethnic Politics* 10/1, 50.

16 "Tongues Under Threat," *The Economist*, 22 January 2011, 58

17 Krog, A. 2009. *Begging to Be Black*. Cape Town: Random House Struik, Ltd., 101.

18 Von Veh, K. 2012. *Diane Victor: Burning the Candle at Both Ends*. Johannesburg: David Krut Publishing, 31.

19 Serote, M. "Post-Sharpeville Poetry: A Poet's View," quoted in Colin Richards, "About Face: Aspects of Art, History and Identity in South African Visual Culture," (1991), reprinted in *Reading The Contemporary: African Art from Theory to Marketplace*. Oguibe, O. and Enwezor. O. eds. 1999. London: InIVA, 354.

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ROBERTA BALLESTRIERO



THE DEAD IN WAX: FUNERAL CEROPLASTICS IN THE EUROPEAN 17TH-18TH CENTURY TRADITION

There is in the Abbey a somewhat disconcerting tendency, to which one has to become accustomed, for inanimate objects to move and at length to reappear in a different place.¹

Westminster Occasional Paper, December 1973

Wax was known and used for numerous purposes since ancient times by the Egyptians, Greeks and Romans. It was also used for encaustic painting, but the first known use of wax for modeling was the sculpting of bronze and jewelry with the lost-wax casting process (*cire perdue*). This process consisted of pouring the melted metal between two layers of refractory material divided by a layer of wax, which was then eliminated and substituted by the metal itself. The particular physical and chemical characteristics of

wax, such as malleability, resistance to atmospheric factors, the possibility of accepting paint, all justify the interest in choosing to adopt this material to create a wide variety of figures and portraits. The high burning potential of the material explains the use of wax figures in religious and magic rituals. This type of figure was in use in ancient Greece and remained popular up until the introduction of photography. The advantageous characteristics of wax have led to the use of this material over the centuries for numerous purposes: – funeral masks, – wax models, sketches, – portraits, – wax votive offerings, – anatomical wax modeling, – waxworks.

The main characteristic of wax is that it is capable of achieving a remarkable mimetic likeness superior to other materials. It is flexible, easy to work, can be colored, and can be adorned with organic materials such as body-hair, hair, teeth and nails. The versatility, flexibility and above all its amazing mimetic capacity (and also the fact that wax resembles so remarkably human flesh), explain why wax was used to create funeral masks and effigies. In fact, funeral masks were produced from an early age and since the 14th century became widely used in the West, confirming the macabre tendency of the art of Ceroplastics.

Lysippus and Lysistratos of Sikyon, two brothers who lived in the fourth century B.C., were renowned in Greece as skilled sculptors and portraitists; indeed, Pliny reports that the idea of obtaining a “mask” produced from a direct plaster cast of a face into which molten wax was poured originated with Lysistratos.² The ancient Romans created masks and images of the deceased in wax to keep in the atrium or in niches. During funerals, effigies were laid on the parade bed, while portraits of the ancestors were carried in processions to accompany the newly deceased.³ They were then laid to rest and adorned with laurel wreaths for festivities and special celebrations.⁴

Only the rich were in a position to commission such figures, although wax statues of allegorical subjects or gods (*lares*) could be found in the houses of all social classes. Dolls with a wax face

(*pupae*) are likely to date back to this period, or perhaps even to the times of ancient Greece, and are testimony to an art which survived until the nineteenth century.⁵ The earliest evidence of funeral heads was discovered in 1852 in a Roman grave in Cumae. Two skeletons were found, with wax heads, colored glass eyes and traces of natural hair. The male head was preserved in the National Museum of Naples, while the female disintegrated in situ.⁶ The museum guide of 1876 suggested that these bodies belonged to persecuted Christians from the earliest days of Christianity.⁷

From pre-Christian times to the present day wax was also the most suitable material to make votive offerings and ex voto images, not only thanks to its resemblance to human skin, but also for its plasticity and reasonably low price. The offering of objects to a divinity or saint to ask for a grace (*propitiatory ex voto*), or to give thanks for a received grace (*gratulatory ex voto*) is an ancient custom; the objects were generally placed at pilgrimage sites, churches, chapels and shrines.⁸

Votive offerings could be of any kind but were often reproduced parts of the human body, representing healthy or diseased organs. In Florence, from the 13th to the 17th century, the donation of votive offerings was so common that it created a real industry of *ex votos* in different materials but especially in wax. Votive offerings of all kinds were present in different Florentine churches but especially in the church of SS. Annunziata. The anatomical votive offerings progressed to life-sized statues. Nobles, Florentine as well as foreigners, commissioned life-sized figures of themselves in colored wax. These were dressed in their own clothes and then offered to the Santissima Annunziata as an act of devotion.

These ‘bóti’, as they were known in the Florentine vernacular, were present in nearly all churches in Florence, but in the church of the SS. Annunziata they became a major feature, turning the sanctuary into an enormous museum of wax figures of all types that included body parts as well as whole figures. This practice ended in 1786

when the reforms made by Leopold II, Holy Roman Emperor from 1790 to 1792, ordered the clergy to free the churches of all votive offerings; the remaining waxes were melted down to make candles.⁹

The fact that wax allowed the creation of remarkably similar figures linked this material to portraits and funerary effigies. In fact, replacing the real body with a waxen image was practical. This habit, which started with the Greeks and Romans, was necessary because of the duration of the funeral and sometimes because of the time between the death and the funeral itself. In Latin Christianity from the beginning of the 13th century, the exhibition of the dead showing the face became intolerable. Therefore the body was closed in the coffin immediately after the death. From the 14th century, the body was removed from inclusion in the ceremony. That did not express a desire for anonymity. Indeed, at the funerals of important people, the hidden body was replaced by a replica in wood or wax. Artists therefore tried to obtain the greatest possible similarity by taking a cast just after death to create a mask. The faces of these statues became death masks.¹⁰

According to Giorgio Vasari, in his “Life of Andrea del Verrocchio”, wax masks, portraits and effigies were very rough/clumsy “...o vero di cera e goffi affatto...”. Apparently it was thanks to Verrocchio, who was taking plaster casts from nature, that this art improved. Thanks to Verrocchio’s innovations, a new custom developed in Florence and death masks started to appear in every Florentine house on fireplaces, doors and windows.¹¹ Eventually the tradition of funeral masks and effigies declined in Florence but the custom continued in France, probably until the 17th century not only as part of the royal ceremonies, but also of the nobility.

In France the custom slowly disappeared with the Enlightenment, but the English royalty successively copied it at funerals. In Venice, an analogous ceremony was in use from the 17th century until the fall of the Republic in 1797.¹² The concept of “double funeral” also as a political cele-

bration where a three-dimensional effigy was placed on the coffin is an ancient custom and was first documented in England in 1327 for Edward II, and then in France for Charles VI in 1422.¹³

The effigy was regularly used for the burials of the English and French royals and it played an important role in the funerary protocol, overshadowing the real corpse. This custom reached extremes in 16th century Europe. In France in 1514 at the death of Anne of Brittany, wife of Louis XII, the effigy was served sumptuous meals. The same treatment was reserved for the effigy of Francis I of France in 1547.¹⁴ Interestingly, with Francis I, the corpse was separated from the wax effigy and adorned with the royal insignia during the funeral procession. The mortal remains preceded the cortege while the effigy advanced in the position of honor at the back surrounded by the dignitaries, leaving the corpse virtually alone.¹⁵

The first effigy in Venice was used in 1485 when Doge Giovanni Mocenigo, killed by the plague, was buried in haste and in secret as a result of the development of the disease in the city. Until then the funerals of doges had been characterized by modesty; from that moment effigies were used occasionally, usually at the request of the dying man.¹⁶ In 1612, the austere Leonardo Donà was the first doge who did not want to be embalmed, and he was buried privately the same night he died. The body was replaced by a wax effigy for the rituals, which lasted several days, in the Doge’s Palace and in the church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo. Likewise doge Antonio Priuli stated in his will that he did not want to be embalmed and that a ‘figure’ be placed on the litter, as for his predecessor Leonardo Donà.¹⁷ Julius von Schlosser, in his “History of portraiture in wax” of 1911, stresses the importance of the resemblance between the real person and the portrait. Death masks provided a rapid and effective way of achieving this likeness

Currently in Venice there are a number of funeral masks kept in storage at the Museo Correr. Recently researchers tried to discover whom these masks portrayed. It is likely that they represented

FIGURE 2.1 *Main façade of the Scuola Grande di San Rocco*, 16th century, Venice, Italy. (Foto: Ballestriero R. & Burke O.)



Alvise III Mocenigo, who died in 1732, and Francesco Loredan, who died in 1762. Often the effigy was just a dummy with a wax face and hands; in the Museo Correr there is a wax funeral mask modelled on a plaster cast and a pair of clasped hands arranged as though lying on a body, which are probably more recent than the other pieces.

At the Scuola Grande of S. Roch, (Fig. 2.1) famous for hosting the great cycle of paintings by Tintoretto, is kept an eighteenth-century gilt wood case containing the wax head of Doge Alvise IV Mocenigo, modelled by an unknown artist and probably used during the public funeral ceremony for the Doge (Fig. 2.2). The head, at one time on show to the public, is dressed in the typical headwear of a Doge and was undoubtedly a funeral

mask. A close inspection reveals that there are several small holes where the eyebrows should be, indicating how initially real hairs were used to enhance the resemblance to the deceased, a commonly used practice in the art of wax modeling. The Mocenigo family provided as many as seven Doges, of which Alvise IV Mocenigo was the seventh Doge from the family and one of the last of the Serenissima.

Venetian custom included a double funeral for the doges. A few days after the death, the embalmed body was buried in the family tomb, followed by the lavish “*obsequies of the statue of the Most Serene Prince*”. The custom of using death masks and effigies in wax is well documented in the *Ceremonial Book of the doges*.¹⁸ The effigy of the deceased, dressed in the traditional beautiful attire, with the sword (*Stocco*) in his right hand, was shown for three days in the Hall of the Ducal Palace (*Sala del Piovego*).¹⁹

FIGURE 2.2 *Funeral effigy of Doge Alvise IV Mocenigo*, c. 1779, wax mask, h approx. 33 cm, Scuola Grande Arciconfraternità di San Rocco, Venice, Italy. (Foto: Ballestriero R. & Burke O.)



During those three days the effigy was veiled by priests, patricians and senators and on the third day it was accompanied by an immense, slow procession across the square to the church of Santi Giovanni e Paolo for the funeral. The preparation was the responsibility of *nonzoli* (sacristans) of San Marco, supervised by the ducal master of ceremony.²⁰ In the celebration of the funeral, a leading role was traditionally allocated to the Scuola di San Marco and in the 17th century occasionally to the Scuola of S. Roch. A dispute between the two Schools to establish which one should play the pre-eminent role in the funeral of Alvise IV Mocenigo indicated how important at that time this honor was.

The fact that the funeral head is still kept in the School of S. Roch underlined that this school won the privilege.²¹ At the Correr Museum there is also a whole wax head of the Patriarch of Venice, Francesco Antonio Correr who died in 1741. The head was modeled with cloth soaked in wax, a technique similar to the one employed to make the carnival masks so popular in Venice. This head

reminds us of the 12 wax portraits of Capuchins present in the right sacristy of the Redentore Church. The Sanctuary of the SS. Redentore was constructed as a votive offering following the safe delivery of the city from the plague, which had decimated the population in the years 1575-1576 (Fig. 2.3). The architect of this church was Andrea Palladio who supervised the works right up to his death in 1580. In the first vestry, together with the paintings of Paolo Veronese, Palma the Young and others, the busts of eleven Capuchin saints are conserved in glass cases.

Not related to the funeral ceremonies but more to the commemorative portraiture, Saint Francis and the other canonized and beatified capuchins dated from probably the second half of the 18th century are represented. These waxes were dressed in a coarse Franciscan cowl and finished with real beards and hair; their eyes appear to have been made from colored glass and accentuate the realistic appearance of the busts (Fig. 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7, & 2.8).

FIGURE 2.3 *Façade of the Basilica del Santissimo Redentore*, Andrea Palladio, 1577-1592, Venice, Italy. (Foto: Ballestriero R. & Burke O.)



FIGURE 2.4 *Seraphicus Patriarca S. Franciscus Assisiensis, (1182 – 1226)*, second half of the 18th century, wax bust, h. approx. 60 cm, Chiesa del Redentore, Venice, Italy. (Foto: Ballestriero R. & Burke O.)



FIGURE 2.5 *S. Laurentius A Brund: Generalis Or.C., (1559-1610)*, second half of the 18th century, wax bust, h. approx. 60 cm, Chiesa del Redentore, Venice, Italy. (Foto: Ballestriero R. & Burke O.)



FIGURE 2.6 *S. Veronica De Julia Ord. Cappuccinarum Abbatissa* (1660 – 1727), second half of the 18th century, wax bust, h. approx. 60 cm, Chiesa del Redentore, Venice, Italy. (Foto: Ballestriero R. & Burke O.)



FIGURE 2.7 *B. Angelus Ab Acrìo Mission. Cappuc.*, (1669-1739), second half of the 18th century, wax bust, h. approx. 60 cm, Chiesa del Redentore, Venice, Italy. (Foto: Ballestriero R. & Burke O.)



FIGURE 2.8 *B. Crispinus A Viterbio Lus Ordin. Cappuc.*, (1668-1750), second half of the 18th century, wax bust, h. approx. 60 cm, Chiesa del Redentore, Venice, Italy. (Foto: Ballestriero R. & Burke O.)



In England between 1413 and 1553 were terms such as 'pycture', 'personage', 'image' and 'cast' were used to describe full-length robed and supine effigies paraded atop the coffins of deceased monarchs and consorts at the time of their funeral.²² The English funerary tradition of the monarchy comes directly from the French one, however in the French custom some of the effigies were presented seated, such as the stone/marble sculptures on "*Transi tombs*". Also in London a transformation occurred over the centuries where the effigies evolved into something closer to portraits.

According to Schlosser another singular funerary custom appeared, occupying a middle position between the votive statues of Florence and the French effigies. This was the practice of exhibiting wax figures of high personages in Westminster Abbey, standing erect in glass cases, richly dressed and leaving them on display permanently. This custom made this place of worship the forerunner of wax museums such as the famous Madame Tussaud's.²³

The earlier Westminster effigies may have possessed two functions: first within the funeral service, as a recumbent representation of the dead monarch and then, after the service, as a memorial figure.²⁴ In fact, with the death of Charles II in 1685, the custom of funeral effigies lying supine ended and the tradition of figures standing upright began. It is not known who ordered this effigy, or why it was commissioned, not even the name of the artist is known, but a new custom had begun for the British royalty and aristocracy.

The example of Charles II was followed by Frances Stewart, Duchess of Richmond and Lennox, famous for her beauty and for refusing to become the mistress of King Charles II. Often nicknamed as '*La Belle Stuart*' for her beauty, she probably wanted to emulate the new style begun with the effigy of the king, as the supine form was out of fashion. Thus, on October 7, 1702, the duchess ordered in her will: 'To have my Effigie as well done in Wax as can bee and set up... put in a presse by itselfe distinct from the other with clear

crowne glasse before it and dressed in my Coronation Robes and coronette.'²⁵

In this particular case, we can see how the attitude to funeral effigies had changed among contemporaries:

First: it was the duchess who commissioned her own portrait and not the family or executors of the will after death. Second: the executors were told to "... secure the services of Mrs. Goldsmith, arguably the best wax modeller of those days, for a fee of £ 260."²⁶

It should be noted that Mrs. Goldsmith, owner of a wax museum and precursor of Madame Tussaud by at least a century, took almost a year to make the effigy, which was installed in the Abbey on August 4, 1703. Apparently it was exhibited in her museum first.²⁷ '*La Belle Stuart*' has nothing to do with the typical funeral effigies of the past and it is rather the desire of the deceased to live forever in memory through a portrait to be remembered as she was in life, and in the case of the Duchess, in all her beauty. The wax modellers were often real artists, and the use of the death mask, taken directly from the face of the deceased, allowed fidelity of detail and meticulous realism.

We could see how a death mask was used in the likeness of the noble Prince Edmund Duke of Buckingham, who died in 1735 at the young age of 19. Because of his frail health his mother sent him to Rome, where he died of tuberculosis on 30 October 1735. The magnificent funeral was held in London on January 31 of the following year. Obviously in this case the effigy was necessary because of the elapsed time between the death and the funeral. The work is very unusual in that period because the duke was shown lying supine with closed eyes and his effigy was kept in the same position even after the ceremony. We can consider this as the last genuine funeral effigy.²⁸ The effigy is incredibly realistic and the sunken cheeks, as reproduced from the death mask, showed the Duke to be in poor health at the time of his death. Additionally, thanks to the casting of the hands, we can also deduce that the young man was in the habit of nail biting.²⁹

The mother, Catherine, Duchess of Buckingham held a grand ceremony for her child as she did for her husband earlier. Later she personally oversaw the production of her own funeral effigy during the winter of 1735/6. After her death in 1743, the effigy was placed near her tomb, previously prepared in a glass case, along with that of her first child, Marquis of Normanby, who died in 1715, age three.³⁰ These effigies marked the definitive end of the funeral tradition.

From the 17th to the early 19th century, sacristans and minor canons began to take small tips from visitors to the Abbey and so they increased the business by commissioning other effigies (such as King William III, Queen Mary II, Queen Anne's sister, William Pitt Earl of Chatham, Horatio, Viscount Nelson, also the effigy of Queen Elisabeth was remade in 1760). The waxwork of Nelson was the last to be placed in the Abbey. Again, tradition became business as had previously happened in Florence during the 15th-16th century. In fact, at that time, the friars at the Basilica were much criticized as they encouraged this behavior in the faithful, which tended more towards superstition than to religion. However, in Machiavelli's *Mandragola*, Friar Timothy, alluding to the 'bóti' in the Santissima Annunziata, maintains how inadequate the attempts made by the friars were to persuade the people to continue to bring their votive offerings:

Then they wonder that devotion is lacking. As I recall there were five hundred images and today there are only twenty. The fault is ours, we have not been capable of maintaining our reputation. Habitually after vespers we used to form a procession in that place and sing praises. There were always new votive offerings present; during confessions we comforted the men and women and urged them to make votive offerings. These practices are no longer carried out and we ask ourselves why things have changed?"³¹

With regards to the Westminster Abbey in London, the funeral effigy had ceased to be a component of the royal funeral and finally the decision to exhibit monarchs was taken by the Abbey authori-

ties rather than the court. The creation of the later waxworks "was an ingenious move on the part of the Abbey: they were valuable tourist attractions and a source of income for the lay vicars".³² Slowly the concept of funeral effigies of the English royalty faded and merged into a business, anticipating the great success of waxwork museums that continue to this day with famous names such as Madame Tussaud.

Notes

¹ 'The Undercroft Museum and the Treasures Exhibition', *Westminster Occasional Paper*, December 1973, 14, in Harvey A, Mortimer R, *The Funeral Effigies of Westminster Abbey*, Woodbridge, The Bodydell Press, 1994, 21.

² Pliny the Elder, *Historia Naturalis*, XXXV, LXIV, Venice, Domenichi L., 1603.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Lombardi Satriani LM, "Ex-voto di cera in Calabria", in *La ceroplastica nella scienza e nell'arte*, Atti del Primo Congresso Internazionale, Florence, Olschki, 1977, 533.

⁵ AA.VV., *Le Cere Anatomiche della Specola*, Florence, Arnaud, 1979, 15.

⁶ Schlosser J von, *History of portraiture in wax*, 1911, in Panzanelli R. (editor), *Ephemeral Bodies: Wax Sculpture and the Human Figure*, Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 2008, 177.

⁷ Monaco D, *Guida novissima del Museo nazionale di Napoli: secondo l'ultimo ordinamento*, Naples, Vincenzo Morano, 1876, 66.

⁸ Antoine E, *Ex voto*, In *Encyclopedia of the Middle Ages* (ed. Andre' Vauchez), Cambridge: James Clarke & Co. (e-reference edition) 2001. Distributed by Oxford University Press. Open University. (Accessed 25 July 2009). Available at: <http://www.oxfordreference.com>.

⁹ Lanza B, Azzaroli Puccetti ML, Poggesi M, et al., *Le Cere Anatomiche della Specola*, Florence, Arnaud, 1979.

¹⁰ Ariés P, *L'uomo e la morte dal Medioevo a oggi*, (1977), It. transl. M Garin, Trento, Mondadori, 1992, 194

¹¹ Vasari G., *Vita di Andrea Verrocchio*, in *Le vite dei più eccellenti pittori, scultori e architetti*, Florence, 1568, publication of 1991, Roma, Newton, 506.

¹² Schlosser J von, *History of portraiture in wax*, 1911, in Panzanelli R. (editor), *Ephemeral Bodies: Wax Sculpture and the Human Figure*, Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 2008, 201.

¹³ Ricci G, *Masks of power*, in Daninos A, (editor), *Waxing eloquent, Italian portraits in wax*, Eng. transl., Bolton C, Milan, Officina Libraria, 2012, p. 61.

¹⁴ Ibid., 62.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid., 65.

¹⁷ Ibid., 65.

¹⁸ Cecchetti B., *Il Doge di Venezia*, Venice, P. Naratovich, 1864, p. 286, in Schlosser J von, *History of portraiture in wax*, 1911, 201.

¹⁹ Molmenti P., *La storia di Venezia nella vita privata dalle origini alla caduta della repubblica*, Turin, Roux & Favale, 1885, 395, in Schlosser J von, *History of portraiture in wax*, 1911, 201.

²⁰ Molmenti P., *La storia di Venezia nella vita privata dalle origini alla caduta della repubblica*, Turin, Roux & Favale, 1885, 395, in Carobbi G., *Arte Ceroplastica*, manuscript inedited, realized in Florence in 1929, 52.

²¹ Daninos A, (editor), *Waxing eloquent, Italian portraits in wax*, Eng. transl., Bolton C, Milan, Officina Libraria, 2012, p. 83, 84.

²² Harvey A., Mortimer R., *The Funeral Effigies of Westminster Abbey*, Woodbridge, The Bodydell Press, 1994, 3.

²³ Schlosser J von, *History of portraiture in wax*, 1911, in Panzanelli R. (editor), *Ephemeral Bodies: Wax Sculpture and the Human Figure*, Los Angeles, Getty Research Institute, 2008, 204.

²⁴ Harvey A., Mortimer R., *The Funeral Effigies of Westminster Abbey*, Woodbridge, The Bodley Press, 1994, 56.

²⁵ Ibid., 14.

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Ibid., 133.

²⁹ Ibid., 15.

³⁰ Ibid., 14-15.

³¹ N. Machiavelli, “*Mandragola*”, act V, scene I, in *Opere minori* of N.M., Florence, Le Monnier, 1852, 292.

³² Harvey A., Mortimer R., *The Funeral Effigies of Westminster Abbey*, Woodbridge, The Bodley Press, 1994, 19.

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AMANDA BROWN



THE WAY SHE LOOKED THE DAY SHE DIED: VERNACULAR PHOTOGRAPHY, MEMORY, & DEATH

When considering the topic of photography and death, we see a complex and varied relationship between the medium and time. We might think of the canonical (but possibly staged) photograph by Robert Capa of the Spanish Civil War soldier at the instant of being shot, of the slice of time after the bullet hits him but before he falls down; a split second caught by the camera and forever fixed.¹ Here we see photographic time as conceived by Museum of Modern Art curator, John Szarkowski, in his influential 1966 publication, *The Photographer's Eye*, in which he wrote of the photographer's fascination with "immobilizing thin slices of time" and of the "isolation of a single segment of time."² There is also, of course, the quiet, placid, immobilized time—the still-life time—that we see in post-mortem photographs. Or we can

think of death and time as postulated by Roland Barthes in his oft-quoted passage from *Camera Lucida*, which posits that in every photograph of the living, we see the future death of the individual. He writes, “whether or not the subject is already dead, every photograph is this catastrophe.”³ For Barthes, all photographs carry the death of the sitter into the present; if photography were a verb tense, it would be the future anterior, the tense of that has been.

