SYMBOLS OF COLLECTIVE MEMORY: THE SOCIAL PROCESS OF MEMORIALIZING MAY 4,1970, AT KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

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Monument and memorial building is one of the more dramatic forms of symbolic expression. This form of symbolic expression represents aspects of a community's collective history; and its existence thereby serves to crystallize consensus and solidarity. The building of the memorial is a dialectic of symbolic interaction explicated through use of a social process model. This article will first describe the theoretical issues involved with collective representation and memory. The theoretical base when applied to the activity of memorial building generates a social process model. The model is described by application to the building of various memorials, but particular interest will be focused upon the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D. C. The model suggests how creation of this type of symbolic work involves a complicated organization of social norms or conventions. Part of this organization involves merging norms from a specialized genre of the art world with norms of collective representation residing in the non-professional community. Administrative bureaucracies and political institutions play important roles as well. After the authors explicate the social process model, they apply it to the experience of memorializing students killed and wounded at Kent State University on May 4, 1970. Erection of this memorial involves