In this paper, I will focus specifically on the vernacular photographic practice of memorial photography, and the complex network of time, death, and memory that this particular genre embodies. Memorial photography can be defined as a photograph taken when the sitter was still alive, which has been ‘framed’ or placed into a new context after the death in such a fashion as to indicate that the sitter is now deceased. I distinguish this from post-mortem or mortuary photography, photographs taken of the sitter after death, although certainly this genre can serve a memorializing function of well. Specifically, I will highlight a unique **private memorial album** held at the University of Colorado (CU) Boulder Libraries, while placing it in the context of other examples of memorial photography. While the small body of literature on single memorial images is growing, less attention has been paid to the memorial album, specifically the narrative aspects and particular relation to time of these multi-image constructions.

Compiled circa 1913, the album in question traces the life of Philadelphia resident, Carol Warren Benson Philler, who died at the age of twenty-five from toxemia of pregnancy. What distinguishes this album is an inscription written in the mother’s hand, scrawled onto the cover of a studio portrait at the very end of the album which reads, “This picture of Carol taken Christmas 1907 was wonderfully like her a day or two before she died—in fact the day she died” ([Fig. 3.1](#)). This final combination of image and text signifies the enactment of a private mourning ritual and narrative, in which photography serves to fix forever the de-

ceased in an image of youthful innocence and beauty.

The Benson Album opens with an inscription giving Carol’s birth and death dates, and then proceeds with an arrangement of photographs charting the life of the deceased. It opens with a largely chronological sequence of photographs, commencing with studio portraits of Carol as a baby and then progressing through childhood and into early adulthood. The world captured in the album is largely a world of women, a world of sisters, mothers, aunts, and grandmothers. Carol’s father is referenced early on in the album with a photograph of a four-year old Carol looking out from the porch with the caption, “waiting for her father (reverend F.L. Benson to come home),” but it is not until young adulthood that males make more of an appearance in the album.

Indeed, album making itself, as well as funerary crafts, has traditionally fallen in the province of the female sphere, with women being the keepers and preservers of family memory. In terms of album-making, in the Victorian era women would frequently not only assemble albums but also create fanciful collaged works involving cut-up cartes-de-visite and their own drawings. In the Benson Album, Carol’s mother is the compiler of the album, a designation that raises interesting questions about authorship. Who is the author of this album? Is it the mother who contributed a drawing to the album and exercised a keen eye in page layout, sequencing, and composition, or is it the multiple producers of the photographs, both studio photographers and amateurs alike?⁴ I would argue that as the compiler, the mother is the primary author, for the album can only be understood in its totality, assembled as it is from multiple disparate parts. Placing primary authorship with the mother opens up a way of viewing domesticized women in this period as having an authorial, artistic voice, just not one that has traditionally been recognized within the canon.

In terms of the history of portrait photography and the family album, the Benson Album occu-

FIGURE 3.1 *“This picture of Carol taken Christmas 1907 was wonderfully like her a day or two before she died—in fact the day she died”*



FIGURE 3.2

pies a pivotal moment in time, a period of change between the slow, formal world of the studio portrait and the instantaneous, casual moment of the snapshot. In the end, the album ultimately keeps one foot in the world of studio photography and one foot in the world of the amateur snapshot. In 1888, the year of Carol Warren Benson's birth, Kodak introduced a handheld camera that came preloaded with flexible film. True to the advertising slogan of "you press the button, we do the rest," the camera had a single shutter speed and fixed lens, and the user simply had to return the camera to Kodak to have the film processed, new film loaded, and the camera and prints sent back.⁵ Owing to the ease of use of the Kodak camera, its introduction led to a significant increase in amateur photography, giving rise to the ubiquitous family snapshot.

With the rise of amateur photography, studio photography eventually fell out of favor, and albums transformed to accommodate new tastes. As opposed to the nineteenth century, when albums were produced with slots of a uniform size, first to accommodate carte-de-visite photographs

and later to accommodate the larger cabinet card format, the twentieth century saw the marketing of albums to accommodate the multiple image sizes that proliferated with the rise of snapshot photography. As Elizabeth Siegal has noted, however, in her work on American photo-albums, this change did not happen overnight and cabinet-card format albums in particular were popular well into the early twentieth century.⁶ While the round images produced by the early Kodak camera, or Kodak 1's, appear early on in the Benson Album (Fig. 3.2), the family did not abandon studio photography altogether. Looking closely at the images in the album reveals that the family returned to the same studio over and over again, and as the children grew, the same carpet and furniture from the studio remained ever present and unchanged.

Additionally, it is precisely the form of the cabinet card album—not a more modern format—that we see in the Benson Album, and the mother's frustration with the limitations of this format is clearly apparent. While some pages are used as intended with a single photograph inserted into the slot and filling the frame, the al-

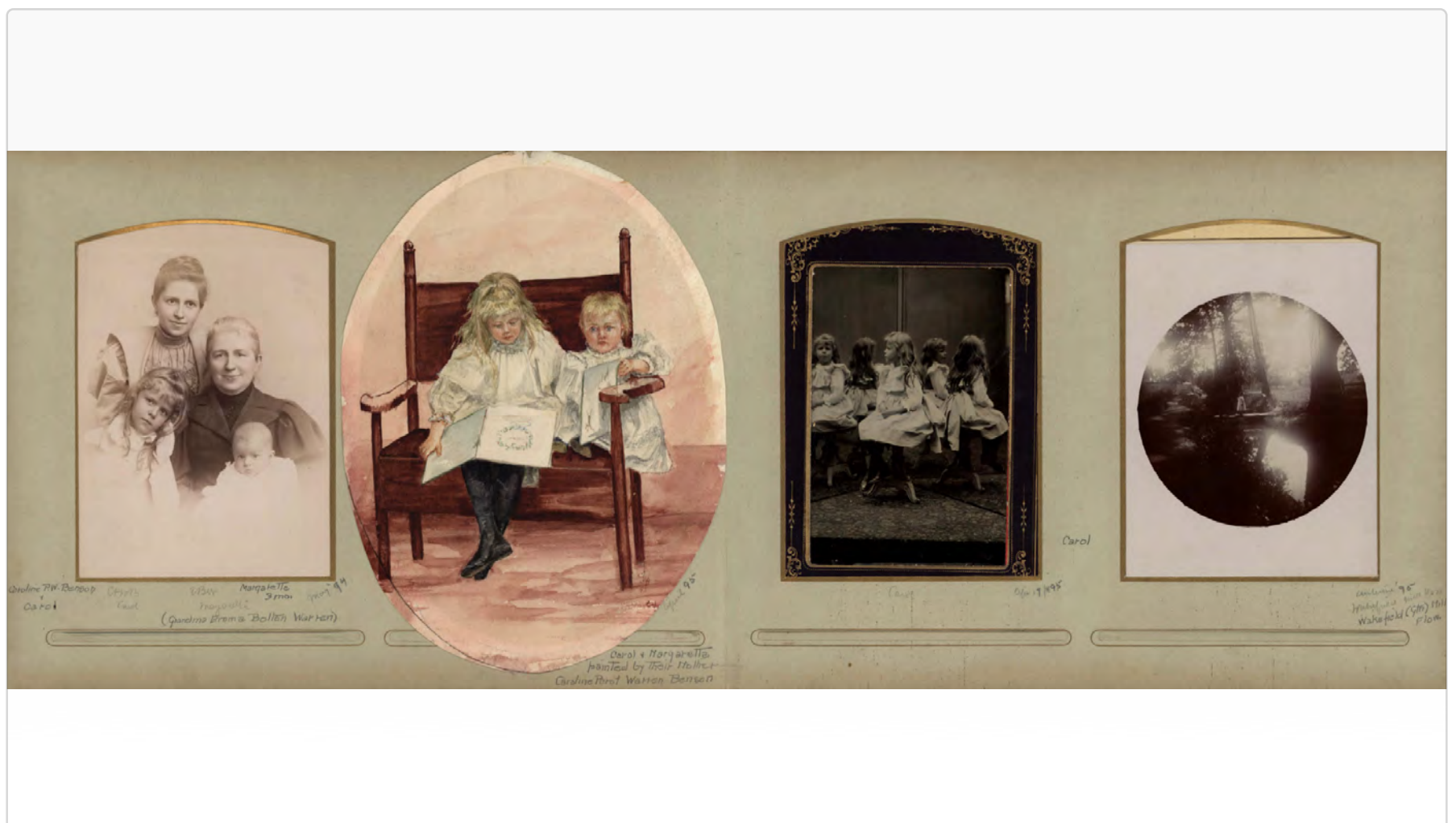
bum also includes numerous examples of photographs which have been pasted over the frame or inserted without filling the frame entirely, frequently offering a jarring juxtaposition between frame and image. Further deviating from the cabinet card album's intended format and use is the mother's placement of her own drawing of her children in the album (Fig. 3.3). The combination of the mechanical and the hand-made in this spread speaks of both the instantaneous, immediate time of the photograph and the slowed-down time of the drawing, of the indexical and the iconic, of the machine and the human.

The mixture of the handmade and the mechanical can be seen in numerous examples of memorial photography. In fact, it is often the addition of handmade, crafted elements that signal that the sitter is now deceased. For example, in a piece from 1910 featured in the Van Gogh Museum's 2004 exhibition, *Forget Me Not: Photography and Remembrance*, photograph, text, and decorative elements such as flowers and taxidermied doves are used to create a memorial image.

Writing on the piece in the exhibition catalogue, Geoffrey Batchen notes that in "mingling Christian iconography—the dove of peace and resurrection, symbol of the Holy Ghost—with a secular, mechanical image—a photograph of the deceased—it speaks of death and mourning but also of the renewal of life. It seeks to remember this man not as someone now dead, but as someone once alive."⁷ With his reading of such vernacular photographs, Batchen rightly complicates Barthes' assertion that every photograph speaks of the death of the sitter, for in vernacular photographic practices, we often see the assertion of both life and death,⁸ and this is equally true for both singular memorial images and memorial albums, as I will detail further in the course of this paper.

Before I return to the Benson Album, it is important to note that although this album is a particularly striking example of the memorial album genre, it is certainly not the only example. The International Center for Photography's Hugo Huslig Album, a somewhat later example than CU

FIGURE 3.3



Boulder's, was compiled by the deceased's mother upon the death of her son at the age of twenty-three. Moving back in time, there is an example of a Baltimore-area carte-de-visite album compiled in the 1860's, in which collaged elements memorializing a dead child break with the strict conformity of the album's other images.⁹ On account of the private nature of these albums, however, and the infrequency in which they have appeared in traditional collecting institutions, an exact account of the number and degree of prevalence is difficult to ascertain.

The Benson Album can also be understood in terms of printed textual memorial books, or 'albums' as they are sometimes known, examples of which can be found within both the Jewish and Christian traditions. A German-Jewish example, published in 1922 by Zion Verlag of Munich, includes standardized printed text along with space for details about the deceased to be filled in by hand. Additional space was also provided for the mourners to affix a photograph of the deceased. Continuing with the theme of time, the album also assists the mourner in identifying the *jahrzeit*, or anniversary of death, on the Christian calendar, which differs from the Hebrew calendar. While the book itself was standardized and mass produced, the addition of individualized details allowed it to function as a personalized and unique form of devotion and remembrance held by the principal mourner.

In the Christian tradition, privately printed memorial books were quite prevalent in the late-nineteenth century and typically included a photograph in the frontispiece, either a tipped-in original photograph or reproduction, along with some combination of biographical sketch, sermon, and recollections from friends and family. Rather than tell the story of the deceased's life through images as the Benson Album does, these works rely on a textual narrative and include just a single image to bring the deceased to mind. While these printed works were meant for distribution to a wider set of mourners beyond the immediate family, they re-

main in essence, an act and function of private mourning.

In contrast, *The Seven Mile Funeral Cortege Of General Grant* in New York aids in the mourning for a national figure who would have been known personally to few if any of the people who bought this memorial album. Published in Boston in 1885, the album includes tipped-in original photographs detailing the last days of Grant's life and his funeral procession. The oversized format of this album, with pages at fifteen by eighteen inches, speaks of public display and stands in sharp contrast to the smaller format of private memorial albums.

In the introduction to their encyclopedic study of photobooks from 2004, Martin Parr and Gary Badger explain that the genre of the photobook exists somewhere between the novel and the film.¹⁰ In other words, rather than being composed of a random assortment of single images, the photobook employs a conscious sequence of images, often with an implicit narrative. The same can certainly be said for the format of the photoalbum. In the case of the Benson Album, the narrative is the life of Carol Benson, which unfolds as we turn the album's pages. But just what sort of narrative or story does the album tell? For it is not a strict unfolding of time that we see in this album; time turns back, and rather than ending with the finality of the subject's death, time and life itself loop back on themselves. As an example, certain images of Carol are repeated at different points in the album, disrupting a straightforward narrative of the chronological unfolding of time ([Fig. 3.4](#)). Even the final image of Carol is found earlier in the album in proper chronological sequence, and when we encounter this image again at the end of the album, it jolts us back in time to an earlier point in the narrative.

Continuing with the theme of the genre crossover with the novel and the film, we must also ask ourselves whether the tale of Carol Warren Benson falls under fiction or non-fiction. Ultimately, I would argue that it falls in between the two. While employing indexical signs of Carol's

FIGURE 3.4



life at various stages of her development, the photographs have of course been consciously selected and arranged to put forward a story that is acceptable and comforting to the album's complier. As the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu has noted, "There is nothing more decent, reassuring and edifying than the family album."¹¹ Indeed, the photo-album offers the perfect vehicle for carefully editing a fiction of family happiness and presenting a view of how one would like both the dead relative, and the family itself, to be remembered. Nowhere is this clearer than with the album's final image and the inscription, "the way she looked the day she died," when in fact it is an image of Carol taken many years before her death and with much life still before her. It is a comforting fiction in which time does not move forward—quite the opposite in fact, for it is a careful selection of which memory of her daughter the mother would like to emphasize.

The relationship of photography and memory is equally as complex as the relationship of photography and time. Photographs are frequently thought of as aides-memoires, but to return to Roland Barthes and *Camera Lucida*, Barthes writes, "Not only is the photograph never, in essence, a memory...but it actually blocks memory, quickly becoming a counter-memory."¹² Barthes reaches this conclusion after looking at family snapshots of his own childhood, and he implies that the images filled his consciousness with such force that they superseded any memories unmediated by photographic information. Following Barthes, we see the convenience of the memory-blocking aspect of photography employed in the album as a strategy for dealing with grief. While the album's photographs bring to mind the lovely lost young woman, the final image also serves to replace any authentic memories of the last day of Carol's life with the more comforting, constructed memory offered by the portrait of Carol six years younger than she was the day she died and four years prior to her marriage, long before the pregnancy that resulted in her death.

Just as photography can both encourage the retention of memory and block memory unmediated by photography, the memorial photograph and the memorial album, as we have seen, can affirm both life and death at the same time. We know that Carol has died when we look at the album, but as time bends backward through the fiction of the album format, we also have the possibility of eternal life.

Notes

¹ John Szarkowski, *The Photographer's Eye* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1966), 11.

² Szarkowski, 100.

³ Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981), 96.

⁴ For a larger discussion of this issue, see Elizabeth Siegel, *Galleries of Friendship and Fame: A History of Nineteenth-Century American Photograph Albums* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 2.

⁵ Richard Benson, *The Printed Picture* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2008), 150.

⁶ Siegel, 159.

⁷ Geoffrey Batchen, *Forget Me Not: Photography & Remembrance* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004), 82.

⁸ Geoffrey Batchen, Yoshiaki Kai, and Masashi Kohara, *Suspending time: life - photography - death* (Nagaizumi-cho, Shizuoka: Izu Photo Museum, 2010), 108.

⁹ Siegel, 108.

¹⁰ Martin Parr and Gerry Badger, *The Photobook: A History* (London: Phaidon, 2004), 7-8.

¹¹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Photography: A Middle-Brow Art*, trans. Shaun Whiteside (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990), 31.

¹² Barthes, 91.

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RACHEL HARMeyer



OBJECTS OF IMMORTALITY:
HAIRWORK AND MOURNING IN VICTORIAN
VISUAL CULTURE

*I'll weave a bracelet of this hair;--
Although these locks so hallowed are,
It seems like sacrilege to wear
Such relics of the dead.*

*I've seen them clust'ring 'round a brow
Which drooped beneath affliction's blow,
And slumbers in the church-yard now,
With all its beauty flown.*

*The hand that dressed these locks with care,
And 'ranged them 'round that brow so fair,
And oft clasped mine with friendly air,
Is turning back to dust.*

*And closed those eyes, whose radiant beams
Surpass'd imagination's dreams,
Yet whisp'ring still, were but faint gleams
Emerging from the soul.*

*Farewell, dear friend, these locks I'll keep,
Till in the grave with thee I sleep;
There, like thee, may I cease to weep,
And, with thee, wake to sing.¹*

Sarah S. Mower, 1851

In John Everett Millais' painting *Only a Lock of Hair* from c. 1857-8, a young woman holds a small pair of scissors in her right hand, poised to sever a lock of her hair that she holds in her left. This painting alludes to the practice, common in Europe and America in the nineteenth century, of giving and keeping locks of hair as tokens of affection, as well as mementos of the deceased. *Only a Lock of Hair* refers to hair given as a love token, while Sarah S. Mower's poem above refers to hair kept in remembrance of loved ones after their death. The poem also describes the transformation of the hair into hairwork: "I'll weave a bracelet of this hair." During the nineteenth century, hair was often made into hairwork objects and jewelry: it was an artifact of affection and a material for memory. This sentimental treatment of hair was not a uniquely nineteenth-century phenomenon: in the anonymous article "The Hair as Remembrancer," published in the United States in 1848, the author states that "the custom of keeping the hair of deceased friends, is one of the oldest that we can trace into the records of time."² The author goes on to explain that this tradition "has arisen from its convenience, and its being the part which under certain circumstances will last the longest of any in the body."³ Because of its capacity to retain its original qualities even after being severed from the body, hair was seen as symbolic of enduring life. Hair itself was a treasured memento, and both locks of hair and hairwork were exchanged as living, sentimental tokens of love and friendship in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

In the context of mourning jewelry, hair was seen as a living extension of the departed individual. This function of hairwork can be understood when placed in the context of ideal images of death and dying in the visual culture of the nineteenth century, which equated beauty with life and immortality. The idealized body lying in repose, without decay, was a pervasive image in the visual culture of the nineteenth century. The desire to preserve the bodies of the dying was acted out on an aesthetic level: by capturing the last mo-

ments of the subject's life in a sketch or painting, taking death masks, through post-mortem photography, and through the preservation of a lock of the loved one's hair. In what follows, I will argue that nineteenth-century sentimental hairwork was inextricably linked to portraiture, even when it was not anchored to the miniature portrait. Like the miniature portrait and the photographic portrait, hairwork was an objectified extension of the body, kept as a personal and sentimental memorial. For those who possessed it, hairwork had the capacity to reconstruct the body into an ideal form that could live beyond death.

Like postmortem photography and other objects associated with mourning and memorialization from the nineteenth century, hairwork has unfortunately often been dismissed as a disturbing relic from the past. Today, the Victorians in particular are often misunderstood as pathologically death-obsessed, and their culture is seen as one celebrating death.⁴ Nineteenth-century hairwork has long been characterized as "a macabre and unsavory product of a bygone era," discussed primarily in connection to mourning culture.⁵ James Stevens Curl, a historian of architecture, discusses hairwork only in connection with mourning jewelry of the period and what he terms "the Victorian celebration of death." Curl describes mourning jewels including hairwork as "curiously unnerving objects" which "often excel in the art of evoking sentiment."⁶ Curl applauds the intricacy and craftsmanship in hairwork, but admits that "the affect on contemporary sensibilities is likely to be one of distaste."⁷

Misunderstandings regarding the purpose of nineteenth-century hairwork unfortunately abound, and this is reflected in the early literature on the subject. In a 1974 article discussing hairwork in the Minnesota Historical Society's collections, Virginia Rahm writes "of all the fads and fashions which flourished in the Victorian era, that of creating and wearing ornaments made of human hair ranks among the oddest and one of the more macabre."⁸ Rahm goes on to character-

ize the Victorian period as "a time in which good taste was all too often overwhelmed by the quest for the sentimental, the unusual, and the bizarre."⁹ This is tame criticism when compared to the introduction to an Antiques exhibition catalogue in 1945, quoted by Irene Guggenheim Navarro: "The gruesome idea of wearing jewelry made from the hair of a loved one who has died is hard for the matter-of-fact person of today to grasp... These articles of jewelry were 'worn with sadistic pleasure.'"¹⁰

This assessment of hairwork ignores its meaning and social use in the nineteenth century and demonstrates a lack of understanding of not only these objects, but the nineteenth-century approach toward sentimentality and death in general. While nineteenth-century attitudes toward death and dying certainly differed from those in current circulation, it is incorrect to state that the original intent of hairwork was macabre or gruesome. Nineteenth-century society allowed and expected its members to express their emotions and to grieve openly through the social ritual of mourning. Rather than being obsessed with death, nineteenth-century Westerners were consumed with the need to memorialize the lives of their loved ones, to objectify and treasure them through talismans of memory.

The preservation of a lock of a loved one's hair or its transformation into sentimental hairwork was a practice well-established by the nineteenth century, though the diversity of styles of hairwork expanded greatly during that time period. Ornamental hairwork first gained popularity in the seventeenth century, where it was "fashioned as both love tokens and death memorabilia."¹¹ In the seventeenth century, hair was plaited and preserved under crystal in brooches that often also had enamel memento mori motifs, such as a skeleton holding an hourglass. The date of death and the name of the individual commemorated often appeared on the reverse, and it was common for these objects to be given as tokens of remembrance. The brooches

functioned as mourning jewels—the hair preserved under crystal belonged to a specific person, was the element that personalized it, and it could be worn during the period of mourning. The seventeenth century hairwork mourning jewel acted as a memorial and as a secular relic: a reminder of the specific loss of an individual loved one as well as a general exhortation to ‘remember your death’ (*memento mori*) and morally prepare for one’s own mortality. The *memento mori* aspect of these objects had diminished significantly by the nineteenth century, but the memorial function of sentimental hairwork endured.

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, hairwork was often united with the miniature portrait. Cynthia Amnéus, in “The Art of Ornamental Hairwork,” notes that miniature portraits “were often commissioned to commemorate momentous life events such as births, betrothals, deaths, or other joinings or separations.”¹² She connects the purpose of the miniature portrait with the sentimental artifact of hair: “like fragments of hair, they were mementoes meant to maintain a bond between the sitter and the beholder whether separated simply by distance or death.”¹³ In miniature portraits, the hair belonging to the individual depicted often appeared on the reverse. In the case of this particular early nineteenth century miniature portrait, hair surrounds and frames the portrait itself, completing the likeness (Fig. 4.1). Fine amounts of chopped hair were also incorporated into narrative mourning scenes, as can be seen in this mourning brooch from 1788 (Fig. 4.2). Amnéus distinguishes between portraiture and hairwork, commenting, “while the miniature portrait provided a visual substitute for an absent loved one, a snippet of hair was a tangible connection—‘the literal body reworked.’”¹⁴ After the birth of photography, the lock of hair or hairwork continued to be united with the photographic portrait, as can be seen in Fig. 4.3 and Fig. 4.4. Hair could also appear on its own, as the sole material of hairwork jewelry, such as in Fig. 4.5 and Fig. 4.6, without an accompanying likeness.

Hairwork attained new heights of fashionable popularity in the nineteenth century, reaching its zenith from 1830-1880.¹⁵ Hairwork was combined with other media and sometimes hairwork objects are not easily classified, as the materials comprising the object often span categories: a painted miniature often includes hairwork on the reverse, a hairwork bracelet may include a portrait photograph, and the treatment of the hair itself varies widely, depending on the specifics of time and place. The multiplicity of media employed in these objects makes both the act of categorization and the task of uncovering their purpose equally difficult. The form hairwork jewelry took also changed over time: after 1830, hair was no longer merely preserved under glass, but could be elaborately braided to form bracelets, necklaces, and watch chains (Fig. 4.7). A diagram of such an intricately braided bracelet can be seen in this illustration from Mark Campbell’s *Self-Instructor in the Art of Hair Work* from 1867 (Fig. 4.8).

Helen Sheumaker, author of *Love Entwined: The Curious History of Hairwork in America*, explains that by this time hairwork was connected to “sentimental fashion.”¹⁶ She differentiates between the styles of hairwork in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the specific meanings they create, remarking that in the nineteenth century, earlier styles of hairwork “were modified to provide even more open displays of hair and the affections it represented, and new styles developed that did not simply include hair but were fully composed of hair.”¹⁷ This aesthetic difference reveals the changing nature of sentimental expression, and Sheumaker posits, “in the eighteenth century, the sentimental associations of hair were obliquely displayed” whereas in the nineteenth century, “hairwork and the sentimentality it conveyed was worn for others to observe.”¹⁸ It is important to note that the hair was always connected to the person from whom it was taken, and despite the vicissitudes of fashion, the material meaning of sentimental hairwork remained unchanged.

FIGURE 4.1



FIGURE 4.2



FIGURE 4.3



FIGURE 4.4



FIGURE 4.5



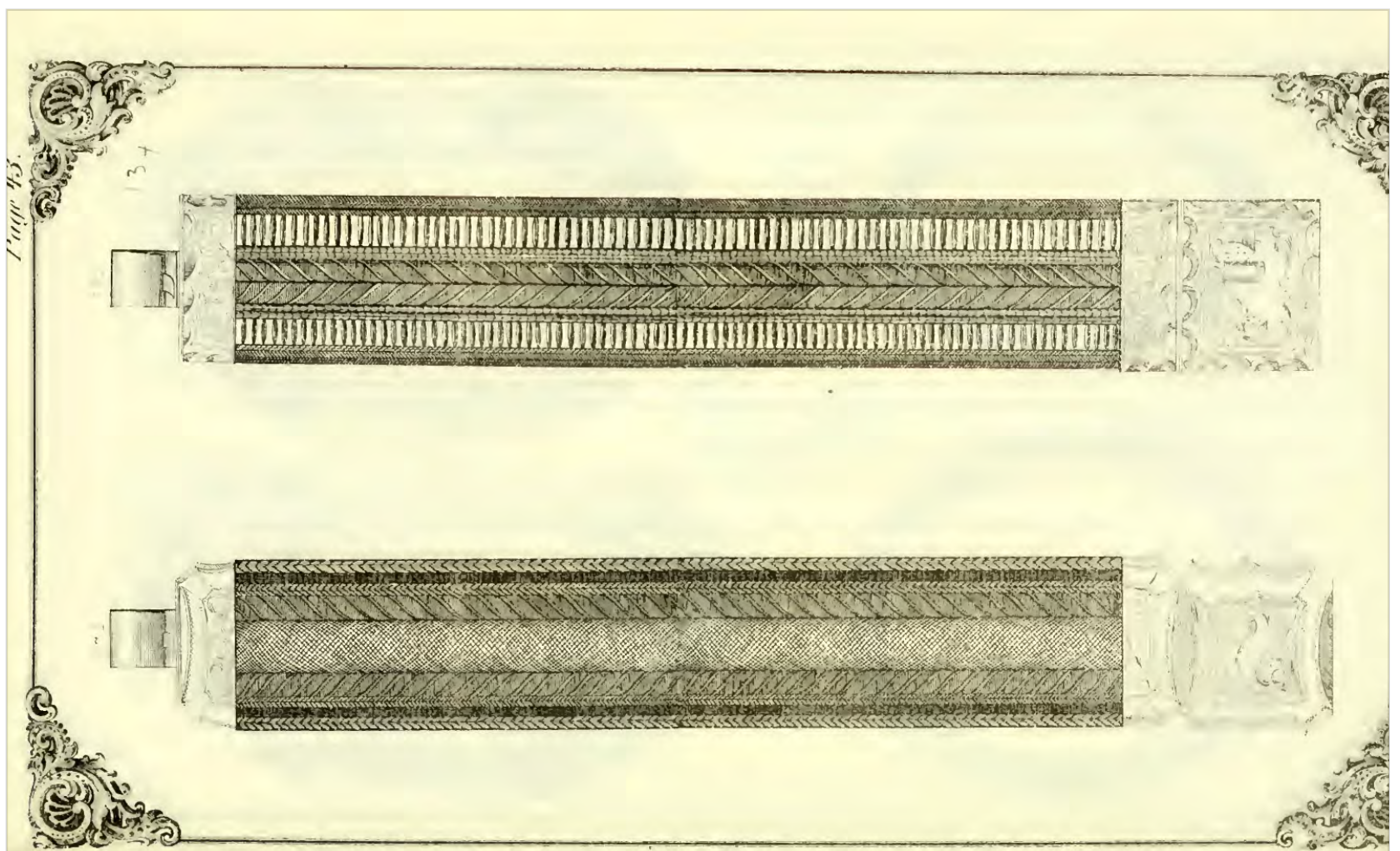
FIGURE 4.6



FIGURE 4.7



FIGURE 4.8



Hairwork was not confined to jewelry, but also included hair wreaths and locks of hair saved in albums, and the makers of such objects included both professional and amateur practitioners. By the mid-century, the hair wreath and the hairwork bracelet had risen to prominence. The hairwork bracelet or necklace (or even watch chain) consisted solely of elaborately braided or worked hair save for the clasp. The hair wreath was a larger, intricate construction of hair, which was wrapped around wire and worked into the form of a flower wreath. The former style was worn close to the body, whereas the latter was made for display within the home. The lock of hair, preserved as a sentimental artifact, can be considered the vernacular form of hairwork. Elaborately worked hair was available to those who could afford to commission professionally made hairwork, or those who had mastered the skill of working hair themselves. Hair was seen as meaningful, in the context of sentimental and mourning culture, because it was seen as an extension of the body that could endure indefinitely.

In the small body of scholarly literature that addresses hairwork as its subject, hair is often discussed as a relic. Sheumaker describes it as such in her prologue to *Love Entwined*, asserting, “when we encounter hairwork... we confront a relic of the living, breathing reality of someone long deceased. Because these scraps of hair were saved to remember someone, we behold that person’s self through a fragment of the body.”¹⁹ This description vividly illustrates both hair as a relic and perhaps accounts for the underlying reason behind contemporary aversions to hairwork. Amnéus similarly remarks that because of its “imperishable” state, “hair is a privileged human relic” bestowed “only to those most familiar.”²⁰ In “Materializing Mourning: Hair, Jewellery and the Body,” Marcia Pointon also identifies hair and hairwork as a relic.²¹ Deborah Lutz, in “The Dead Still Among Us: Victorian Secular Relics, Hair Jewelry, and Death Culture,” claims that hairwork functioned as a secular relic, stating that “for the

Victorians, artifacts of beloved bodies still held some of the sublime, fetishistic magic of those outmoded holy relics of bygone days.”²² Lutz elaborates this point, pointing out that “behind many Victorian narratives of personal relic collecting is the wish that the relic, rather than being a *memento mori*, might mark the continued existence of the body to which it once belonged.”²³ Unlike other fragments of the body historically venerated as relics, hair recalls the living state of the body: it remains the same after death, unlike the rest of the body, which is subject to decay.

The metamorphosis of hair into hairwork—its transformation from bodily fragment into treasured relic—was a means to give mortal remains an immortal body. C. Jeanenne Bell points to a quote by Leigh Hunt (1784-1859), which she states “sums up beautifully the Victorian’s love of hair”:

Hair is at once the most delicate and lasting of our materials; and survives us, like love. It is so light, so gentle, so escaping from the idea of death, that with a lock of hair belonging to a child or a friend, we may almost look up to heaven, and compare notes with angelic nature; may almost say, “I have a piece of thee here, not unworthy of thy being now.”²⁴

This quote by Hunt remained popular throughout the nineteenth century, was later reproduced in *Godey’s Lady’s Book*, and illustrates more than the Victorian’s love of hair: it reveals hair’s meaning to the Victorians as a substance associated not with death, but with eternity and life. Interestingly, Bell does not mention that Leigh Hunt’s quote dates from before the Victorian period, and can be found in an essay written at least a quarter of a century before it began appearing in *Godey’s Lady’s Book*.²⁵ Lutz does make the important note that “behind many Victorian narratives of personal relic collecting is the wish that the relic, rather than being a *memento mori*, might mark the continued existence of the body to which it once belonged.”²⁶ Within sentimental hairwork, the rhetoric of life, not death prevails.

The essential component of sentimental hairwork was its medium: the hair of the loved one. Women who undertook the arduous, painstaking task of creating their own hairwork could turn to instructions from magazines and manuals. Instructions for making hairwork circulated in the print culture just as motifs and styles of hairwork did. An early guide to hairworking was published in Leipzig, in 1822: Emilie Berrin's *Gründliche Anweisung für Frauen auf alle mögliche Art Haargeflechte nach der jetzigen Mode zu fertigen, als: elastische Leibgürtel, Armbänder, Halsbänder, Uhrbänder, Ringe etc.* (Thorough Instructions for Women on the Production of All Possible Kinds of Hairbraids According to the Current Fashion: Elastic Waist-Belts, Bracelets, Necklaces, Rings, etc.). In Britain, *The Englishwoman's Domestic Magazine* provided instructions for working hair, as did Alexanna Speight's *The Lock of Hair: Its History; Ancient and Modern, Natural and Artistic, with the Art of Working in Hair*, published in London, 1871. In America, *Godey's Lady's Book and Magazine*, *Arthur's Home Magazine*, and Mark Campbell's *Self-Instructor in the Art of Hair Work* (1867) were available to instruct the ambitious amateur. *Godey's Lady's Book* presented to its American readers in 1850 instructions for working hair:

By acquiring a knowledge of this art, ladies will be themselves enabled to manufacture the hair of beloved friends and relatives into bracelets, chains, rings, ear-rings, and devices, and thus insure that they do actually wear the memento they prize, and not a fabric substituted for it, as we fear has sometimes been the case.²⁷

A similar sentiment is expressed in Mark Campbell's *Self-Instructor in the Art of Hair Work*, in which Campbell addresses "Persons wishing to preserve, and weave into lasting mementoes, the hair of a deceased father, mother, sister, brother, or child," stressing that by making the hairwork themselves, the maker "can also enjoy the inexpressible advantage and satisfaction of *knowing* that the material of their own handiwork is the actual hair of the 'loved and gone.'"²⁸

This emphasis on public anxiety regarding the possibility of a substitution of material, that is to say, a stranger's hair exchanged for a loved one's, which would be anathema to the purpose of hairwork, illustrates the supreme importance of the hair of the loved one in sentimental hairwork. One of the most important features of amateur hairwork is that, because it was made at home or for close friends, the authenticity of the hair could be assured. Isabel Richter, in *Trauer Verkörpern* (*Mourning Embodied*) discusses Emilie Berrin's guide to hairworking, in which Berrin relates the following anecdote. Because he was going on a journey, her cousin Alphonse demanded:

...quite a pound of tenderness his from his young beloved, which would result in a talisman from the hands of a beautiful fairy, to relieve him from the pain of separation. Moved by the evidence of his deep love, his beautiful wife gave him the sacrifice of a lock of her long black hair, which the happy Alphonse undertook to have braided in Leipzig.²⁹

Alphonse retrieves the finished work, wrapped in paper, from the hairworker and on his way home he addresses "the sweetest words to the beloved braid."³⁰ As it turned out, the finished piece contains the blonde hair of an unknown woman, much to Alphonse's surprise and dismay, and "once the illusion was destroyed, the talisman had lost all its magic."³¹ According to Richter, it was for that reason that Berrin "inculcated in her students that 'bought hair awakened none of the sentiments which inspired in these ladies the desire to learn the art' of hairworking."³²

The purpose of hairwork is similar to that of the portrait: to preserve the body in an ideal form in which it could remain and be remembered. Both of these material fragments were kept as treasured artifacts (hair as hairwork or a single lock of hair, the features of the face through a painted likeness, a photograph, or a death mask) that could endure beyond death. The rhetorical connection between the facial features of the loved one and their hair can be seen not only in the miniature portrait, but

in sentimental poetry of the nineteenth century as well.

Through looking at hairwork in conjunction with sentimental poetry of the period on the subject of death—particularly the death of children—it is also possible to come to a better understanding of the purpose of the beautification of death in the nineteenth century. Many features of the nineteenth century's aestheticized presentation of the dead body as a sleeping body significantly predate the Victorian era. The rhetoric of beautiful death was in place well before the advent of photography and the post-mortem photograph. Francis Chantrey's funerary sculpture, *The Sleeping Children*, from 1817, embodies the ideal of nineteenth century postmortem presentation. William Lisle Bowles both describes and commemorated the sculpture in a poem of 1826:

*Look at those sleeping children; softly tread,
Lest thou do mar their dream, and come not nigh
Till their fond mother, with a kiss, shall cry;
'Tis morn, awake! awake! Ah! they are dead!*

*Yet folded in each other's arms they lie,
So still—oh, look! so still and smilingly;
So breathing and so beautiful, they seem,
As if to die in youth were but to dream*

*Of spring and flowers! Of flowers? Yet nearer stand
There is a lily in one little hand,
Broken, but not faded yet,
As if its cup with tears were wet.*

*So sleeps that child, not faded, though in death,
And seeming still to hear her sister's breath,
As when she first did lay her head to rest
Gently on that sister's breast,*

*And kissed her ere she fell asleep!
The archangel's trump alone shall wake that slumber deep.
Take up those flowers that fell
From the dead hand, and sigh a long farewell!*

*Your spirits rest in bliss!
Yet ere with parting prayers we say,
Farewell for ever to the insensate clay;*

Poor maid, those pale lips we will kiss!

*Ah! 'tis cold marble! Artist, who hast wrought
This work of nature, feeling, and of thought;
Thine, Chantrey, be the fame
That joins to immortality thy name.*

*For these sweet children that so sculptured rest
A sister's head upon a sister's breast
Age after age shall pass away,
Nor shall their beauty fade, their forms decay:*

*For here is no corruption; the cold worm
Can never prey upon that beauteous form:
This smile of death that fades not, shall engage
The deep affections of each distant age!*

*Mothers, till ruin the round world hath rent,
Shall gaze with tears upon the monument!
And fathers sigh, with half-suspended breath:
How sweetly sleep the innocent in death!³³*

According to Bowles, through the art of sculpture, Chantrey memorializes and immortalizes not only the dead children or his patron, but himself as an artist. By transforming the form of their bodies into an artistic presentation, he ensures that “the cold worm can never prey upon that beauteous form.” Felicia Dorothea Browne Heman (1793-1835), in 1829, approaches the same sculpture and subject matter in her poem *The Sculptured Children on Chantrey's Monument at Lichfield*.

*Fair images of sleep!
Hallow'd, and soft, and deep!
On whose calm lids the dreamy quiet lies,
Like moonlight on shut bells
Of flowers in mossy dells,
Fill'd with the hush of night and summer skies;*

*How many hearts have felt
Your silent beauty melt
Their strength to gushing tenderness away!
How many sudden tears,
From depths of buried years
All freshly bursting, have confess'd your sway!*

*How many eyes will shed
Still, o'er your marble bed,*

Such drops, from Memory's troubled fountains wrung!

*While Hope hath blights to bear
While Love breathes mortal air,
While roses perish ere to glory sprung.*

*Yet, from a voiceless home,
If some sad mother come
To bend and linger o'er your lovely rest;
As o'er the cheek's warm glow,
And the soft breathings low
Of babes, that grew and faded on her breast;*

*If then the dovelike tone
Of those faint murmurs gone,
O'er her sick sense too piercingly return;
If for the soft bright hair,
And brow and bosom fair,
And life, now dust, her soul too deeply yearn;*

*O gentlest forms! entwin'd
Like tendrils, which the wind
May wave, so clasp'd, but never can unlink;
Send from your calm profound
A still small voice, a sound
Of hope, forbidding that lone heart to sink.*

*By all the pure, meek mind
In your pale beauty shrined,
By childhood's love—too bright a bloom to die!
O'er her worn spirit shed,
O fairest, holiest Dead!
The Faith, Trust, Light, of Immortality!³⁴*

Heman's poem evokes the intimate loss of a mother, referring to "the soft breathings low/ Of babes, that grew and faded on her breast." Like Bowles, Heman envisions the bereaved mother taking comfort in the immortality promised though the "Fair images of sleep," the figures of the sleeping children, just as Bowles imagines all mothers and fathers as being capable of being moved by the monument.

The impact of Chantrey's *Sleeping Children* continued to be felt in the Victorian period, on both sides of the Atlantic. Samuel Irenaeus Prime reproduced Heman's poem in his book *Thoughts on the Death of Little Children*, published in New York in 1852. Prime directly addresses the reader,

The child is dead. The eye has lost its lustre. The hand is still and cold. Its little heart is not beating now. How pale it looks! Yet the very form is dear to me. Every lock of its hair, every feature of the face, is a treasure that I shall prize the more, as the months of my sorrow come and go.³⁵

This book, written three years after the death of one of his younger sons, can be best described as a manual for how to process one's grief as a parent in the event of the death of children.— an all-too-common occurrence in the nineteenth century. This excerpt links two aspects of the body: "every lock of [the child's] hair, every feature of the face" becomes "a treasure that I shall prize the more, as the months of my sorrow come and go." Through the painted or photographic likeness and the art of sentimental hairwork, these precious bodily fragments were transformed into treasured relics. In this passage, a connection is established between the lock of hair and the features of the face of the dead child. Both ephemeral subjects of the parents' gaze become objectified as treasures to be prized during the period of grief and mourning to follow. Hairwork objects and likenesses of the deceased, physical objects to be treasured, allowed the bereaved access to the image of their lost loved one after they were buried.

Before the advent of photography, most people did not have the means to image themselves: the common person did not have access to or ownership of his or her own image. The finality of death erased forever the features of a beloved face, and it is no small wonder that those who could attempted to preserve the bodies of the dying through portraiture: the production of a sketched or painted likeness, or an impression taken to create a death mask, or by preserving a lock of their loved one's hair. Beyond its status as an artifact of the body, hair could recall the body's living state. The lock of hair referred to the unique individual from whom it was taken and functioned a reminder of that individual. Post-mortem as well as pre-mortem photography captured the last image of the loved one before their body was laid to rest. It was not uncommon for the post-mortem photograph to be the only image, living or dead, of the

subject, especially in the case of children. Post-mortem photography attempted to represent the dead subject either with eyes open and retouched to seem alive, or as sleeping bodies, lying in repose like the figures in Chantrey's *The Sleeping Children*. Both approaches to representation re-frame the dead body as a living one.

The poem, "On Seeing a Deceased Infant," in which the author describes the act of looking at a dead child, provides valuable insight into the underlying ethos behind postmortem photography. Published in *The Ladies Garland*, 1825, this poem predates the invention of the daguerreotype and makes evident the pre-existing cultural need for photography, specifically post-mortem photography, as a means to document the last moments of a loved one.

*And this is death! How cold and still,
And yet how lovely it appears!
Too cold to let the gazer smile,
But far too beautiful for tears.
The sparkling eye no more is bright,
The cheek hath lost its rose-like red,
And yet it is with strange delight
I stand and gaze upon the dead.*

*But when I see the fair wide brow
Half shaded by the silken hair,
That never looked so fair as now
When life and health were laughing there;
I wonder not that grief should swell
So wildly upward in the breast,
And that strong passion once rebel
That need not, cannot be suppress.*

*I wonder not that parents' eyes
In gazing thus grow cold and dim,
That burning tears and aching sighs
Are blended with the funeral hymn;
The spirit hath an early part
That sweeps when earthly pleasure flies,
And heaven would scorn the frozen heart
That melts not when the infant dies.*

*And yet why mourn? that deep repose
Shall never more be broke by pain;
Those lips no more in sighs uncloze,
Those eyes shall never weep again.
For think not that the blushing flower
Shall wither in the church-yard sod,
Twas made to gild an angel's bower*

Within the paradise of God.

*Once more I gaze—and swift and far
The clouds of death and sorrow fly;
I see thee like a new-born star
Move up thy pathway in the sky;*

*The star hath rays serene and bright
But cold and pale compared with thine;
For thy orb shines with heavenly light,
With beams unfailing and divine.*

*Then let the burthened heart be free,
The tears of sorrow all be shed,
And parents calmly bend to see
The mournful beauty of the dead:
Thrice happy—that their infant bears
To heaven no darkening stains of sin;
And only breathe life's morning airs
Before its evening storms begin.*

*Farewell! I shall not soon forget!
Although thy heart hath ceased to beat,
My memory warmly treasures yet
Thy features calm and mildly sweet.
But no, that look is not the last,
We yet may meet where seraphs dwell,
Where love no more deplores the past,
Nor breathes that withering word—farewell!³⁶*

Here, "the mournful beauty of the dead" is linked to the promise of immortality. The beautification of death, coupled with allusions to the afterlife, was a means to give the bereaved solace in the face of mortality, to assure them that their loved ones lived on after death. By presenting the dead as beautiful, by posing the dead as still alive, by preserving and wearing the hair of the dead, the bereaved extended the lives of their departed. These excerpts of sentimental poetry illustrate the deeply-rooted cultural desire to have the ability to preserve the image of the self and one's loved ones, which photography addressed as a new medium.

Hairwork should be viewed not just as an accompaniment to the portrait, but also as an object that functioned as a kind of portraiture. Hairwork represents an absent body, that of a unique

person, and simultaneously functions as an extension of the original subject. The painted miniature portrait, which often included hairwork, was authenticated in two ways: through the faithfulness of the likeness, which could vary, and by the presence of hairwork, which as we have seen, was only valuable if it was authentic. Authentic hair created an authentic portrait. Interestingly, after the invention of photography, hairwork continued to be united with the portrait in photographic jewelry. The photographic portrait, though it was used interchangeably with the painted portrait, differed in how it communicated meaning. It did not just imply that an individual sat for a portrait, it verified it, through the process of photography. Like hairwork, photography operated as a trace of the individual: the photographic hairwork object doubly authenticated the identity of the subject. A further example of the rhetorical connection between the features of the face and the lock of hair of a loved one can be found in Alexanna Speight's *The Lock of Hair*, part historical essay, part guide to hairworking from 1871. Speight discusses the association of hair with the head from which it originated, and the act of recollection:

When we think or speak of human hair we naturally enough associate it with the human head. The mind recalls the curly locks of youth, dwells upon the flowing tresses or gigantic superstructure of womanhood, or mournfully turns away from the spare and scattered grey covering of old age. But however we may look upon it in admiration or in sorrow, we still connect hairs with heads.³⁷

More importantly for the connection between portraiture and hairwork, Speight goes on to discuss hair as an agent for actuating a memory of the face, referring to "the few solitary hairs which call back the dear face never more to be seen, scenes never again to be revisited, and incidents long held by the past among its own."³⁸ The primary audience for the hairwork object consisted of the very people that knew the subject of the hairwork best: they could identify and recognize the hair of their loved one. Hairwork, for the private, intimate viewer, functioned as an object that invoked

remembrance through visual and tactile memory, and it is not difficult to imagine the original viewer calling to mind the absent face of the distant or deceased loved one as they contemplated the hairwork object.

Sentimental hairwork retains the individual identity of its unique subject, and it seems to have always had this function as an object of remembrance. Like a portrait, hairwork can refer to a subject that can be living or dead, and this is part of how both portraits and hairwork function as symbols of immortality. Hair was an extension of the body that could endure indefinitely; it recalled the living state of the body; it could survive after the rest of the body had decayed. Therein lies its significance as a token of exchange: in a society that valued the aesthetic presentation of dead bodies as beautiful, immortal, and incorruptible, hair was highly valued as an object that embodied these elements. Hair was seen as having the capacity to bring to mind the features of an absent face, the ability to recall those features even from beyond the grave. It is no surprise that hair, the eponymous "remembrancer" of "The Hair As Remembrancer," and a material of memory, was worked into hairwork, which was worn on the body and displayed in the home. Hairwork was a means to reconfigure or reconstruct the body into a perfect form that could endure through the immortality of hair: an intimate portrait of life, not of death.

I would like to thank Hayden Peters for granting permission to me to use images of hairwork and miniatures from his impressive website The Art of Mourning to illustrate this paper, and I would like to encourage all who are interested in reading more about these topics to consult <http://artofmourning.com/>. Further, I would like to thank my thesis advisor, Dr. H. Rodney Nevitt Jr., and my thesis committee, Dr. Jessica Locheed, Dr. Jenni Sorkin, and Dr. David L. Jacobs for supporting my research, and Dr. Rex Koontz for encouraging me to pursue this topic in my graduate studies. Last but not least, I would like to thank The Art of Death and Dying Symposium for providing me with the opportunity to share my research on nineteenth century hairwork and mourning with the interdisciplinary and diverse group of academics interested in the arts of death and dying.

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4 James Stevens Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death*, (Stroud, UK: Sutton, 2000).

5 Irene Guggenheim Navarro, "Hairwork of the Nineteenth Century," *Antiques* 159 (March 2001): 487

6 James Stevens Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death*, (Stroud, UK: Sutton, 2000), 201.

7 James Stevens Curl, *The Victorian Celebration of Death*, (Stroud, UK: Sutton, 2000), 201.

8 Virginia L. Rahm, "MHS Collections: Human Hair Ornaments," *Minnesota History* 44, no. 2 (July 1, 1974), 70.

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12 Cynthia Amnéus, "The Art of Ornamental Hairwork," in *Perfect Likeness: European and American Portrait Miniatures from the Cincinnati Art Museum*, ed. Julie Aronson and Marjorie E. Wieseman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 64.

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Haare keines von den Gefühlen (erwecken), welche diesen Damen das Verlangen einflößten, die Kunst des Flechtens zu lernen.”

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37 Alexanna Speight, *The Lock of Hair: Its History; Ancient and Modern, Natural and Artistic, with the Art of Working in Hair*, (London, 1871), 5.

38 Alexanna Speight, *The Lock of Hair: Its History; Ancient and Modern, Natural and Artistic, with the Art of Working in Hair*, (London, 1871), 83.

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HERBERT R. HARTEL, JR.



DEATH AS CONFRONTATIONAL AND EMBRACING IN SYMBOLISM

Death was hardly a new subject in the visual arts in the late-nineteenth century, having been depicted often in Christian and mythological narratives and symbolically in still lifes, portraits and landscapes. The Symbolists of the late-nineteenth century were fascinated with death, probably more than any earlier artists, and depicted it often. Death was part of their interest in the bizarre, frightening, morbid, and mysterious. They usually depicted death as intimate, confrontational, disturbing and foreboding. Prior to Symbolism, depictions of death sustained a measure of emotional, spatial and physical detachment between the grim subject and the viewer. Death was depicted with the necessary facts and details and was meant to affect the viewer emotionally, but it was still somewhat remote and safely on the other side of the picture plane. The Symbolists often strove to eliminate this separation between the viewer and the dead,

between the living and the dead, as they pondered the mysteries of what death was. They were radical in how they depicted death because they were willing to explore at length a subject most people avoid. They showed death as a profound and mysterious event that was inescapable and always nearby. Death was regarded as something to be avoided and feared, or accepted, or perhaps occasionally even welcomed, depending on the circumstances of the one who was seen dying.¹

Earlier depictions of death showed Christian, mythological or historical figures dying, being killed, or being mourned. The reality of death was shown by emphasizing the fact that someone was now dead, but the actual moment and experience of dying were not explored. Matthais Grunewald's *Crucifixion from the Isenheim Altarpiece* is one of the most gory depictions of Jesus's corpse ever painted. It vividly describes what happens to a dead body, but the emphatic reality is that Christ is not dying but has been dead for a while. Jesus being lowered from the cross and mourned were common subjects in Christian art, but even the most emotive paintings of these subjects, such as Rogier van der Weyden's *Descent from the Cross*, Andrea Mantegna's *Dead Christ* and Titian's *Pietà* indicate that Jesus is already dead, not dying in front of us. Skulls, wilted leaves and petals on plants and flowers, and ripened fruit in still lifes symbolized death, frailty, the passing of time, and the inevitability of death.

However, something different which anticipated the Symbolist approach to death was occasionally seen. The small allegorical paintings about death by the German Renaissance painter and printmaker Hans Baldung Grien are proto-Symbolist in depicting death. *Death and the Maiden* and *The Three Stages of Life* each show a skeletal ghost in the background stalking a comely young woman. The eerie mood in Symbolist images of death was occasionally seen in Romanticism, which greatly influenced Symbolism. Henry Fuseli's two versions of *The Nightmare* make the viewer uneasy as a threatening, other-worldly horse and monkey, symbolic of demons, ghosts

and witches, surround a beautiful, restless and vulnerable woman. Francisco Goya explored death more than any artist before him. In *Fearful Folly*, the grim reaper towers over several frightened men who struggle to escape. Death as depicted in Realism and its precursors may have influenced how the Symbolists sought to make it seem so tangible and close. Jacques-Louis David's *Death of Marat* was originally shocking because it showed the stark reality of the recent assassination of a political figure, of an actual event that was immediately historic. However, with his arm hanging over the side of his bath, his head flung back, and his mouth slightly open, Marat appears to be at the moment of death. His bloody corpse in the tub has not yet been discovered, so the attack was very recent. *The Raft of the Medusa* by Theodore Gericault is a scene of shipwrecked men, some of them dead or dying. In *The Dead Christ with Angels*, Edouard Manet shows a bruised and dirty Jesus propped up by angels as he seems to gasp his last breath. Depicting these figures in such brutally real and messy conditions upon their deaths made these paintings controversial when they were first exhibited. Claude Monet did a few heart-wrenching sketches of his wife Camille as she was near death from cancer. In this painting, she is so emaciated that she is skeletal and so near the end that Monet has painted her in wispy, pale tones which suggest she is disappearing in front of him. Gustave Courbet's *Burial at Ornans* emphasizes the bleak mood and mundane facts of the funeral of an ordinary person, someone who is not godly, holy or noble. The painting explores how we mourn and deal with the death of others, not how we understand death itself and how we deal with our own mortality. However, the inclusion of Courbet's recently deceased grandfather in the left background attending the funeral of his friend and in-law anticipates a major pictorial device of the Symbolists. Courbet's grandfather is inconspicuous and looks as real and alive as every other figure in the crowd.

Symbolism's distinctive manner of depicting death was probably influenced by horror fic-

tion and spirit photography. Literature was very much part of Symbolism, and horror classics such as Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1886), Bram Stoker's *Dracula* (1897) and Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) were written during the Symbolist era. The most acclaimed author of horror at this time was Edgar Allan Poe, who became internationally known in the late-nineteenth century and was very important to the Symbolists. His stories and poems were widely read and translated into numerous languages. His poem "The Raven" was especially popular. A few Symbolist artists produced illustrations and paintings based on Poe's work. **Odilon Redon** did illustrations of Poe's writings for publications of his works and Paul Gauguin did *Nevermore*, an 1897 painting in which he overtly referred to "The Raven" with the title and the dark blue bird on the window ledge. These illustrations of Poe's poem place the raven above and behind the figures, and try to make it a haunting, stalking presence. This placement of the bird is similar to where the approaching figure of death is often seen in Symbolist paintings, drawings and prints. In *Nevermore*, Gauguin's raven is hardly the most frightening bird ever illustrated, but the recumbent Tahitian girl is not really asleep because of the fear it instills in her. She lays on her bed with her eyes open as she glances behind her, perhaps hearing the raven utter his haunting declaration "Nevermore."

Spirit photography may have influenced the Symbolists, since it was of great interest to many people from the 1860s until the early-twentieth century. It was one of the first means possible for manipulating photographic exposures for expressive effects and conveying mood and feeling. Spirit photographs have the faded, otherworldly atmosphere found in many Symbolist works because they show figures that are supposedly ghosts as faintly visible figures or silhouettes. This evocative, hazy atmosphere is evident in such famous examples of spirit photography as William Mumler's manipulated photograph of Mary Todd Lincoln with the ghost of her husband beside her.

Although widely dismissed as fraudulent since they were first made, spirit photographs could have encouraged Symbolists to explore similar visual effects for similar emotional and psychological states of mind.

In Symbolism's more narrative and figurative scenes of death, the subject is given physical, even human-like form, often with feelings of confrontation, absorption, and embrace. In *Isle of the Dead* (1880), Arnold Böcklin depicts a white-caped figure standing next to a coffin on a small boat that is being rowed slowly by a second figure toward a small island with tall cypresses surrounded by jagged rocks. The painting refers to the Greek myth of Charon, the boatman who ferried the dead to the afterlife by crossing the River Styx. Cypress trees are frequently associated with death and are common in cemeteries. The island becomes an eerie, looming presence in which the cypress trees fill a dark, empty void that is ready to absorb, embrace or welcome the figures and, by implication, the viewer. Ferdinand Hodler's *Night* shows several nude men and woman sleeping on the ground and embracing as one is awakened and startled when a figure in a dark cape kneels over him. The figure is most likely death himself, who has come to take the man's soul. He engulfs the nude man's genitals as he bends over slowly, implying castration as well as death. Although most interpretations of this painting dwell on the castration, the possibility of imminent death, perhaps symbolically linked to castration, tends to be overlooked. However, interpreting this painting as death approaching is quite plausible considering the message written by Hodler on the back of the canvas: "Some who go peacefully to bed in the evening will not wake up in the morning."² It is not clear if this nightmare is becoming this man's reality; Hodler has deliberately left us this mystery to ponder.

Numerous Symbolist paintings and prints make death a shocking reality, one that is tantalizingly imminent, by connecting a person to death with unflinching directness and thorough exploration of the tragic and morbid. Sometimes the per-

son linked to death is an actual person, not a generic type, and occasionally he is the artist. In *The Sick Child* (1885-1887), Edvard Munch gives us an intimate view of a dying, bedridden girl with her mother or another female relative seated next to the bed, bent over and weeping. Although the subject was unusually blunt and personal, the prospect of death is not that startling visually because the figures are far from the viewer and the textures are fuzzy, so that the scene is not in focus and its emotional impact is somewhat blunted as a result. Munch suffered great emotional pain when his mother and sister Sophie died of tuberculosis several years apart when he was young. These tragic personal events not only led to these paintings but altered the direction of his artistic career. Munch painted these subjects several years after the actual events which inspired them occurred, but his painful memories were still fresh.

Death becomes strangely intimate and direct in Munch's *Self-Portrait in Hell* (1892). In this brushy canvas of fiery orange, yellow and brown, Munch is nude, seen from the hips up, and turned away slightly. He looks at us with gut-wrenching but silent fear as the flames of Hell engulf him. Munch's works were surprising in the late-nineteenth century for their powerful and sincere expression of his suffering, loss and unhappiness. This vision of his own death as eternal misery and punishment may have been influenced by the loss of family members, but it was probably also effected by the religious views of his father. The elder Munch was a practicing Lutheran with extreme ideas on sin and punishment. He ranted that damnation was almost certain for all humanity, including himself and his family, and that the ghost of his wife and mother of his children was watching and judging them from beyond the grave.³ Emotional and psychological problems and incurable diseases such as tuberculosis were quite common in the Munch family. This self-portrait reveals fear, worry, uncertainty and self-doubt in a bold, forceful way that was virtually unprecedented. One notable precedent to Munch's painting is Michelangelo's inclusion of his self-

portrait in *The Last Judgment* as the face on the flayed skin of Saint Bartholomew. The meaning of this peculiar placement of Michelangelo's self-portrait has invited much speculation about his psychological and emotional issues. Böcklin conveys a similar relationship between the artist and death in his *Self-Portrait with Death Playing a Violin* of 1872. In this painting, Böcklin and a skeletal figure stalking him are seen up close, and the artist seems to have just become aware of the specter of death behind him, probably from the haunting funereal music he plays on his violin. The mood is quite sinister and suggests the inevitability of death regardless of one's place in the world, that for the artist the only possible immortality is through his art. In these self-portraits, the barrier separating the artist or viewer from death, which was traditionally the picture plane and the world created by the artist, is being eliminated because the artist seems to approach the spatial boundary of the picture plane by placing himself so close to it or by looking at the viewer.

One of the most innovative ways that death is depicted in Symbolism is by showing a figure, often a ghostly, demonic creature, approaching a person from the side and behind, almost as if surprising him. The figure of death may be shrouded in a cape and virtually unseen. It may be an animated skeletal figure that is naked or only partly clothed with a dark shroud. These figures associated with death are ghosts, demons or otherworldly escorts that will take the human to the afterlife. It is usually not specified if the next world is Heaven or Hell, but the dark, bleak mood suggests it is the latter. These ghostly figures usually lurk in darkness and when they encroach on the living, it is often by moving across the space behind the picture plane at angles that suggest they might break through it and enter our world. Consequently, their approach toward their victim extends to the viewer, who once seemed to be safe outside of the pictorial space. This change toward a more blunt, confrontational, absorbing and unsettling connection with death is something radically new that is an under-appreciated aspect of

Symbolism. The change is somewhat comparable to what William Rubin described in 1983 as the shift from the “narrative” to the “iconic” in early Analytic Cubism, in particular the paintings of Pablo Picasso.⁴ The visual change is considerable, but the emotional and psychological intensity achieved by the greater closeness of the viewer and the dead is even more profound. One of the first times this appears in Symbolism is Böcklin’s *Self-Portrait with Death*; it became more common by the early-1880s. This compositional format is quite similar to Greun’s paintings of death from the 1510s. It made death a palpable, unsettling, real presence. In his 1897 watercolor *Death Listens*, Finnish Symbolist Hugo Simberg depicts death as a dressed skeleton who listens as a young boy plays his violin before he claims his soul. Although we are initially shocked to see a skeleton, not to mention one who is dressed and soothed by music, we are not really afraid but slightly perplexed by the scene. By keeping the skeleton and the boy parallel to the picture plane and separated by the table and by illuminating the room with a bright, even light, the creeping dread that death usually elicits is greatly diminished. Also, the viewer still feels safe on the other side of the picture plane because none of the forms depicted threatens to breach it.

Gauguin explored the spirituality and mysticism of the Tahitians, including their ideas on death, in his 1892 *Spirit of the Dead Watching (Manau Tupapau)*. This painting was inspired by Gauguin’s discovery upon returning to his hut one day that his teenage lover Tehemana was laying on her bed in fear of dead spirits she believed were in the room. This was a common aspect of Tahitian religious and mystical thinking. Gauguin found this intriguing, even amusing, and did this painting about it.⁵ Here we see a dead spirit as a simplified, flattened figure on the far left of the composition, dressed in black with a brown face and large eyes, who is peering through the door, staring at the girl who does not see him but senses his presence. The figure is almost cartoon-like, and yet there is something sinister about him.

The dark tones of purple, violet and blue in the room describe dim lighting and enhance the mood of mystery and death. By the time Gauguin did this painting, the basic compositional format for such a narrative was widely used among his fellow Symbolists. He did not invent it but he made it unforgettable.

Redon used this compositional format numerous times in his *Noirs* of the 1880s and 1890s. The *Noirs* were charcoal and pastel drawings and lithographs that were moody, shadowy images of the bizarre, frightening and unusual. Some were illustrations for various short stories, novels and poems, including Gustave Flaubert’s *Temptation of Saint Anthony* and the writings of Edgar Allen Poe. Redon’s early drawing, *Faust and Mephistopheles* of 1880, uses the device of death approaching from behind, but does so rather awkwardly. His illustrations for *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* done in the mid-1890s are much more evocative. Number 18 of 1896 shows a despondent Anthony with his head tilted while Satan appears as a dark, bat-winged figure behind him. The two are in a brief dialogue, as Anthony asks what is the reason for life and death and Satan replies that there is none. This metaphysical uncertainty and religious skepticism is not surprising in the era of Friedrich Nietzsche. Number 20 shows death as a caped skeleton with a female flying around him. Death says: “It is I who make you serious. Let us embrace.” The comment is perplexing since we initially expect it is spoken to Anthony, but he is not shown. Death’s statement seems more logical if the comment is understood as directed to the flying figure, which might represent a free and living spirit. If they embrace, and Death gains control over her, he succeeds in taking a human soul. In addition to the theme of imminent death, sexual seduction is also implied and connected to the moment of death. Similar coiled serpentine figures appear in Redon’s lithograph no. 3 for *The Temptation of Saint Anthony* from 1889 captioned with Death saying “My irony surpasses all others,” and his 1905 painting of a very similar figure, *The Green Death*.⁶

The Czech Symbolist Auguste Bromse did *Death and the Girl*, a series of six illustrations, in 1901. These aquatints depict death as a living skeleton in a shroud stalking, taunting, and then claiming the soul of a woman in the middle of a dark, lonely night. They reflect how Symbolists thought at length about death with a morbid obsession and a fascination for the bizarre and horrific. Bromse used symbolic and narrative details, careful sequencing of events, Symbolism's unique pictorial devices, and the manipulation of light and shadow to create fear and dread. The theme of death being inevitable and close by is conveyed with iconographic details that were well established traditions by the late-nineteenth century, including the figure of death and everyday reminders of the passing of time and the physical, sensory pleasures of life such as musical instruments. However, Bromse has made them more shocking and disturbing by dwelling on them, showing the narrative not in one scene but in several that are sequentially related and thus reinforce one another, by carefully describing figures and objects no matter how obvious or obscure they are. No other Symbolist work explores the approach of death in such meticulous detail, and with such a powerfully evocative mood, as we see death stalk his prey of this particular night. Death is shown as a tall skeleton dressed in a long robe who is slowly getting closer to the unsuspecting beautiful young woman, following her in a park at night, playing a violin to measure the passing of time and taunt her, following the girl into her home, entrancing her with his music, and then claiming her soul and committing her body to her grave with the assistance of mysterious muscular and mostly nude man. Such a carefully developed narrative series about death was unheard of before Symbolism.⁷

As the Symbolist movement progressed, some artists made death more violent and strident. Belgian artist Jan Toorop depicted death as a semi-corporeal presence that is antagonistic, shrill and harrowing in his 1892 pencil drawing, *O Grave, Where Is Thy Victory?* In this meticu-

lously decorative, tonal illustration, intangible spirits fly over an open grave as gnarled hands reach out of the ground to grab and pull at the deceased who is laying on a funeral bier awaiting burial. The rhythmic, curving lines of many forms, including the spirits, and the harmonized array of gold and dark brown tones create fear and melancholy in this dark, murky scene. The drawing depicts a literal confrontation with death as a speaking, moving, violent presence. Toorop has used the same narrative device as Redon, that of including dialogue in the illustration, to create a verbal exchange between death and his intended target.

The Symbolist fascination with death lasted well into the twentieth century, although it gradually lost much of its ambiguity and mystery. In his 1911 painting *Death and Life*, Gustav Klimt depicts death as a skeleton wearing an elaborately decorated cloak and holding a scythe. He is looking at the young people who twist and turn amorously in their sleep in front of him. He is dangerously close to them and ready to claim whomever he wants by swinging his scythe. In her 1934 print *Death Seizing a Child*, Käthe Kollwitz depicts a frantic mother clutching a baby to her chest as a skeletal ghoul looms over her and tries to take her child. The scene is deeply tragic and disturbing. However, the emotional subtlety of earlier Symbolism which made scenes of death so compelling, is now mostly gone. Since Kollwitz was more concerned with self-expression than the more philosophical ideas on life and death, she was more an Expressionist than a Symbolist. However, this print demonstrates how Symbolism and Expressionism were sometimes closely related, and how the latter came from the former.

Symbolism ended early in the twentieth century as Art Nouveau, Fauvism, and Expressionism were born. The combined effect of these new movements, with their different expressive goals and thematic interests, was to push the ghosts, demons and spirits of Symbolism into the history of modernist art, where they can still be found and experienced today.

Notes

1 Most studies of Symbolism have been formalist, stylistic and monographic. Most of the artists studied at length have been French, even though the movement was widespread across Europe and the United States. The artists and artworks that were most radical and innovative in style have been treated rather preferentially. Hence, the most studied artists include Paul Gauguin, Vincent van Gogh, Edvard Munch and Odilon Redon. Iconographic studies are still not that common. Contextualizing studies that examine the social, political, philosophical and cultural influences have been more scarce. Books such as Michelle Facos' *Symbolist Art in Context* are part of a growing trend to reverse these entrenched biases.

2 Peter Selz, et al. *Ferdinand Hodler* (Berkeley: Art Museum of University of California–Berkeley, 1972): 30-31; Michelle Facos, *Symbolist Art in Context* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2009): 22.

3 J. P. Hodin, *Edvard Munch* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1993. Repr. of 1972 ed.): 11-13.

4 William Rubin, "From Narrative to 'Iconic' in Picasso: The Buried Allegory in *Bread and Fruit-dish on a Table* and the Role of *Les Demoiselles de Avignon*," *Art Bulletin* 65.4 (Dec. 1983): 615-649.

5 Francoise Cachin, et al. *Gauguin* (Washington, D.C.: National Gallery of Art, 1988): 279-282.

6 Stephen F. Eisenman, *The Temptation of Saint Redon: Biography, Ideology and Style in the "Noirs" of Odilon Redon*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992): 214-222. In his detailed interpretation of *Temptation of Saint Anthony No. 20*, Eisenman emphasizes the erotic overtones of the print and discusses the iconographic traditions that support his claim for the great importance of the erotic meaning. Without needing to dispute Eisenman, I contend that the erotic aspect is not as important as he believes.

7 Otto M. Urban, et al., *Decadence in Morbid Colors: Art and the Idea of Decadence in the Bohemian Lands, 1880-1914*. (Arbor Vitae, 2006); *August Bromse (1873-1925): Ein Graphiker in der Spannung zwischen Symbolism und Expressionismus*. A set of these aquatints is in the collection of the National Gallery of the Czech Republic in Prague.

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DONNA KACMAR



RITUAL SPACES

RITUALS

There exists within man a need for ritual. Ritual is a patterned symbolic response to a disorienting experience. Rituals are attempts to relate to the experience, find meaning within it, and get in touch with the mythical aspect of our existence.¹ Rituals enable us to reflect upon our spiritual potentialities.² Rituals are performed and rhetorical. They are a way in which man deals with paradox and conflict in life. Through ritual we "organize our understanding and dramatize our fundamental conceptions".³ Ritual provides us with a sense of reality, a reflection of ourselves and a restructuring of meaning. Rituals deal

with the experience of time. There is a passage from ordinary time to sacred time in performed rituals and rites of passages. Sacred time is reversible so that primordial mythical time may be made present. In this way rituals may transcend temporal time and time can be made continuous.⁴

Rites of passage are rituals that mark the passage of the individual through life cycles.⁵ Barbara Myerhoff identifies how nature marks the life course only upon birth, sexual maturation and death. T.S. Eliott refers to "the brass tacks" as being "birth, copulation, death".⁶ These inevitable occurrences are marked by rites of passage. Rites of passage deliberately destroy continuity of life by marking these events as disruptions and fractures. These events provide moments of great anxiety and occasions for the individual to be most receptive to understanding.

Myerhoff has also considered three paradoxes that are a part of rituals and rites of passage. First we must resolve conflicting notions of man as a creature of nature or man as a social and cultural being. The paradox of continuity versus disruption and change is also a part of rituals. Man must consider temporality and immortality. The third paradox identified is the resolution of individuality and uniqueness of expression with the sense of connection and involvement with others.⁷

Death provides the event for a great rite of passage. Death cannot be confronted or avoided. One of Sartre's characters has said that death will "creep up behind us". Death is the absence of life. Without life we cannot know or experience. Therefore it is not possible to know death or experience death. We must, however, accept that death will happen in order that we may fully experience life. Margaret Mead has stated that she knows "of no people for whom the fact of death is not critical and who have no ritual by which to deal with it."⁸

The practice of funerary rituals finds its origins in fear. The elaborate events and celebrations were a way to appease the dead. Modern ritual has evolved to be concerned with grief and the mourners. Most contemporary funerary services involve

four phases: 1) the rites at the time of death or the initial adjustment, 2) the funerary rite, 3) the rite of committal and separation and 4) memorialization in ritual over time. The funerary rite provides the confrontation with the body, therefore, "...we understand something about our own death in contemplating and enacting rituals involving a corpse".⁹ We are confronted with the body at the wake and at final commendation. The rite of passage of death must allow us to know that death has occurred, that the body is no longer living and to say farewell to the body.

Death provides a significant disruption of the continuity of life. Man must come to accept the finitude of his life, the limits of the human condition, and make decisions based upon these constraints. Is it possible to believe in immortality and truly be in the temporal? Can you believe in the sacrament of the ordinary and believe in the afterlife? We must revel in the journey not the end. Many funerary rites reinforce this idea and provide comfort to the grieving mourners not by false hope of an afterlife but by presenting the beauty in man being highly integrated with continuous existence. The death of an individual being marks the existence of this continuity as well as the evolving nature of life. This involvement in being, in existence, can be celebrated upon death. We can leave the ritual with an understanding and appreciation of the boundlessness of life.

Death rituals can be both singular and temporal. This paper explores two types of burial sites: landscapes and temporary urban conditions. The private burial landscape of the Brion Tomb and the larger public landscape of Woodland Cemetery in Stockholm will be presented. Burial traditions on the Venice island of San Michele are temporary and typically only involve a ten year stay on the island before being moved to a permanent home on the mainland. Burials in Cuba are also temporary and bodies are reburied after just two years when remains are transferred to a smaller container due to the limited space on the island. These interruptions require a specific land-

scape and architecture to support the various rituals and ceremonies.

LANDSCAPES

Brion Tomb, San Vito d'Altivole, Italy

Carlo Scarpa began his career in 1930, detached from architecture circles, and followed his personal inclinations in his work and in his teaching. He felt that "the architect's profession is for the mature"¹⁰ and that an architect needs humility and an understanding of life. This removal from architectural theoretical inquiries led him instead to the world of the writer, the artist, the craftsman, the master builder and the glass blower. This self-reliance on a personal understanding might have led to his careful and contemplative working method.

Scarpa designed a landscape of interconnection for a family memorial, a place that deals with "the ephemerality of life".¹¹ The Brion Tomb, in San Vito d'altivole, Treviso, Italy, provides a series of subtle transitions from the zone of life, as understood in the contemplation chapel in the lily pond, to the zone of death, symbolized by the tombs of Onorina and Giuseppe Brion. The memorial is an L shaped garden that wraps two sides of the existing village cemetery.

The garden, designed for and commissioned by the Brion family, contains both public and private functions. An Italian cemetery is truly a place of community. An Italian widow will visit the grave of her husband several times a week, maintaining the gravesite and maintaining contact with the past members of her family. The cemetery is not a place of mourning; it provides for social engagement while supporting the act of remembrance, the connection to the traditions and understandings of the culture.

Scarpa's garden illustrates the narrative of the funerary ritual. There exists a dual narrative that corresponds to the two main circulation paths and defined rituals. One path leads from the public entry from the village cemetery, through the propylaeum, to the prato or public lawn, and then

to private visitation with relatives. Inside the propylaeum the visitor is facing east and oriented to the cardinal directions. To the left are the tombs, the body, and the public lawn reached by a set of generous stairs. To the right, a series of narrow and steep steps allows access to the zone of the spirit and the private space of the meditation pavilion, which is the last portion of the second path. This second narrative is the narrative of the funerary ritual itself, which starts at the funerary gate, leads to the public mortuary chapel, to the tombs and ends at meditation chapel. Both narrative paths follow the sequence of separation, transition, and incorporation of the body which define rituals.¹² In each case the transitional space is the circulation space, the space of the body in motion. The narrative structure, based on the funerary ritual, is tied to the body and completes the architecture. The primacy of the body is revealed.

The arcosolium, an arched form that protects the sarcophagi of Onorina and Giuseppe Brion, sits at the corner of the plot. The circle in which the tombs are placed is cut into the earth, creating a tension in the ground plane and increasing the protection offered to the tombs. South of the tombs an elevated garden and lawn leads to the pool and the meditation pavilion. To the west, on a lower ground plane, are the family tombs and the mortuary chapel. Organized movement through the project helps the visitor understand the composition. This "syncopated movement"¹² links the simple building forms into a complex landscape that is felt by the body. This movement sequence is carefully articulated but is not a closed system. Space and circulation weave freely through out the composition allowing the visitor to chose and switch their individual paths.

The garden is also an allegorical and metaphorical experience as described through its use of material, space and water. Material is used as both symbol and space. Concrete is at times solid and dense or can be thin and light, as in a canopy. It can be read as either positive or negative space in the zigzag forms. Water also provides symbols and

linkages throughout the composition. The transformation of matter as the water leads from the meditation chapel, in a series of chambers from wet to dry, to the tomb is seen as an allegory of the dematerialization of the bodies in the tombs.¹³ There is a balance of matter and space; nothing is treated as separate. The project describes the sensual reunion in death.¹⁴

Although much has already been written regarding the human figures in the drawings of Carlo Scarpa, most extensively by Frascari and Anderson, it is hard to ignore the drawings of the pavilion filled with bodies. This private and contemplative space, a space of the spirit, is still inhabited and defined by the body. An understanding of the body is apparent. In order to view the garden you must sit or, if standing, align yourself, as indicated by the drawn figures, with a slit in the fascia. The inclusion of the figures in Scarpa's drawings illustrates how the body motivates design decisions. "The figures in the drawings of Carlo Scarpa...show that the elements of architecture can respond actively to human gestures, that spaces shape themselves to affect sensations in particular ways, and that the human body is a direct agent of architectural composition".¹⁵ Not only are figures in drawings helpful in understanding scale and how a building might feel, but they also help the designer develop how a body moves through the space. Frampton agrees with the importance of "the imaginative, dynamic and involuntary projection of self into the architectural object, without which architectural experience would be purely intellectual or associative".¹⁶ Frascari has said that the body's habits regulate Scarpa's planning. This is evidenced by drawings of the pavilion and by the design that is clearly shaped by the body standing, seeing, and sitting. From this privileged place on the platform of the pavilion, connections are made beyond the walls of the cemetery to the landscape beyond.

Skogskyrkogarden, Woodland Cemetery, Stockholm, Sweden

The Woodland Cemetery was designed by Erik Gunnar Asplund and Sigurd Lewerentz after winning the design competition in 1915, competing against 52 other entries. The two architects were both young and each had individual practices though they collaborated on this competition entry and its development, though buildings within the complex were designed individually.

When a new cemetery was needed Stockholm's City Engineer, A. E. Pahlman, looked to Pere Lachaise cemetery in Paris as a model for an urban public cemetery; a new type of large public burial ground located outside of city walls for hygienic purposes. When site difficulties emerged on the large plot of land south of the city the Cemetery Authority Director, K. G. Hellstrom, determined that hosting an international design competition for the project would help connect cemetery reform, a new movement to promote cremation as both hygienic, efficient, and culturally accepted, with modern design aesthetics.

Asplund and Lewerentz started with the idea of landscape and the primitive Nordic connection to nature. They even named their entry "Tallum" referring to the pine trees and to the small log cabin at Villa Tallom designed by Lars Israel Wahlman in 1906, reinforcing this primitive connection to nature. As Caroline Constant writes, the architects "relied primarily on enhancing attributes of the landscape – ridge and valley, earth and sky, forest and clearing, meadow and marsh – to evoke associations of death and rebirth".¹⁷ The circulation routes through the landscape to each chapel have been carefully organized. The processional routes to the chapels were designed to set the tone of mourners and then reconnect them to nature and the circle of life. "The cemetery may, in fact, be regarded as a garden."¹⁸

The entrance begins at the circular entry court and leads, past a stone wall on a path to the main chapel. While on this path, the Way of the Cross, views of the building beyond are hidden un-

til one rises along with the landscape. The visitor ascends the stone path, passing by a large stone cross with the Woodland Crematorium on the left. This series of buildings contains three chapels: Chapels of Faith, Hope and Holy Cross. These were completed in 1940 by Asplund, the same year he died, and his urn is housed near the Chapel of Faith. The Chapel of Holy Cross is the largest chapel of these and each contain a centrally placed catafalque for the coffin to be placed.

The route continues through dense trees to the Woodland Chapel also designed by Asplund and built in 1920, the first structure in the project. Coming from the dense forest one is led underneath a low portico with Tuscan columns supporting the sheltering shingled roof to the brightly illuminated interior. Even the building is “subordinate already – to the woods” as stated by Gunnar Asplund when describing his Woodland Chapel. “The building was compressed until it modestly subordinated itself, insinuated itself into the woods, surrounded by spruce and pine trees towering to double its own height.”¹⁹

Chapel of Resurrection, was added between 1923 and 1925 when the Woodland Chapel proved too small. It was designed by Sigurd Lewerentz with its portico set at an angle to the chapel. You enter the chapel from the north but exit to the west. While the chapel maintains the traditional east/west axis of Christian churches the portico faces north and south. Leaving the chapel you head west, along the Way of the Seven Wells, a long path, with older graves set among the trees on either side, that cuts through the forest and leads to the Grove of Remembrance, a paved square bordered by elm trees. A series of Service Houses and storage areas designed by Asplund complete the buildings in the complex. The quiet solemn architecture reflects a modern understanding of classic and antique forms that is always second to the power of the land forms and trees.

As beautiful and moving as these two landscapes are I believe it is also important for the rite of passage of death to be able to occur within the community. It has been suggested that the re-

moval of the dead out of the churchyard, and then further out of the city limits into suburban cemeteries, as these landscape examples demonstrate, has expelled the acceptance and familiarity of death from our lives. We are confronted with balancing the need for the performance of funerary rites to be located within the community, within the dense urban fabric, and the inherent limits of that land. Some cities, with real spatial limitations, have allowed that daily interaction and visual recollections of the certainty of death in a temporary way, providing nearness for a limited time period.

TEMPORARY CEMETERIES

Isola di San Michele, Venice, Italy

The island of San Michele became a cemetery in 1836 when special funerary gondolas carried bodies to the island. While there are areas of the island that include permanent residents such as Igor Stravinsky and Ezra Pound, there is a large center field for more temporary arrangements. Space is limited on the island, although an enlargement is under way, and burials are squeezed in tightly. Dead Venetians are only guaranteed a few years of rest on San Michele, long enough for widowers to visit their husbands. After a period of around ten years, remains are exhumed and stored in an ossuary and a new set of temporary residents are placed in efficient trenches.

Colon Cemetery, Havana, Cuba

Colon Cemetery was established in 1876 and covers 140 acres. One noticeable characteristic are the funeral wreaths which are made out of wadded up, tightly twisted raffia studded with flowers, green leaves, and a ribbon of remembrance and adorn new graves. The cemetery has more than 800,000 graves and 1 million interments and space is very limited. After three years the deteriorated remains are removed from the tombs and placed in a much smaller box. Typically families will have a second ceremony at this second interment.

Notes

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- ¹⁶ Frampton, Kenneth. *Studies in Tectonic Culture*. Cambridge: Graham Foundation, MIT Press, 1995.
- ¹⁷ Constant, Caroline. *The Woodland Cemetery: Toward a Spiritual Landscape* (Stockholm: Byggförlaget, 1994): 1.
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CECILIA MARRUGO-PUELLO



LA REPRESENTACIÓN DE LA MUERTE COMO VIDA EN LA NARRATIVA DE GARCÍA MÁRQUEZ

“Esta es, incrédulos del mundo entero, la verídica historia de la Mamá Grande, soberana absoluta del reino de Macondo, que vivió en función de dominio durante 92 años y murió en olor de santidad un martes de septiembre pasado, y a cuyos funerales vino el Sumo Pontífice”.

En la extensa obra de la narrativa garciamarquiana encontramos particularidades que evidencian una singular mirada hacia el mundo de la cultura popular. Dicha mirada es un elemento fundamental presente en sus cuentos, crónicas periodísticas o novelas como forma de exaltar o celebrar la cultura de la costa

Caribe colombiana, de donde el autor es oriundo.¹ Si buscamos las causas de dicha exaltación las encontramos en el trasfondo mismo su cultura popular, es decir en las representaciones o expresiones genuinas de la cultura de un pueblo como su folclor o su cosmovisión. El concepto de cultura popular, definido históricamente, debe ser abordado no solo como una expresión cultural unilateral, sino como una categoría que conlleva en sí misma ideologías de exclusión y de oposición ante una cultura de élite. El ambiente cultural en la región del Caribe de Colombia, imponía a los escritores emergentes una estructura formativa distinta a la estrictamente académica. Entre este grupo humano menos sumisos a la herencia hispanista, con una rica constitución multiétnica entre blancos, africanos, indígenas y sirio libaneses sumado a un fabuloso espíritu carnavalesco, parecía generarse una mayor libertad de la infancia, una relación más directa con la naturaleza, una apertura mental de permanente ejercicio por la socialización pueblerina. La educación formal se hibridaba con los más variados ingredientes de las tradiciones orales. Las dimensiones de lo carnal, lo popular y lo mágico podían descubrirse en espacios como el patio y la casa.² Gabriel García Márquez vivió y bebió de esta realidad caribeña popular desde sus primeros años, y plasmó su sello multiétnico, híbrido y transculturado en su literatura, dando como resultado el famoso realismo mágico. En este ensayo veremos entonces cómo para la literatura de García Márquez, y en particular en su cuento *Los funerales de la Mamá grande* (1962)³ y su crónica periodística *La muerte de Joselito* (1950)⁴ dicha forma de inclusión de lo popular representaría una visión del mundo, donde las jerarquías sociales y sucesos como la muerte perderían su estatus “sagrado”, monolítico, invirtiendo así el orden de los valores establecidos.

El instrumento utilizado por García Márquez para la creación de este mundillo de jerarquías invertidas es la parodia, acompañada de un tipo especial de humor irónico o, de la manera en que el argot caribeño lo bautizaría, un “mamagalismo” muy propio del ambiente popular de la

costa del Caribe colombiano. Este tipo de humor contribuye a la construcción de un espíritu carnavalesco, donde se presenta el intercambio de jerarquías y se hace burla de las altas esferas. Según el estudioso Mikhail Bakhtin esta particularidad se presenta por lo que él llamaría “el sentido carnavalesco del mundo”:

The ‘carnival sense of the World,’ as a process and a technical term, covers many interconnected ideas.... First, it is a view of the world ... [that] usually involves mockery of all serious, “closed” attitudes about the world, and it also celebrates ‘discrowning,’ that is, inverting top and bottom in any given structures. Discrowning points symbolically to the unstable and temporary nature of any hierarchy.⁵

Para ejemplificar esto, en “*Los funerales de la Mamá Grande*” la muerte de la vieja matrona y su ceremonial entierro se convirtió en suceso que facilitó la unión de diferentes capas sociales en un mismo rito celebratorio de libertad de la dictadura hegemónica que la Mamá Grande representaba. Se convirtió en un evento circense donde los gaiteros de San Jacinto, los contrabandistas de la Guajira, los arroceros del Sinú, las prostitutas de Guacamayal, los hechiceros de la Sierpe y los bananeros de Aracataca compartían escenario junto con el presidente de la República y el Sumo Pontífice.

El cadáver embalsamado se convierte en espectador y espera paciente mientras en el palacio presidencial “se hacían enmiendas constitucionales que permitieran al presidente de la República asistir al entierro” (90). Su estado de observador pasivo nos hace reminiscencia a sus fastuosas fiestas de cumpleaños que ella “presidía desde el fondo del salón, en una poltrona con almohadas de lino, impartiendo instrucciones” y decidiendo el destino de cada habitante de la aldea (83). Irónicamente, el narrador describe cómo no solo la capital, sino el país e incluso el vaticano se verían consternados por la declarada tragedia nacional por el fallecimiento de “la matrona más rica y poderosa del mundo” (83).

Sin embargo, en este caso se celebraba su muerte y con ella, la muerte de la clase he-

gemónica rural a la cual representaba. Para la clase popular esto sería el evento para iniciar el más grandioso carnaval, no muy diferente de las fastuosas fiestas de cumpleaños de la Mamá grande. Se daría inicio a los sacrificios de reses en la plaza pública, la participación de bandas musicales entre toda clase de comidas del pueblo entre bollos, morcillas, chicharrones, butifarras de “los funerales más grandes del mundo” (93):

El gran día era venido. En las calles congestionadas de ruletas, fritangas y mesas de lotería, y hombres con culebras enrolladas en el cuello que pregonaban el bálsamo definitivo para curar la erisipela; en la placita abigarrada donde las muchedumbres habían colgado sus toldos y desenrollado sus petates, apuestos ballesteros despejaron el paso a la autoridad. Allí estaban, en espera del momento supremo, las lavanderas de San Jorge, los pescadores de perla del Cabo de la Vela, los atarrayeros de Ciénaga, los camaroneros de Tasajera, los brujos de Mojajana, los salineros de Manaure, los acordeoneros de Valledupar, los chalanes de Ayapel, los papayeros de San Pelayo, los mamadores de gallo de La Cueva, los improvisadores de las Sabanas de Bolívar, los camajanes de Rebolo, los bogas del Magdalena, los tinterillos de Mompo, además de los que se enumeran al principio de esta crónica, y muchos otros.

La Mamá Grande murió y dejó como protagonistas y dueños de la escena al populacho; el punto cumbre de la parodia comienza en primer lugar con el desfile del presidente y sus ministros; la corte suprema de justicia, el consejo de estado, los partidos tradicionales y el clero, y los representantes de la banca, el comercio y la industria, los arzobispos entre otros. Ahora es el pueblo el espectador y la clase alta el foco de la burla: “Calvo y rechoncho, el anciano y enfermo presidente de la república desfiló frente a los ojos atónitos de las muchedumbres que lo habían investido sin conocerlo, y que sólo ahora podían dar un testimonio verídico de su existencia” (93).

En segundo lugar “desfilaban las reinas nacionales de todas las cosas habidas y por haber” (93) Como comenta el narrador:

Pasaron precedidas de la reina universal, la reina del mango, la reina de la auyama verde, la reina del guineo manzano, la reina de la guayaba

perulera, la reina del coco de agua, la reina del frijol de cabecita negra, la reina de 426 sartales de huevos de iguana, y todas las que se omiten por no hacer interminables estas crónicas”. (93)

Este modelo de humor carnavalesco corresponde a lo que Bakhtin denominaría como *dis-crowning*, donde las jerarquías son cambiadas de posición y el “rey”, por ejemplo, se convierte en el payaso o bufón por el principio del revés. En este caso, se celebraba que el presidente bajara de la casa presidencial, a la aldea macondiana para volverse otro igual al pueblo. Las reinas parodiadas fueron “...por primera vez desprovistas del esplendor terrenal...”. (93) El Sumo Pontífice a pesar de la noche de insomnio por los mosquitos, gozaba “repartiendo dulces italianos y almorzando bajo la pérgola de astromelias con el padre Antonio Isabel” (92). Las figuras de poder de la sociedad, incluida la solemne la muerte, han sido descoronadas por las fuerzas centrípetas del mundo carnavalesco y de la cultura popular como el patio universal.

El autor mismo se traspone en el disfraz de “los mamadores de gallo de La Cueva” y se vincula al centro del funeral, lo cual le permite establecer críticas y atacar su objeto: la clase gubernamental o la cultura de élite que ignora u oprime a la popular. El recurso de la ironía o del humor sarcástico le ha permitido al autor “desacralizar” a los personajes. De esta forma, el mentado “mamagalismo” sería recurso fundamental para la burla y la inversión de jerarquías en la literatura garciamarquiana.

Otra de las manifestaciones populares en el Caribe colombiano conocida como el Carnaval de Barranquilla sirve como marco de la crónica periodística. En el velorio de Joselito de febrero de 1950. Este marco icono de la cultura popular es clave para representar el revés que permitía la convivencia de lo popular con la élite. El cronista caribeño Alfonso Fuenmayor afirmaría sobre esta festividad: “Quizá lo que hace del carnaval un fenómeno fascinante, irresistible, retorcido dentro de su propio enigma, es que al hombre le permite, transitoriamente, tener acceso a una vida distinta,

a una vida que ya no es la ordinaria, la que impone, no sin tiranía, la santa rutina...” (“Hablemos de carnaval” 52). La vida del carnaval representaba la posibilidad de manifestaciones culturales que parten de un encuentro entre el hombre y su idiosincrasia, su música, su humor vital. Como diría Bakhtin: “...the world is seen anew, no less (and perhaps more) profoundly than when seen from the serious standpoint... Certain essential aspects of the world are accessible only to laughter”.⁶ Esa renacida cosmovisión se observa en esta crónica con la “muerte” de Joselito, personaje que es la encarnación misma del carnaval:

A las cinco lo pusieron en cámara ardiente. Ardiente cámara de grito y aguardiente para ese Joselito estrafalario y disparatado que más que tres de vida desordenada tuvo tres días de agonía sin remedio. El toro y el tigre –a las cinco– conocieron la noticia y debieron pensar, simplemente, que Joselito se había disfrazado de muerto para bailar la danza de los cuatro cirios, puesto de través en cualquier mostrador de mala muerte. Sin embargo, cuando se confirmó la noticia y se dijo sin lugar a dudas que el desabrochado José estaba auténtica, definitiva y físicamente muerto, el tigre y el toro se vinieron trastabillando por los breñales de su propia borrachera, perseguidos por un dolor de cabeza sordo, mordiente, que era montaraz y primitivo por ser dolor en cabeza de tigre y de toro. (“Textos costeños” 129)

Aquí vemos nuevamente ese humor vital, esa visión del cronista Caribe que celebra hasta la muerte. Se observa una representación del funeral a manera de travesty o de parodia exagerada, donde el que hacía de muerto, se murió en la realidad cronística. La risa aparece representada en un culto cómico paralelo a la cultura oficial, o al culto religioso mismo de la institución eclesiástica.⁷ Esta contraposición se ve reflejada en el funeral: “Joselito murió como lo que era: como un farsante de lona y aserrín” (“Textos costeños” 130).

Como es típico de la tradición carnavalesca, notamos cómo dialogan la ceremonia popular y el culto religioso. Es decir que la risa como elemento de la cultura popular aparece apartada de la ceremonia estatal, de la etiqueta social y en este caso del culto oficial de la iglesia (Bakhtin, “Cultura

popular Rabelais” 71). La significación positiva de la risa se perfila en este aparte final de la crónica: “Mientras que Joselito, a salvo ya en la otra orilla de la semana, reía como el papagayo bisojo y medio cínico del verso, contando los incautos a quienes les “saldría” en ese castillo sin límites ni claridad que debió ser para ellos el miércoles de ceniza” (“Textos costeños” 130, énfasis mío).

En la resurrección de Joselito, se reconoce en la risa una actitud regeneradora que apela a una nueva vida; en otras palabras, se representa a la fiesta del carnaval como un escape a un porvenir mejor de igualdad y libertad. La risa de Joselito, de lo popular nos indica que: “...el rostro oficial miraba hacia el pasado...mientras que el rostro popular miraba alegremente hacia el porvenir y reía en los funerales del pasado y del presente” (Bakhtin, “Cultura popular Rabelais” 78). Es decir que la comicidad no es estrictamente un recurso, sino que está relacionada con la continuidad de la vida, con una concepción social y universal del cronista (Bakhtin, “Cultura popular Rabelais” 87).

La muerte queda representada en esta crónica desde el revés del carnaval, el cambio de la estructura y el orden de la vida, a través de la representación del triunfo de la locura (por lo menos una vez al año), sobre “los días ordinarios”; en otras palabras, es el triunfo de lo carnavalesco. Bakhtin nos ayuda a entender cómo este tipo travesty, al ser desarrollado en la literatura, cumple con una función social al apelar a la diversión, a la bufonería o a la locura para provocar una renovación de la vestidura externa y de la imagen social.

En conclusión, García Márquez conocía la importancia de la prensa y de la palabra escrita como medio para difundir estilos literarios (García Usta, “García Márquez 129) y mostró a través de sus cuentos y crónicas su particular forma de ver el mundo y su región. Como diría el estudioso Jorge García Usta: “...el humor costeño, la desacralización sistemática, el mundo como sonrisa, la belleza inédita, la otra cara de las cosas. La receta primordial cuya definición duró años: magia, humor, poesía.”⁸ Todos estos fueron elementos fundamentales que harían parte de su exitosa carrera literaria posterior.

¹ A lo largo de este estudio, me referiré a *lo popular* o *la cultura popular* partiendo desde la distinción que elabora García Canclini en su texto *Culturas Híbridas*. De acuerdo con sus postulados retomaré el concepto de la cultura popular como fenómeno de producción, lo cual se refiere a las formas de expresión locales tales como la música o el arte. Esto se diferencia de la concepción desde teorías de consumo, donde los sectores populares son “espectadores obligados a reproducir el ciclo del capital y la ideología de los dominadores.” (García Canclini 191)

² García Usta, Jorge. “El poeta como cronista”. *Vigilia de las Lámparas: Héctor Rojas Herazo, Obra Periodística, 1940-1970*. Ed. Jorge García Usta. Medellín: Fondo Editorial Universidad EAFIT, 2003.

³ García Márquez, Gabriel. *Los funerales de la mama grande*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Suramericana, 2001.

⁴ *Gabriel García Márquez, Obra periodística: Textos costeños*. Ed. Jacques Gilard. Santa Fé de Bogotá: Editorial Norma, 1997.

⁵ Morson, Gary Saul, Caryl Emerson. *Mikhail Bakhtin: Creation of a Prosaics*. California: Stanford University Press, 1990.

⁶ Bakhtin, Mikhail. *Rabelais and his World*. Trans. Hélène Iswolsky. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984.

⁷ *La cultura popular en la edad media y renacimiento*. Trans. Julio Forcat y César Conroy. Barcelona: Barral Editores, 1974.

⁸ García Usta, Jorge. *García Márquez en Cartagena: Sus inicios literarios*. Bogotá: Editorial Planeta Colombiana S.A., 2007.

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MALGORZATA OLESZKIEWICZ-PERALBA



REPRESENTATIONS OF DEATH IN MEXICO: LA SANTA MUERTE

*Muerte Querida de mi corazón, no me desampares de tu protección.
(Dear Death of my heart, don't forsake me from your protection).*

Prayer to Santa Muerte

*I don't know if God exists, but death yes...Death is stronger than life, as she puts an end to it. In view of
a lack of meaning of life, there is an excess of meaning of death.*

Testimonies of Santa Muerte devotees from Tepito¹

The devotion to Santa Muerte or Holy Death is a new phenomenon, currently happening in Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador, and the “Greater Mexico” in the USA. It seems to have started in the *colonia* Tepito in Mexico City in mid-twentieth century (1940s-1960s), as a private cult, which spread widely about twenty years ago, and reached an unprecedented popularity in the past ten years.

Santa Muerte is generally portrayed as a skeleton wearing a Franciscan monk’s cape, in a standing posture, or sometimes seated at a throne, with a scythe in her right hand and the earth or the scale in her left. She can also carry a candle, a book, or a spade, and is often accompanied by an owl, by seeds, and by coins. In addition, a particular Santa Muerte statue I acquired at the Mercado de Sonora in Mexico City in 2009 contains an image of Jesus on the cross, the Holy Ghost as a dove, pieces of “gold,” a lucky four-petal trefoil, and a horseshoe. Her scythe is adorned by a skull and a rose. Following the baroque logic of syncretic devotions, the more super-imposed symbols an object contains, the greater its power. Variations to her outfit include a Virgin Mary-like robe and veil, a girl’s first communion dress, or bride’s gown, an “Aztec” Santa Muerte, and a seven-colored one, among others, depending on the occasion and petition. On some images, her scythe is portrayed in the form of a human spine.

Public altars in Mexico have special persons in charge of caring for the figure, and often godfathers or *padrinos* that support them, they are regularly cleaned and renewed, and La Flaquita’s clothes are changed every month, as the Virgin Mary’s robes are changed in the Catholic tradition. La Santita is often adorned with long hair, jewelry, a crown, and in some places there is a tendency to her dulcification, as in the Iglesia Tridentina of self-proclaimed archbishop Romo, where she was re-named as The Angel of Death (El Angel de la Muerte), or by the influence of Santería in Veracruz, where she seems to have merged with the *orixá/oricha* or goddess Iemanjá/Yemayá from Brazilian Umbanda/Cuban Santería, where she is represented by a beautiful white young

woman, called The White Flower of the Universe (La Flor Blanca del Universo) or The Young Encarnated Death (La Joven Muerte Encarnada).²

Offerings to Santa Muerte include *veladoras* (votive candles), statuettes, flowers, incense, fruits, sweets, smoking cigars and cigarettes, as well as alcohol. Devotees often blow tobacco smoke on her in a sign of blessing, and kiss and touch her glass case at Enriqueta Romero’s altar. If they are lucky they can also touch her robe from an open side. These rituals, as well as the main two colors—red and black—evoke the devotion of the Roma at the Saint Sara-La-Kâli subterranean altar at Les Saintes Maries-de-la-Mer in southern France;³ the cigars and alcohol, as well as the colors are reminiscent of Pombagira from the Umbanda religion in Brazil. Santa Muerte is portrayed in various forms and colors that have symbolic significance and are connected to the intention of the person’s offering. Usually she is represented by a statuette or even a human size statue, a candle, an *escapulario* (scapulary), medallion, trinket, ring, bracelet, or tattoo; she is portrayed on paintings and graffiti, as well as on various products such as T-shirts, incense, perfumes, oils, soaps, and aerosols. Her statue can be made of diverse materials, such as plaster, wood, bone, plastic or polyresin. The colors are red—for love, passion, and relationships, white—for purification, black—for and against black magic, the elimination of negativity and total protection, violet—for health and transmutation, gold or yellow—for money and prosperity, blue—for spiritual concentration and studies, and green—for legal problems and justice.

There are also variations, such as a Santa Muerte fully covered in dollar bills, La Flaquita as the Virgin of Guadalupe, and other “new” colors, such as amber—for the healing of drug addictions and alcoholism, brown—for enlightenment and wisdom, and rose—to reinforce love. Popular are also seven-color images and candles that encompass all of the above attributes, called La Santa Muerte de los Siete Poderes (Saint Death of the Seven Powers),⁴ or Las Siete Muertes (Seven

Deaths), powers embodied in the different color energies that have a positive effect on work, health, loyalty, understanding, fortune, and forgiveness.

On a made in Mexico votive candle I acquired at a San Antonio *botánica*, the disposition of six different color La Flaquita images placed around a main one called Santa Muerte is very similar to a visual arrangement from Santería. The new Santa Muerte candles are most likely derived from the notion of Las Siete Potencias Africanas (Seven African Powers) from Afro-Cuban Santería, which portray seven saints syncretized with seven orichas or African Yoruba gods, namely Changó, Ochún, Yemayá, Obatalá, Orula, Ogún, Eleguá, placed around Jesus Christ or Olofi. Although in Texas Santería candles, as well as other unofficial saints' ones, such as Niño Fidencio, and even the "Reverse" black and red candle can be bought at any *botánica*, Hispanic neighbourhood *bodega* (grocery store), and even at the giant supermarket chain HEB, Santa Muerte candles have been removed from the latter. There is an increasing influence from Regla de Ocha or Santería in Mexico, especially on the Veracruz coast, which spread to other places such as Mexico City.

It is necessary to add that although some of her characteristics are rather stable, Santa Muerte is a living cult and, as other popular syncretic devotions, she is multivalent and in constant flux. Therefore, her attributes may change from place to place and from one time to another, as she is a depositary of human creativity and changing social circumstances. Devotees have appropriated La Santa Muerte and make her serve them in the way they want to be served, rather than obeying a fixed prescription imposed from above. If the Santita does not fulfill their wishes, she may be punished by placing her upside down, by burying her, or by taking away her hand until she fulfills the devotee's wishes, as other colonial saint statues were and continue to be treated by the populace.

This may also be the reason why Doña Enriqueta's center in Mexico City seems to be more

popular than that of Archbishop David Romo. Curiously, the majority of Santa Muertistas consider themselves of the Roman Catholic Faith and they incorporate her in their devotion as another saint, albeit the most powerful of them. She is often considered the messenger of God, his wife, or the Holy Spirit. Conversely, the Catholic hierarchy does not accept the devotion to Santa Muerte as part of their faith. We have to remember that as many Latin American religions, the Santa Muerte devotion is syncretic and borrows heavily from Catholicism, as well as other unorthodox cults.

This is visible in the liturgy that follows the Catholic model. The rosaries, masses, altars, and prayers for her are modeled on and accompanied by Catholic prayers, such as Hail Mary, Our Father, and Glory Be. Her names are even more varied and abundant than the colors, and they are in constant creation. Some examples are Mi Niña Blanca, La Madrina, La Doña, La Jefa, La Santa Niña, La Señora, La Flaca, La Flaquita, La Huesuda, La Calaca, La Dama Poderosa, La Comadre, Santísima Muerte, La Santita, Mi Rosa Maravillosa, La Hermana Blanca, and Mi Niña Guapa. Sometimes people give her human first names, such as Esperanza. Her altars may be fixed, as those in households, businesses, penitentiaries, and on the streets, or mobile, as in the case of ambulant vendors and carros de la muerte, or semi-mobile, such as on trucks, buses, or taxis. On her altars she may appear alone, or accompanied by Jesus, the Virgin Mary, a Buda, or an owl, among others.⁵

Although Santa Muerte acquired "bad press" through the media, as a pseudo-saint of *narcotraficantes* (drug traffickers) and other delinquents, her devotion is very widely spread among "normal" mortals, such as housewives and other working people. Nevertheless, her bad name requires a separate mention, as she is also found on *narcoaltares* (drug altars) belonging to high profile drug traffickers. In such a role is presented in Homero Aridjis' novel, *La Santa Muerte*, which describes a twenty-four hour celebration of the fiftieth birthday of a Mexican capo. In the book,

there is one chapter devoted to a Santa Muerte ceremony where, beside drug traffickers, ecclesiastical, civil and army dignitaries, as well as entertainment world stars are present, and which includes human sacrifice. Although this type of manifestation is the one that can most often be found in sensationalistic press articles, TV news, or soap operas, this does not seem to be the main aspect of the cult, which is individual and spontaneous, and pertains to people from all walks of life.

Currently, among hundreds of places of devotion, there are two main focal points of the cult in Mexico City. One in *colonia* Tepito in front of the home of Enriqueta (Queta) Romero, where she first publically displayed a life-size statue of La Flaquita in November 2001, and started a public rosary ceremony every first of the month, in 2009;⁶ and the Iglesia Tradicional México-Estados Unidos, Misioneros del Sagrado Corazón y San Felipe de Jesús in the nearby colonia Morelos, led by its self-proclaimed archbishop, David Romo, where Santa Muerte is called Angel de Luz, Angel de Dios, or Angel de la Muerte, and Amabilísima Madre, among others. In this center, masses, rosaries, pilgrimages as well as weddings, baptisms, and confirmations are performed. They also established the first national holiday devoted to Saint Death on August 15, the same day when Catholics celebrate the feast of the Assumption of the Virgin Mary. The Mexican Secretaría de Gobernación (Ministry of the Interior) revoked the permit to this church in 2005, alleging that they deviated from their original goals, perpetrating infractions to the Religious Associations Law.⁷

Both centers profess the adoration of Santa Muerte, but they approach it in different ways. The Parroquia de la Misericordia follows the Trent Holy Mass established by Pope Pío V, which was abandoned by Catholic Church in 1969, after Second Vatican Council. This devotion differs in some aspects from the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church, and is not accepted by it, as since 2002 the Iglesia Tradicional includes Santa Muerte worship. Besides these two centers of devotion, all of

Mexico, the border with the USA, and other countries on the American continent, especially those directly to the north or south of Mexico, also have many places of worship of Santa Muerte. Her omnipresence has been reinforced by the transnational migrations and by the electronic media, pertinent to the postmodern world in which she originated. Her cult is mostly individual and heterogeneous but in Mexico it is also subject to numerous public displays, and is highly commercialized. I was recently surprised during a visit to the *Botánica Papa Jim's*, which is a huge religious goods supermarket in the Hispanic West Side neighborhood of San Antonio, Texas, to find among the myriad of aisles with different kinds of products, Santa Muerte statues and candles dominating the space. Her representations included a central altar with a seated La Madrina statue where diverse offerings were placed. In contrast, there were only a few small Virgin of Guadalupe icons, not very visible to the public.

I found a similar situation in other religious stores in San Antonio that include La Niña Blanca, such as *Botánica Elegguá*. Besides selling products, these stores also offer esoteric services of various natures, from *limpias* ("cleansings") by *curanderos* to tarot and Santería's *diloggún* readings and Palo Mayombe rituals.⁸ Different kinds of products and services are offered in the same place, which may lead to syncretic mixtures. Santa Muerte devotees usually consider themselves Catholic or Santeros, and practice a mix of different rituals. Nevertheless, not all of San Antonio *botánicas* include Santa Muerte products.⁹

What is the reason for such quickly spreading devotion to this bizarre figure? The cult of Santa Muerte, as other unofficial devotions, such as the ones to Niño Fidencio, Pedrito Jaramillo, or Jesús Malverde, is directly related to scarcity, liminality, and conflict. She is invoked for protection and strength, in the hope of transforming disorder into order in the private lives of individuals, their families, and their communities. Devotees ask her for love, employment, prosperity, good health, and protection from enemies or rivals. The follow-

ing poem of thanks to the Niña Blanca resumes the meaning she has for devotees:

*You have become in a very special being in my life
I think about you every instant and
my faith in you grows
Since I know you I don't feel alone anymore
I know that God sent you to me
so I ask you with great love
You want the best for your sons and daughters
and you know what is in our hearts
So my girl you already know well mine
You know everything about me, you know all my
needs and that's why I ask you
with great love
I carry you in my heart forever.¹⁰*

The difference with La Flaquita is that while the above folk cults are based on historical or legendary individuals, the personalized Santa Muerte, on the other hand, is a symbolic, all-encompassing figure. The cult of La Niña Blanca started to be widespread in Mexico City about twenty years ago, especially in the marginal neighborhoods of Tepito and Morelos among persons at the fringes of society who by their occupations were exposed to danger and death. This included prostitutes, criminals, inmates, street vendors, homosexuals and transgendered individuals, but later spread to many other occupations that deal with transitions, transgressions, and liminality, such as migrants, truck and taxi drivers, policemen, troops, prison guards, psychologists, and lawyers. It is also a cult directly related to drug trafficking, as its members daily commingle with danger and death. In this case, her powers may also be used to harm enemies or rivals in the trade.

The Mexican devotion to death has ancient roots related to human insecurity in the face of such uncontrollable events, as illness and massive death because of epidemics, wars, and catastrophes, Catholic and Native Mexican beliefs, and was well-developed before La Santísima phenomenon took hold. She was and still is embodied in

such colonial figures as San Pascualito Rey, Nuestra Señora La Muerte, and San Bernardo o Santa Muerte,¹¹ as well as in the pre-Hispanic lord and lady of death, Mictlantecuhltli and Mictecacihuatl. What is most significant though is that death's new avatar, Santa Muerte, was "born" in contemporary times, in the mid-twentieth century, she is of the feminine gender, and since ten years ago she is enjoying an unprecedented popularity among wide sectors of the population, in Mexico and among its neighbors north and south of the border. What are the reasons for this astonishing phenomenon, especially taking in consideration that Mexico already had its protective saint-queen in the figure of the Virgin of Guadalupe? Although the population of Latin America, specially the Indians and the imported black slaves, has been subject to all kinds of mistreatment, hardships and even massive death since colonial times, and as a consequence developed many survival strategies including popular devotions, it is also true that such a fast and massive growth of a particular cult is uncommon.

Nevertheless, when we examine the lucrative movement of the drug traffic from Latin America to the United States, which passes through the Mexican border in these globalized times, especially since the opening of Mexico to international markets and the Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), signed on January 1st, 1994, and later developments such as the "War on Drugs" proclaimed by President Calderón, war that claimed an astonishing number of 65,000 victims in the six years of his presidency,¹² we start to see a larger picture of a country caught up in the middle of a war that hardly anyone is immune to. From criminals, troops, police, and special forces to small commerce and the service industry that suffers the consequences of the drop in tourism, great numbers of people have had their livelihoods threatened.

Similarly to La Pelona who is an ambiguous figure in Western terms--neither good nor bad--her devotees can also find themselves in an ambivalent and contradictory position, switching sides or collaborating with both, as in the case of

“agents of order” that work together with organized crime. I see Santa Muerte devotion as the last resource, after everything else, including religion with its protectors, such as God, Jesus, and the emblematic Virgin of Guadalupe, have failed. As one of my informants put it, “Santa Muerte carries out things for you that the Virgin of Guadalupe can’t.”¹³ The insecurity, fragility, ambiguity, and anguish of everyday life experienced by millions of people in modern society give rise to the need for a strong, just, and fearless advocate, such as La Madrina (the Godmother) who will protect and defend them from the unpredictability of sudden attacks, kidnappings, stray bullets, hunger, and ruin, and who is *on their side*, no matter the social class or circumstances. As other syncretic cults of Latin America, Santa Muerte is a utilitarian devotion that is geared towards everyday protection and help in difficult life situations, a sort of saint of last resorts. As various other attitudes of different Latin American peoples in the face of aggression and difficulty, such as mockery, irony, play, or passive resistance, the devotion to La Niña Blanca is another survival strategy vis-a-vis tremendous life strides. It is enough to consult any Santa Muerte devotional book,¹⁴ to realize that the prayers, rituals, and *amarres* (binding spells) are not geared towards an abstract salvation of the soul, but to everyday survival in all areas of daily life. A good example is “Una oración para invocar” (“A Prayer to Invoke [Santa Muerte]”):

Lady of death
Skeletal spirit
Most powerful and strong,
Indispensable in the moment of danger,
I invoke you certain of your bounty:
I beg to omnipotent god,
Grant me all I am asking for:
Make repent all his life
The one who harmed me or gave me
the evil eye

And may it turn against him right away;
For the one who deceives me in love
I ask that you make him come back to me
And if he does not listen to your strange voice
Good spirit of death,
Make him feel
The power of your scythe.
In games and in business
My advocate I name you
As the best
And any
That comes against me
Make him a loser:
Oh, Lady of Death,
My protecting angel,
*Amen!*¹⁵

In this invocation to La Niña Blanca, questions of danger, witchcraft, love, business, and good luck in gambling are included. Other prayers from *La Biblia de la Santa Muerte* serve to counteract a whole gamut of specific problems that may occur in daily life. They include the “Prayer to Ask for Advice,” “Prayer to Solve Family Problems,” “Prayer to End a Family Conflict,” “Prayer of Financial Difficulties,” “Prayer for Abundance and Finances,” “Prayer for Health of the Body,” “Prayer to Take Away a Vice,” “Prayer to Protect Children,” “Prayer to Avoid Robbery,” “Prayer to Take Care of Work,” “Prayer for Business,” “Prayer to Protect a Business,” “Prayer to Cleanse a Business,” “Incantation for Good Luck,” “Prayer to Attract Good Fortune in Business and at Home,” “Prayer to Attract a Loved Person, and “Prayer to Enjoy Protection during a Trip”.¹⁶

These prayers, as well as *trabajos* or “works”—rituals geared towards the attainment of a goal—deal with every possible life affliction, including getting rid of evil spells, and freeing oneself from debt or making someone pay a debt. While prayers are petitions on a verbal level that may include some limited actions, rituals involve material objects, specific actions and words, spe-

cific days and hours of the week, and may be repetitious and extended in time. It is expected that a ritual for a singular problem that involves symbolic actions and several senses is more efficacious than mere words. In addition, special altars for homes and specific places, such as a business, a restaurant, or a legal office are a common practice. They usually include a color-specific Santa Muerte statue and tablecloth, a votive candle, a glass of water, flowers, cigarettes, incense, and alcohol, among other well-defined symbolic objects.

With individual and collective prayers such as novenas and rosaries, rituals, altars, and worn objects, the life of a devotee in Mexico City¹⁷ seems to be encompassed by their worship of Santa Muerte. The prevalence of her scapularies, medallions, and tattoos, as an ultimate shield and identity symbol worn on the body, speaks to the great need for protection and help. In spite of three centuries of colonial rule of slavery and forced labor since the sixteenth century, it seems that Mexico has never experienced a crisis encompassing every social class on every level of existence, such as the one unfolding in the twenty-first century. Santa Muerte stands as a mute, albeit not passive witness to this predicament. Although it is true that images of death accompanied various societies for centuries, what is most surprising is that nowadays La Santísima does not only remind people of their mortality, but she became the most trusted agent of protection of the livelihoods for millions of people. This includes the paradox of Lady Death being recurred to in works against bullets, illness, and for good health which are meant to prolong life.

Notes

1 Included in Alfonso Hernández Hernández, “Devoción a la Santa Muerte y San Judas Tadeo en Tepito y anexas,” *El Cotidiano* 169 (2011); translation mine.

2 Juan Antonio Flores Martos, “Transformismos y transculturación de un culto novomestizo emergente: la Santa Muerte mexicana,” Mónica Cornejo et al., eds, *10 Teorías y prácticas emergentes en antropología de la religión* (Spain: Donostia, 2008) 63. <<http://www.ankulegui.org>>.

3 Sara-La-Kâli, a Virgin Mary-like statue paced in the subterranean crypt of the church at Les Saintes Maries-de-la Mer in southeastern France, is an unofficial patron saint and the object of veneration of the Roma who gather there by the thousands for her annual May festival (personal fieldwork, May 2008).

4 Arthemis Guttman, *Práctica del culto a la Santa Muerte* (2006, Mexico City: Editores mexicanos unidos, 2009) 21; Perdigón Castañeda 92-93.

5 J. Katia Perdigón Castañeda, *La Santa Muerte protectora de los hombres* (Mexico City: UNAM, 2008) 80-81.

6 R. Andrew Chesnut, *Devoted to Death* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012) 12-13.

7 Perdigón Castañeda 109, 114, 117.

8 *Curandero/a*--folk healer in the Native American traditions; *Diloggún*--sixteen-cowry divination system used in Santería; Palo Mayombe--Afro-Cuban religion.

9 For example, *Botánica Domínguez* and *Botánica Ven a Mí* do not carry Santa Muerte products or services.

10 Rocío, “Agradecimiento para mi Niña Blanca,” 22 Oct 2012 <<http://nuestrasantamuerte.blogspot.com>, 24 Feb 2010>. Translation mine.

11 For a detailed discussion of these figures, see Perdigón Castañeda, and Carlos Navarrete, *San Pascualito Rey y el culto a la muerte en Chiapas* (Mexico City: UNAM, 1982).

12 *Noticiero Nocturno Univision*, 20 October 2012.

13 John Martin, personal interview, San Antonio, 20 November 2012.

14 Devotional books include *La Biblia de la Santa Muerte*, *Prácticas del culto a la Santa Muerte* *El libro de la Santa Muerte*, and *Los poderes mágicos de la Santa Muerte*, among others.

15 *La Biblia de la Santa Muerte* (Mexico City: Editores mexicanos unidos, 2010) 17-18; translation mine.

16 *La Biblia de la Santa Muerte*, 94.

17 In San Antonio, Texas, this cult is predominantly individual. No public ceremonies or events have been performed, as devotees are afraid of stigmatization.

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CHELSEA PATTERSON



THE POSTMORTEM GAZE AND CONTESTED WAYS OF SEEING: DEATH, RACE, AND PHOTOGRAPHY IN THE NINETEENTH AND EARLY TWENTIETH CENTURY

The corpse has long been a visually arresting object of display in the postmodern West, a taboo artifact of mystery owing to its increasingly remote and sanitized nature.¹ The deceased body on display, particularly through photographic representation, often functions as a complex amalgamation of education and entertainment, turning the display of the dead into mere spectacle. This macabre interest in the display of the dead from the Renaissance to the twenty-first century is evocative of a certain kind of looking practice that can engender the dead body or its respective parts into spectacle based upon the materiality of its surroundings. Such looking practices can ultimately result in the abjection and destruction of the corpse, according to how we interpret the corporeal being on display in front of us. This essay will address the following questions: What specific looking practices engender spectacle and abjection of the

dead? How do such looking practices offer new insights into the field of visual rhetoric? What do looking practices upon the dead tell us about Western ways of seeing, particularly within the confines of early photographic practices?

We can document the first traces of the spectacular nature of the corpse through the public anatomy theatre of the early modern period of the 1400s-1600s. Such theatres surreptitiously served as a way to represent the burgeoning field of medicine, while feigning interest in the instruction of the masses to the intricacies of the human body.² Since the focus was on representation rather than instruction, *theatra anatomica* functioned as theatrical performance and entertainment.³ In the anatomy theatre the corpse, who was accused of a crime while alive, was the centerpiece, accompanied by a banquet and music upon the arrival of the anatomist(s). There were also often macabre sculptures and other works of art surrounding the hall, including the preserved body parts of animals and humans, accompanied by their rearticulated skeletons. In addition, the anatomy theatre was often the equivalent of a ball or other important social event and the elite often showcased the latest fashion trends.⁴ Thus, the anatomy theatre was to some extent an excuse to gaze at the cadaver of a condemned criminal on display, to rejoice in the spectacle of criminality, death, and the body's defilement.

Anatomy museums also existed alongside the anatomy theatres and provided an additional space for the display of the dead. These museums were often a place of study for medical students and served the same function as the anatomy theatre—to legitimate the profession of medicine, in this case by associating medicine with science through the act of collection.⁵ Such museums were also open to the public, displaying various forms of human remains. During the European Enlightenment, the acquirement and collection of human body parts was an integral facet of consumer society and consumers ranged from medical stu-

dents and anatomists to fairground enthusiasts who wanted their own anatomical oddity to display in their homes. It must be emphasized here that the display of such human remains was a form of showmanship—each piece of a collection was meant to be looked at, touched, smelled, and talked about.⁶ These museums thus fetishized human remains and promoted multisensory investigations into the mysteries of the deceased human body.

In the United States in the nineteenth century, the collection of the dead continued within circus sideshows, with the display of (often purported) mummified remains of infamous outlaws such as John Wilkes Booth.⁷ This criminality of the body, similar to the Renaissance anatomy theatre, provided a particular kind of spectacle, one that was enhanced by the site of the sideshow, which alleged to provide education and entertainment, to inform the masses of the deformity and oddity of mankind while simultaneously providing a venue for the mockery of such oddities. Thus, the criminality of the body on display, in conjunction with the site of the sideshow, provides an opportunity for abjection of the corpse on display, especially if we consider whether or not the audience had the opportunity to touch the corpse (like a petting zoo), how the barker, or announcer, described the corpse, and how the corpse was arranged within the display and what other exhibits were near it. As we will see, all of these rhetorical aspects play a key role in how the corpse on display is interpreted.

These historic examples of the display of the dead for the sake of a particular kind of gaze based upon curiosity, entertainment, and pseudo education (“edutainment”) are still upon us in the twenty-first century. For example, In the United States traveling plastination displays of the dead such as Gunther von Hagens’s *Body Worlds*, which exhibits preserved human bodies, continues to be a popular attraction. The curiosity that such installations engender within patrons demonstrates that a certain gaze continues to be at work within the postmodern era, a gaze that finds pleasure and

excitement upon gazing at the ultimate taboo: human remains.

A final example of the twenty-first century infatuation with gazing upon the dead takes a more sinister turn and focuses on the medium of photography and its particular representation and display of the dead. Recently, there has been a proliferation of controversial images that have surfaced within the national media that portray U.S. soldiers defiling the corpses of Afghan insurgents. In January 2012, a video was posted on YouTube by an anonymous U.S. Marine that depicts four American soldiers urinating onto three Taliban corpses, while muttering, “Have a great day, buddy” and “Golden, like a shower.”⁸ A still shot of this image was reproduced and displayed widely across various news media. Similarly, in April 2012, an unidentified U.S. soldier released eighteen photographs taken in 2010 that depict American soldiers posing comically with the deceased bodies of mutilated Afghan insurgents, even posing with their dismembered limbs while smiling or providing the camera with a double “thumbs-up” gesture. The proliferation of such images speaks to the necessity of exploring the relationship between the postmortem body and the gaze and the recognition of viewing practices that can engender the abjection of the dead.

THE GAZE

The rhetorical gaze, as outlined by Wendy S. Hesford and Brenda Jo Brueggemann, refers to ways of looking “that occur both within and around (or at) an image: who is looking, how they are looking, why they are looking, where they are looking, and who/what is being looked at.”⁹ This definition of the gaze, then, relies upon rhetorical strategies and the relationship between viewers and objects of the gaze. Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright outline two main trajectories of the gaze, one that is grounded in film theory and art history and focuses on relational looking practices based upon the desire of looking and being looked at, which includes feminist theorists such as Laura

Mulvey and John Berger. The other trajectory is grounded in Foucault’s theories of vision as a network of power and discipline in which the gaze is used to exert control within institutional spaces, such as the panopticon.¹⁰ Likewise, Elkins posits three major discourses within the gaze, including *positional discourse* (how the gaze situates the viewer with respect to figures within a film or picture), *psychoanalytical discourse* (the gaze as a field in which the self defines and redefines itself), and *gender discourse* (the gaze emphasizes the differences between male and female ways of seeing).¹¹

However, other theories of the gaze certainly exist within the spaces of these trajectories, such as Sue Hum’s theory of the racialized gaze, in which images of race and ethnicity are made inconsequential through authenticity and universality.¹² Although all of these theories are certainly relevant and groundbreaking within their respective field, there still is not a theory of the gaze that accounts for ways of looking at the deceased body. Since we are all similarly attracted to and repulsed by death¹³, this viewing practice engenders a specific way of seeing based upon spectacle. This gaze must take into account the fact that desire and repulsion sometimes necessitates abjection and exploitation, that such feelings based upon the premise of desire and power also results in the denigration of the corporeal. However, although the ways of seeing the dead body can be situated amongst these previous theories of the gaze, it still must account for the postmortem, an aspect of the gaze that has not yet been fully accounted for.

In order to fill this gap, I introduce the concept of what I term the *postmortem gaze* in order to invite new ways of envisioning the Western gaze, specifically a way of looking that encompasses death and the corpse. I contend that the postmortem gaze provides an essential way of looking at the lifeless body or its parts, one that accounts for how certain bodies (based on race, ethnicity, class, socioeconomics, disability, or criminality) become spectacle and used for the purposes of preservation, display, and entertain-

ment. Through this intersectionality then, I borrow from Kimberle W. Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality as grounded in critical race theory. However, Crenshaw's theory of intersectionality accounts for the varying experiences of African American women based on race, gender, and socioeconomic class, whereas I use the interstices of subjectivity to account for the multitude of experiences enacted upon the body that deem the body transgressive. In addition, by contextualizing this gaze within the framework of material rhetoric, I provide a new way of viewing the corpse as embodied rhetoric that takes into account materiality, construction, space, and movement rather than semiotics. By moving away from the sign and "reading" the body as text, I provide a fuller explanation of rhetorical embodiment and how spectators use sense and imagery to mediate the postmortem.

Current work in visual rhetoric does emphasize the importance of interactive looking practices. For example, Gunther Kress discusses the disjunction between production and reception and the way that social relations are encoded within images;¹⁴ however, his assessment of the interaction between reception and production of rhetoric is limited to the visual. I argue that we need a new term, the postmortem gaze, to account for the looking practices of postmortem corporeality. The postmortem gaze expands the field of visual rhetoric by demonstrating the myriad ways that rhetorics of the body intersect and contextualize our understanding of how the deceased body has been manipulated and exploited within the interstices of its subjectivity. The postmortem gaze occurs, then, when death becomes spectacle through the transgressive nature of the body, the rhetoric that we use to interpret the body, the space in which the body is displayed, the movement of our bodies within the space, and the senses that we use to analyze the gazing process. Thus, an expansion of theories of the body needs to account for this postmortem gaze and provide a more nuanced definition in which to conceptualize the theory and historicity of postmortem abjection. By contesting tra-

ditional meanings of the gaze, we not only posit new ways of imagining the relationship between the body and ways of seeing, but also identify and challenge the ways that abjection occurs in contemporary society and how these occurrences relate to past narratives of violence on the body and how such violence takes place within a historical loop. By expanding the scope of the theories of the gaze, we can attest to the very real occurrences of exploitation to the postmortem body and challenge its limited conception that ultimately fails to account for the interstices of materiality, subjectivity, space, movement, and imagery and how these aspects work together to form the postmortem gaze. However, before we can analyze how the postmortem gaze functions within a heuristic, it is first necessary to examine how the postmortem gaze is grounded within materiality, specifically within a material rhetoric.

MATERIAL RHETORIC

There have been various theories relating to the materiality of rhetoric. Gillian Rose contextualizes materiality by applying it to the artifact of the photograph, defining materiality as "how [the photograph] look[s] and feel[s], [its] shape and volume, weight and texture."¹⁵ In addition, Rose also defines materiality within the context of geographic location and social and cultural context, such as the scholar Nicholas Thomas, who studies the affects of the photograph within India, and contends that it is what is done with an image that is more important than the image itself.¹⁶ This approach, generally referred to as the *anthropological approach*, studies the place-specific practices of the use of photographs amongst indigenous populations and accesses how the value of the photo changes across time, space, and cultural contexts.¹⁷ Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart further define materiality within the context of the photograph, claiming that photographs are material because they exist within physical forms:

Photographs exist materially in the world, as chemical deposits on paper, as images mounted on a multitude of dif-

ferent sized, shaped, coloured and decorated cards, as subject to additions to their surface or as drawing their meanings from presentational forms such as frames and albums.¹⁸

The importance of this contextualization of photographs brings awareness to the physical nature of photographs so that we concentrate not on the message of the image contained within the photograph, but the materiality of the photo itself and how its construction creates meaning. Although this aspect of materiality is an important starting place for a rhetorical analysis of photography, for example, it does not fully account for embodied practices of looking.

Ultimately, I build upon Carol Blair's concept of material rhetoric in order to account for how rhetoric acts on the whole body, not just the mind. Rhetoric, as Blair defines it, is "any partisan, meaningful, consequential text, with the term "text" understood broadly as a legible or readable event or object."¹⁹ Within this definition, Blair relies on semiotics to define rhetoric, yet she also cautions that semiotics is problematic in reducing all rhetoric to the symbolic. Blair argues that in order to provide a fuller understanding of rhetoric, we need to include materiality, to analyze how rhetoric itself is material.

Blair redefines rhetoric by emphasizing that all rhetoric has a material or "real" component, one that calls attention to how the listener, reader, or viewer interacts with it. For example, Blair contends that to read a (paper-bound) book, a reader must physically open it while usually seated, while to listen to a speech requires the physicality of sitting or standing still, facing the speaker, and remaining silent.²⁰ Specifically, Blair uses the example of memorial sites to emphasize the materiality of rhetoric and develops five questions about rhetorical "texts" that arise from their materiality, including the significance of the text's material existence, the durability of the text, the preservation and reproduction of the text, how the text reacts against or with other texts, and how the text acts on people. Through such questions, Blair estab-

lishes a rhetorical practice that focuses on the body rather than pure visual or auditory means of interpreting texts.

I agree that the materiality of rhetoric is integral to any understanding of rhetoric, that all rhetoric is indeed material. I also comply with Blair's concept of embodiment and that it should be considered within a definition of rhetoric; however, I argue that there is still a component missing to Blair's concept of material rhetoric, a component that I address through the incorporation of the five senses, or sensory modalities.²¹ I argue that it is through the senses that an individual interprets material rhetoric, that it is through the senses in particular that one analyzes the context of the corpse on display. Our current preoccupation with occularcentrism removes important elements of examining the world around us so that ultimately we are left with a limited intellectual understanding based upon this emphasis in visuality.²² I thus provide a heuristic of perception for analyzing the display of the corpse, a heuristic that helps to develop what I term the postmortem gaze, a particular way of seeing the corpse based upon an expanded form of material rhetoric that moves beyond the privileging of the visual. The *postmortem* gaze, ultimately, is a way of viewing the corpse that takes into account sensory modalities that often results in spectacle or abjection based upon various intersections at the site of education and entertainment.

METHODOLOGY: THE POSTMORTEM GAZE

I use visual rhetoric as a form of inquiry and methodology in order to provide a critical intervention into previous theories of the gaze. Building upon Blair's concept of material rhetoric, I provide a fuller understanding of the concept of the postmortem gaze, a Western gaze which is an embodied way of looking that often results in the abjection of the corpse within the spectator's view, based upon a heuristic of perception, through which the postmortem gaze materializes. Thus,

the following concepts are necessary to consider when viewing the corpse on display :

1. The materiality of the rhetoric; in this case, the materiality of the corpse (a photograph, a daguerreotype or tintype, a website, a film, a home video, or “in the flesh”). Materiality can also be used to examine the material *context* of rhetoric. For example, if we are attending a funeral and a minister is reciting the Lord’s Prayer next to the cadaver, the material nature of the speech must also be taken into consideration.
2. The subjectivity of the corpse (according to gender, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic class, Nationality, or transgression such as criminality or disability)
3. The physical space where the corpse is exhibited, such as a museum, a laboratory, a funeral home, or a circus sideshow. (Within the concept of space, I also use “site” as an umbrella term to include the discipline or genre that the corpse is being displayed, such as the site of science, for example.)
4. Movement of our body and limbs in space, which is necessary for the postmortem gaze because our limitations through movement control what and how we see.
5. Sensory modalities, or the senses. By including the senses within an examination of material rhetoric and the postmortem gaze, we can make sense of how the gaze functions through the visual, olfactory, auditory, gustatory, and tactile. It is also important to consider how these modes interact simultaneously through multimodality or intersensoriality²³ through various environments of display and accompanying discursive constructs. An interaction of these modes, particularly visual modes, can also result in intertextuality, in which meanings intersect based upon the receiver’s ability to recognize visual cues within the environment.

Through an examination of this heuristic, then, we gain a fuller concept of how the postmortem gaze functions, specifically in concert with the corpse on display. For example, the space of the corpse provides the spectator clues as to the purpose of the corpse and thus how to “read” the corpse (as a tool for medical students to learn anatomy, as an American sentimental ritual for the recent death of a loved one, as spectacle for passers-by) and thus controls how spectators interact with the corpse (with reverence, with hatred or indifference, or as a source of entertainment).

Material rhetoric thus provides a contextualization for the postmortem gaze, a way of looking at the deceased body through materiality, subjectivity, space, movement, and sensory modalities that can ultimately results in what I term postmortem abjection. Postmortem abjection is the incorporation of the heuristic of perception that engenders postmortem preservation or display of the body or its parts for the purposes of profit within the site of science, medicine, or entertainment. I build upon the term “abjection” here from Julia Kristeva, who distinguishes it from amorality and likens it to “a terror that disassembles”²⁴ so that when one encounters the abject, we are “repulsed but compelled to integrate [ourselves] with what [we] see as abject in order to disturb and test the boundaries and limits of [our] subjectivity for [ourselves] and within the Symbolic.”²⁵ In other words, through the postmortem gaze, a gaze upon the corpse which is materialized through an embodied perception that results in abjection, the deceased body becomes an object of both terror and fascination which can ultimately results in spectacle and the exploitation of the postmortem body.

DATA

In this essay, I specifically focus on photography as a medium and as a material artifact in which to portray death because of its ubiquity in displaying death within the nineteenth and early twentieth century. I will first examine the photographic genre of medical school portraiture and

then lynching photography, situating both genres within the heuristic of perception and the postmortem gaze.

Postmortem photography in general was popular within the genre of memorial photography in the United States and Europe from 1840 to the 1920s and existed within the realm of domesticity and sentimentalism. Nineteenth century mourning photography, the practice of commissioning a professional photographer to capture the image of a deceased family member, was popularized in the early 1840s by the popular slogan of commercial daguerreotypists, “Secure the shadow ere the substance fade,” which served as a reminder of the importance of capturing the image of a loved one before her death.²⁶ Although such imagery seems gruesome and morbid to the twenty-first century eye, these examples of memento mori were abundant in the nineteenth century and could be found hanging on the walls of homes, in the family photo album, and were even mailed to family and friends. Due to the influences of the Romantic Movement in the 1800s, which viewed death as an intimate component of nature and viewed death as an essential struggle that elevated human emotions, Romanticism was linked to sentimentality and thus in an effort to thwart the fear of death, public mourning became an accepted practice. In addition, the 1844 publication of *Record of the Death-Bed of C.M.W.*, the first book to include a postmortem photograph, began an upper-class trend of postmortem memorialization that extended into the 1880s.²⁷

In addition to the Romantic Movement, the general theoretical consensus is that postmortem photography was popular in the nineteenth century due to the direct link between photography and death. Specifically, the invention of the daguerreotype in 1839 led to the belief that if a family member was not photographed before her death, then that person never existed. However, Audrey Linkman contests such claims by arguing that families who already had photographs taken of a child, for example, before her death, still com-

missioned postmortem photographs of the child.²⁸ Linkman further contends that postmortem photography, then, served as a way for long-distance relatives to be “present” at the death and/or funeral of a loved one. It also served as symbolism of the funeral itself, particularly in Britain before World War Two, when many deceased infants of parents of lower socioeconomic classes were not afforded funerals or grave sites. Thus, the postmortem photograph as a site of mourning might have served the purpose of the very grave itself.²⁹

The images of children were most often captured within the postmortem photograph due to the high percentage of infant mortality, which ranged from thirty to fifty percent. Due to epidemics such as cholera and yellow fever, a family could lose all of its children within a few days and thus some children were not named until they survived their first year of life.³⁰ Jay Ruby develops three specific conventions of nineteenth century postmortem photography, from 1840 until 1880, that address some of the difficulties that families faced while mourning for their children. The first two conventions, “the last sleep” and “alive, yet dead,” focus on the denial of death, while the third convention, “dead, yet alive” focuses on the acceptance of death.³¹ All three of these conventions reveal the love and reverence that families held for their departed loved ones, a reverence that was captured through the photographic process.

Photography’s role in the depiction of death is perhaps not that surprising and “is not only an appropriate medium with which to depict the spaces of death- in its relationship to time and place, to past and present, to life, death, and memory- it is, perhaps an essential medium.”³² Indeed, the medium of photography extends to the medical field within the nineteenth century and its depiction of the interstices of race and death.

In contrast to memorial photography, the photographic conventions of medical school portraiture were prefaced upon education, entertainment, and the ideology of white supremacy. Medical school portraiture, that is, the posing of medi-

cal students in mid-dissection with a cadaver, was popular in the United States from the 1880s to 1950. A majority of medical school portraiture that reveals students dissecting corpses depicts mostly male and mostly white medical students surrounding African American cadavers, in the genre of class portraits, cartes de viste, postcards, and “humorous” depictions that both defy earlier conventions of postmortem photography. In the latter half of the nineteenth century it was common practice for medical school students in the United States to take group portraits of themselves dissecting the bodies of sometimes illegally procured cadavers. These cadavers were usually stolen from black cemeteries since white communities did not approve of the plundering of white cemeteries for the purposes of dissection for many core reasons: “One reason for outrage related to a lingering sense of something sacred about the remains, a sense that the identity of the deceased could still be associated with the body. Further, it robbed the community of its control of the dead.”³³

Although white communities objected to the pilfering of white cemeteries, the majority of white communities did not object to the very same pillaging of African American cemeteries for use in medical dissection. Accordingly, the use of material productions such as photography for the ideological or social construction of race is supported by hegemony, so that “the class which has the means of material production at its disposal, has control at the same time over the means of mental production.”³⁴ Thus, the use of medical school photography is a poignant example of how dominant groups who control the dissemination of knowledge (white medical students) control the material production (photography) and its ideological construction of race.

For the purpose of analyzing late nineteenth century medical school photography, I use John Harley Warner and James M. Edmonson’s text, *Dissection: Photographs of a Rite of Passage in American Medicine* as my source for photographic evidence of such practices as the book is

the first of its kind to document the fraternal nature of such disturbing photographic customs. In order to understand the enduring practice of such photography into the 1930s, I frame such looking practices within Foucault’s theory of the medical gaze, a biomedical perception of the body that emerged in the eighteenth century, a separation of the body and soul, a dehumanizing, pathology-seeking gaze that sought to “travel along a path that had not so far been opened to it: vertically from the symptomatic surface to the tissual surface; in depth, plunging from the manifest to the hidden...”³⁵ In this particular gaze, “the eye that governs”³⁶ was powerful because it was supported by the very institution of medicine, which found the medium of photography a welcome home in the promulgation of its ideology. However, the medical gaze alone does not account for a full analysis of looking practices upon the postmortem gaze and it is precisely through the postmortem gaze that we gain a better understanding of ways of looking upon the corpse.

The postmortem gaze as a way of looking is apparent in the photographs that Warner and Edmonson have collected. A majority of the photographs are taken within the genre of the class photo, with the students surrounding the cadaver of an African American body, always caught in mid-dissection. The students usually always wear a uniform consisting of an operating gown or apron, sometimes bowler hats, and usually stare straight at the camera, adhering to the conventions of the representation and appearance of the medical student. Through the postmortem gaze we analyze the space and space in which the corpses are displayed. The space of the laboratory or dissection room informs the viewer that the corpses are situated within the site of science. Through the site of science viewers see the corpses on display as necessary elements of the education process of burgeoning medical professionals. The photographs, however gruesome, are to be regarded with a certain amount of solemnity.

For these group portraiture, the center of the image is always the cadaver, which is usually

lying on a wooden dissection table. The foci of the dissecting table is a direct reference to the Renaissance anatomy theatres of Italy, whose central staging feature was always the table onto which the cadaver was placed. Indeed, it is the cadaver and the table upon which it is laid upon that is the center of each class photograph because in most of these photographs, the sides of the wooden tables are embellished with text written in white chalk. Some of the text is repeated on different tables, with different students, across different years, such as the iconic, “Know thy self,” a reference to the Renaissance injunction that correlates anatomical knowledge to knowledge of the soul and the divinity of the body, which is proof of strong or dominant convictions. In addition, popular epigraphs such as “Man’s usefulness endeth not in death” refers to anatomy legislation while “He lived for others, He was killed for us” comments on the linkage between the cadaver and the crucified Christ. Warner and Edmonson contend that such inscriptions “offer some of the most vivid verbal commentary that we have about the meanings that students attached to these commemorative photographs.”³⁷ Indeed, at first glance, such writing reflects a noble purpose behind both the dissection of the cadavers themselves and the photographic practice of medical school portraiture.

Some of the inscriptions on the sides of these tables, however, reflect the very racism that allowed for the procurement of the African American cadavers in front of them. Racial epithets such as “All coons smell alike to us” and “Sliced Nigger” that adorned the sides of the dissecting tables reveals how the black body as the central figure in these photographs is symbolic with meaning that labels it subaltern and abject. The context of these examples of written rhetoric further influences how the viewer will interpret the visual representation of the cadaver within the photograph. For example, racist slurs scrawled along the side of the dissecting table conflict with the supposed dignified nature of the medical profession, which might cause viewers to second guess the relationship between the African American cadaver and the white

medical students. The deceased black body in the United States within the nineteenth century, then, was still enslaved and subjected to physical defilement as well as the defilement of the very soul, as white Protestant communities believed at the time period. It was thus an easy task for such students to abuse the black body as it existed in direct opposition to the subject position not only of the white male student of anatomy, but the collective white consciousness of the United States. According to Robyn Wiegman, Cartesian Perspectivalism, a scopic regime of detached, dispassionate looking, helped to define the category of “blackness” through its emphasis on an ordered classification system that eventually led to racial science,³⁸ particularly in how the black body existed in direct opposition to white Protestant communities and the collective white consciousness of the United States, so that “someone else bears the burden of the national id; someone else (always already) dies first. This parallel between death and (white) subjectivity might provide some rationale for the use of black bodies...it is easier to lay open that which does not have the mark of sameness.”³⁹

This ideology is perhaps why the students in these photos pose callously, provide sly grins, or evoke humorous play with the cadavers in front of them. Thus, although the existence of medical school portraiture is an extension of the Victorian ideal of remembrance and sentimentality, I argue that the purpose of medical school postmortem portraiture was to promote a sense of fraternity and comradeship, through photographic conventions, amongst the collective identity of white males working within the larger institution of medicine. These students were able to exploit the black bodies in front of them because they were supported by the ideology of the medical institution, a collective identity of white males who profited from the racist support of the surrounding white communities and the ideology of the postmortem gaze, which further dehumanized the defiled black bodies on display in front of them.

Through the postmortem gaze, white communities in the nineteenth and early twentieth cen-

tury interpreted the African American body in these medical school photographs through the lens of science and education. Perhaps they viewed the corpses as a necessity for the advancement of medicine. However, since many of these photographs also included scenes of frivolity, such as cadavers posed playing a game of poker, the postmortem gaze also affords an interpretation of spectacle, of African American corpses as mere entertainment for bored medical students. It is also no coincidence that such images bear a striking resemblance to lynching photos in which white mobs smiled against the macabre display of mutilated black bodies.

It is important to mention that medical school portraiture also took the form of postcards. Medical students often sent home postcards of themselves or of their graduating class dissecting corpses and some of these postcards were printed as holiday greeting cards. The materiality of the postcard here is similar to lynching photography and its circulation of postcards as a souvenir of white supremacy. In fact, it was postcards of lynchings that were circulated most widely in the South⁴⁰ and reached a wide audience that included those who were unable to attend the lynching event. The same professional photographers that produced images on site or peddled them from door to door were also the same photographers that immortalized medical students dissecting African American cadavers. There is no doubt that the photographer played an important role in the ideological function of the lynching photograph, in “the framing of white subjectivity against a black corpse—whiteness founded in the spectacle of the dead black other.”⁴¹

The materiality of the photograph and the postcard is one that allows for continuous remembering of the event due to the nature of its presentational forms, which include myriad forms of framing in family photo albums or within a frame on the wall. The proliferation of lynching photography, whether sanctioned by the United States Postal Service, found in white family photo albums, or passed along underground, reveals

that the practice of photographing lynchings was common and that the proliferation of such photography resulted in the domestication of violence,⁴² a further attempt at normalizing violence against the black body. Thus, through the heuristic of perception and the emergence of the postmortem gaze, lynching postcards were viewed by white communities in the south as an integral facet of domesticity. They were seen as souvenirs to be displayed within the home when body parts from the corpse could not be procured. As a souvenir, then, the African American body within these postcards was viewed through the postmortem gaze as something to be collected, fetishized, and repeatedly celebrated within the home and white communities. As part of a collection, the lynching photograph and postcard were treated as a sacred object, a recollection of a fond event, and as a means to bring white communities closer together.

The photograph and the postcard, as a souvenir and a material object in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, were able to be framed and preserved safely behind glass and within the family photo album, providing a particular practice of looking in which events could readily be remembered within the space of the home. The context through which the photograph is viewed is also important because the viewer’s perspective of the events within the photograph are situated differently depending upon what other photographs are displayed next to the lynching photograph, for example. The space in which the photograph is viewed is also important based upon the people that are present when viewing the photo and their comments of the event, which influences how the content of the photograph is interpreted. The subjectivity of the corpse within these photos is also of importance, engendering the postmortem gaze based upon the audience who is viewing the image.

While viewing postmortem photography, sensory modalities are relevant, although their capacity for influence is not as overt as the modalities that are available through a museum exhibition, for example, where the senses are often care-

fully crafted in order to create a specific visitor experience. Within photography, our vital sense is that of the visual, but senses such as touch also play a key role in how we interpret imagery. If the photograph is not framed behind glass or behind the plastic of a photo album, we must hold it within our hands in order to process the image. We might run our fingers over the image, touching the faces of the individuals within the photo in a gesture of sentimentalism. By simply holding the paper within our grasp, we literally get a feel for the photo's age based upon the kind of paper it was printed on and might run our fingers along its edges or imagine who else might have once touched the very photo that we now hold within our hands. Through the tactile sense, visual rhetoric becomes embodied as we are more aware of how our own body moves and functions within space, reacting both with the images within on the page and the very paper itself.

It must be noted that although the postmortem gaze can ultimately result in abjection and exploitation of the corpse on display through spectacle, the communities to which the deceased belonged were not mere victims because of the gaze. In fact, the gaze can be a powerful tool for resistance. For example, Ida B. Wells famously reframed lynching photography for use in anti-lynching campaigns in order to reveal the cruelty of lynching practices within the South. Such gazes of dissent were apparent throughout African American communities. bell hooks defines such defiant looking practices as oppositional gazing, a way of seeing as a means of political resistance, a way of looking back and contesting controlling images.⁴³ This oppositional gaze was also used by the memorial photographer James Van Der Zee. Van Der Zee, an African American photographer in 1920s Harlem, also helped to reframe the violent imagery of lynching photography by reviving Victorian-era memorial photography within Harlem. Van Der Zee's images portrayed the Harlem community as an upper-class, socially mobile group of individuals who cared and respected for their dead, and by extension, the Harlem commu-

nity as a whole. Van Der Zee's photographs, published in the 1978 *Harlem Book of the Dead*, included romantic Victorian portrayals of memorial photography at a time period when such photography was losing favor with Americans. His images of the dead included a large amount of flowers and often included religious iconography that was superimposed onto the photographs. He also hand painted cheeks, lips, or articles of clothing in order to accentuate a woman's features.⁴⁴ Through such care and personal attention to detail within these photographs, the Harlem community was able to look back and contest the images of violence to the black body that were represented within lynching photography through the reclamation of their dead.

In conclusion, through an analysis of the heuristic of perception, we can move beyond the privileging of the visual in order to develop the postmortem gaze, a gaze that ultimately determines how the corpse is seen and should be treated. The postmortem gaze functions according to the scopic regime of a particular historical period and culture and can result in abjection; however, the postmortem gaze can work in conjunction with the oppositional gaze in order to contest a particular historicity of violence against the corpse. The postmortem gaze, as a looking practice, provides an embodied rhetorical tool for analyzing the visual through an emphasis in sensory modalities, movement, space, subjectivity, and materiality, all of which aid in the construction of the visual. Ultimately, through the postmortem gaze we can analyze how material rhetoric functions to influence how we think about a culture's values and belief systems through the display of their dead. After all, how we treat the dead is often a direct correlation to how we treat the living.

Notes

- ¹ Robert Wilkins, *Death: A History of Man's Obsessions and Fears* (New York: Barnes & Noble, 1990).
- ² Florike Egmond and Robert Zwignenberg, *Bodily Extremities* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2003).
- ³ Helen MacDonald, *Human Remains: Dissection and its Histories* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).
- ⁴ Jonathan Sawday, *The Body Emblazoned: Dissection and the Human Body in Renaissance Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1996).
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MÓNICA SALAZAR



REDEFINING THE MEXICAN TRADITION OF DEATH: TERESA MARGOLLES AND THE EMBODIMENT OF ABSENCE

With the headline: “Mexican narcoterror to be exhibited in Venice,” *Reforma* —one of Mexico City’s most renowned newspapers— announced Teresa Margolles’s participation in the 2009 Venice Biennale. Her installation exposed the unbearable violence that has been afflicting Mexican society in the last decades. For this project, Margolles used blood and small pieces of glass she recovered from assassinations related to the narco trafficking war. Despite the crudeness and illegal nature of her work —she has been working with human remains since the 1990’s— it has not caused any significant controversies in Mexico.¹ It was rather her exposure in the Venice Biennale that shocked international spectators, who called her work: “gut wrenching,”² “a temple of blood,”³ and even “disturbing”⁴.

Margolles was born in 1963 in the northwestern Mexican city of Culiacán, which has had a reputation of being a narco city and the birthplace of the Sinaloa Cartel since the 1960's. In the early 1990's she simultaneously worked on her artistic career and at the Mexico City morgue, thus from the beginning Margolles's work blended the world of art with that of the morgue by adopting human remains —parts of corpses, blood, skin, small pieces of flesh, and the water used to wash corpses— as her media. Considering such biographical details along with the actual state of violence and impunity of the Mexican state, it would be easy to dismiss the complexity of Margolles's work by simply categorizing what Ruben Gallo calls its "necrophiliac aesthetics"⁵ as a byproduct of her surroundings or even as a critique of the *status quo*. Although the criticism of her work is undeniably relevant to its context, her work should also be read in the broader context of Latin American Conceptualism, and within the narrative of Mexico's quest for a truly national art. Furthermore, Margolles's work must also be understood as part of —if not an evolution within— an ancient, yet ongoing Mexican affair with death.

Given the prevalence of conceptualism in the contemporary art world, describing Margolles as a conceptual artist does not provide a valuable insight into her work. The use of this globalizing term implies the risk of disregarding the particularities of its regional developments; if simply called conceptual, Margolles's work could seem anachronistic. Since its emergence in Latin America in the 1960's, conceptual art has been used as a protest tool. Whereas mainstream conceptualism was concerned with the philosophical issue of art vs. the materiality of the everyday object, Latin American Conceptualism was principally concerned with politics. In this sense, Margolles's use of the object —or, to be more precise, what remains of the object— follows this tradition of politicizing the artwork, for it denounces the unbearable inequality that prevails in Mexican society. The sole title of her *Kunsthalle Fridericianum* installation in 2010, *Frontera* (Border or Frontier)

evokes the highly politicized issue of the U.S.- Mexico border. For this installation, Margolles rebuilt in the German gallery two gunshot concrete block walls she removed from the Mexican cities of Ciudad Juárez and Culiacán ([fig. 10.1](#)). Through the minimalist aesthetic of these two gunshot-ridden walls, the artist exposes the violent reality of Mexico. As the recognition of Margolles's works increases and reaches international audiences, the regional critique of her work acquires a global status; it now involves global politics.

Frontera's walls also exemplify how Margolles —like most Latin American conceptual artists— does not necessarily fit into mainstream conceptualism's trajectory towards its complete dematerialization. Instead, what happened in this region was, in Mari Carmen Ramírez's words, "(an) appropriation and inversion of the original concept of dematerialized art,"⁶ which explains why Latin American conceptual art remained object-based. Being part of this tradition, what takes place in Margolles's work is a displacement that has been described by Justo Pastor Mellado as a "formal transmigration"⁷ of an object that once removed from its original context, acquires a shocking value. But Margolles's displacement of the object is quite different from the old Duchampian ready-made paradigm; hers entails additional physical processes that involve an intense interaction with the actual matter of the object. Her forensic art pieces show how Margolles's object is not only displaced, but is highly mediated by mortuary and sanitary processes. Instead of dismissing the materiality of the art object, the artist celebrates it by altering its matter in order to preserve it. And by doing so, Margolles carries on the Latin American tradition of inverting the dematerialization ideal.

Although particular aspects of Latin American Conceptualism are apparent in Margolles's work, the cultural and political heterogeneity of the region demands a look into its immediate context. In Mexico, the decade of the 1990's was marked by a forced opening to international markets and by a generalized state of social unrest

FIGURE 10.1 Teresa Margolles, *Frontera* (2010)

that preceded the fall of the one-party political system that dominated the country for over seventy years. Therefore, the work of Teresa Margolles emerged in a difficult period of transition, amidst crucial events that ranged from Mexico's participation in NAFTA to the *indígena* guerrilla movement in Chiapas. At a time when it became clear that the promise of the nationalist modernizing ideology of the post-Revolution had failed and the institutionalized aesthetics of the regime needed to be rethought, artists of Margolles's generation responded to the challenge of reinventing a national art that had been restricted to the language of the post-Revolution muralists.

Lengua (Tongue) reflects this quest for redefining a contemporary national identity. While working in the morgue, Margolles came across a body of a teenage boy who —like many others— would end up being buried in public anonymous graveyards, since his family could not afford his burial. The piercings of the corpse caught the eye

of the artist, who offered to pay for the young man's proper burial in exchange for his pierced tongue, which according to art critic Cuauhtémoc Medina “metaphorically, ‘spoke’ about his defiance of the social norms.”⁸ That is how the artist obtained the material for *Lengua*, which after going through the pertinent embalming processes became what Medina describes as “a perverse example of Duchamp's progeny.”⁹ It is through pieces like this, that Mexican artists of Margolles's generation resumed the search for an authentic Mexican art that had been abandoned. Furthermore, *Lengua's* use of the globally established language of minimalism and conceptualism to address the regional issues of poverty and inequality not only was “adjusting such traditions to the dark social setting of the third world,”¹⁰ like Medina points out, but it also attests to the Mexican urge to realize an identity. It speaks of what the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur has called the paradox

of our times: the desire to take part in the globalized world —represented by the tongue’s piercings— while having a unique national identity.¹¹

The centrality of the concept of death in Margolles’s work certainly reflects Mexico’s ongoing drug war and the violence it entails, but is also testament of the overwhelming incidence of death symbols in Mexican culture. The conspicuous presence of death in both pre-Columbian and Hispanic cultures makes this concept an important unifying agent for the two radically different mother cultures of the Mexican nation. Thus the construction of a particularly Mexican idea of death has been one of the few successful attempts to merge the heterogenic Mexican nation with a unified collective view. Although the artist does not resort to literal representations of death such as skeletons or skulls, her work nevertheless reminds us of the ephemerality of life. It is therefore, a sort of conceptual *memento mori* that at the same time involves, like Pastor Mellado suggests, a natural “desire for permanence”¹² —or what Miguel de Unamuno called *the tragic sense of life*— and deeply Mexican identity issues.

The universality of Margolles’s work is particularly evident in her sculptural piece *Entierro* (*Burial*). Consisting of a concrete block in which the artist buried a stillborn fetus, this sculpture alludes to the inevitable ever-presence of death as an intrinsic part of human experience. The universal quality of Margolles’s work is further highlighted by her characteristic use of minimalist aesthetics and by her employment of common materials, such as concrete. But while traditional *memento mori* or *vanitas* often acted as social levelers by portraying death as a universal fate, Margolles’s art acknowledges the differences between the death of the rich and that of the poor. In Margolles’s work death remains unavoidable, but is no longer impartial. As a review in *All Art News* indicates, pieces like *Lengua* “suggest that not even death eradicates social inequalities,”¹³ while the walls of *Frontera* denounce a violent, unfair death that remains impune.

But despite Margolles’s successful treatment of the universal theme of death, her work is profoundly Mexican. It certainly belongs to a long national tradition that takes pride in the notion of having a particular view of death.¹⁴ And more importantly, given the illegal trading of human remains it involves, her pieces could not be created anywhere else. As Medina points out “the most disturbing element in Margolles’s forensic art does not lay in the horror of the images and objects she creates but in the institutional conditions which make them possible.”¹⁵ As a way of critiquing the Mexican government that had already turned the post-Revolution murals into the official language of the regime, *avant-garde* artists of the 1990’s tended to ridicule official institutions through their work. This trend, which has been identified by Gallo as institutionalism,¹⁶ exposed the lack of pluralism of the national artistic scene. It was precisely at that time, amidst the critical art of the 1990’s when Margolles formed a group called SEMEFO, which stands for Forensic Medical Services, the government agency that oversees the morgue. Originally conceived as a rock band, the group soon started doing conceptual art. While in SEMEFO, Margolles declared in an interview with Gallo:

In many ways our work is about this ability to penetrate the system... One of our pieces is a collection of tattoos taken from cadavers. I would sneak into the morgue and spot the dead bodies that were about to be cremated. When the guards were distracted —and they often were— I would take out a knife and cut off the tattoos and hide them in my groin...We have only shown these tattoos a few times, and then only for a day at a time, because they are illegal art pieces, and we do not want to mess up our access to the morgue.¹⁷

This way of becoming part of the corrupted system while criticizing its institutions has a lot to do with what it meant to be Mexican in the ‘90s. It involved, as Margolles’s work attests, questioning the validity of the national institutions and the values they entailed.

Furthermore, the identitarian function of Margolles's art becomes even stronger when it reaches the international stage, since works like hers are crucial in reinventing the national identity. Interestingly, it was when the artist represented Mexico in the 53rd Venice Biennale that her work shocked international audiences. Her installation *¿De qué otra cosa podemos hablar?* (*What else could we talk about?*) did not win the prize, but it was one of the most talked-about pieces. To represent Mexico and its terrible reality, Margolles had the floors of the Palazzo Rota Ivancich mopped at least once a day with rehydrated blood and dirt she recovered from narco-trafficking related assassinations in northern Mexico (fig. 10.2). Her installation also replaced the Mexican flag with her *Ban-dera* (flag), which was a tripartite cloth that had

been soaked in the blood she recovered from those shooting scenes (fig. 10.3). In an interview at MoMA in 2009, the artist commented that back in the '90s she had to steal material from the morgue, but nowadays anyone can find death in the streets of Mexico.¹⁸ The fact that this installation showed the world such a realist representation of the country is enormously significant in the way Mexico sees itself; how not even the government can stop people from addressing an uncomfortable topic that can no longer be ignored. But Margolles's death does not pretend to be moralizing; it only aims to confront the viewer with the inevitability of death and with the tragic reality of Mexico.

FIGURE 10.2 Teresa Margolles, *¿De qué otra cosa podemos hablar?*



The French art critic Pascal Beausse suggests that her installations offer contemporary viewers the unique opportunity to experience “a situation of co-presence with death without the company of religiosity.”¹⁹ Margolles’s pieces are not about religion. They are rather an example of protest art that reflects what Pastor Mellado has called: “a wounded sense of civic belonging”²⁰ that prevails in contemporary Mexican society. One of the most important aspects of Margolles’s treatment of death is the way in which she continues a national tradition, while radically altering it. Her work maintains the essential functions of the *memento*

FIGURE 10.3 Teresa Margolles, *Bandera (flag)*



mori, but it breaks away from the literal skeletal tradition, representing, therefore, a radical turn in the long narrative of death representations within Mexican art. Ramirez’s idea of the re-materialization of art has a strong presence in the artist’s work since she adapts conceptual art to the specific circumstances of her environment. In her work, the literal symbolism of the skull is transmuted into abstract representations, processes, and actions that employ the idea of absence as a metaphor for death. In *El agua de la ciudad de México (The Water of Mexico City)*, Margolles poignantly makes the audience receive the concept of death through their senses. Operating humidifiers fed with the water used to wash the corpses at the Mexico City morgue, she poetically filled the white space of the Kilchman Gallery with death. This installation literally made the public absorb Mexican death. In a review of a similar Vaporization, Hans Rudolph Reust wrote: “Margolles’s works function as an infective agent. Long after a visit to the gallery, breathing remains difficult, one’s skin remembering again and again.”²¹ In a way, the whole room was filled with an absence, what the viewers of *El agua de la ciudad de México* ultimately embodied was not death, but the absence it entails.

The significance of Margolles’s artistic proposal is a lot deeper than the immediate environment it denounces. While the historical and socio-political context of the artist’s work may contribute to its better understanding, it also attests to its complexity. Even though the goriness of Margolles’s work provides it with an initial shocking value, it gives way to the reflection on the viewer’s own existence. Out of her questioning of the Mexican reality, and her rethinking of the national symbol of death, the distinct qualities of Margolles’s work are born. The crudeness of her choice of materials and the embodiment of absence that characterizes her installations, mark a significant departure within traditional Mexican representations of death.

Notes

¹ Rubén Gallo, *New Tendencies in Mexican Art: The 1990s* (New York: Palgrave, 2004), 117 (hereafter cited as *New Tendencies*).

² Preston Thayer and Margorie Och, "Report from la Biennale di Veneza - day 6," *Art ltd* (June 2009), http://www.artltdmag.com/index.php?subaction=showfull&id=1245085032&archive=&start_from=&ucat=39&page=reports

³ Daniel Hernandez, "Temple of blood: Teresa Margolles at the Venice Biennale," *Intersections* (May 28, 2009), http://danielhernandez.typepad.com/daniel_hernandez/2009/05/temple-of-blood-teresa-margolles-at-the-venice-biennale.html

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⁵ *New Tendencies*, 119.

⁶ Mari Carmen Ramírez. "Re-materialization," in *Universalis: 23 Bienal Internacional de Sao Paulo* (1996), 180.

⁷ Justo Pastor Mellado, "Teresa Margolles and the Boundaries of the Artistic Intuition," *Art nexus* 9, no. 77 (Jun./Aug. 2010), 55 (hereafter cited as "Margolles and the Boundaries").

⁸ Cuahutémoc Medina, "Zones de Tolérance: Teresa Margolles, SEMEFO et (l')au-delà," *Parachute* 104, 34 (hereafter cited as "Zones de Tolérance").

⁹ "Zones de Tolérance," 36.

¹⁰ "Zones de Tolérance," 37.

¹¹ Paul Ricoeur, *History and Truth*, trans. Charles A. Kelbley (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), 277.

¹² "Margolles and the Boundaries," 58.

¹³ "Extremely Poignant Works of Art by Teresa Margolles at Kunstahalle Fridericianum." *All Art News* (December 7, 2010), <http://www.allartnews.com/extremely-poignant-works-of-art-by-teresa-margolles-at-kunstahalle-fridericianum/>

¹⁴ Octavio Paz, *El Laberinto de la Soledad, Postdata, Vuelta al Laberinto de la Soledad* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 1997), 59.

¹⁵ Medina. "Zones de Tolérance," 48.

¹⁶ *New Tendencies*, Chapter Five: Institutionalism, 135-159.

¹⁷ Rubén Gallo, "Citiscap Mexico City," *Flash Art* (Nov./Dec. 1997), 62.

¹⁸ MoMA. "Conversations with Contemporary Artists: Teresa Margolles." <http://www.moma.org/visit/calendar/events/6831>

¹⁹ Pascal Beause, "Teresa Margolles: Primordial Substances," *Flash Art* (Jul./Sept. 2005), 108.

²⁰ "Margolles and the Boundaries," 58.

²¹ Hans Rudolph Reust. "Teresa Margolles: Galerie Peter Kilchmann," *ArtForum International* 42, no.3 (Nov. 2003), 200.

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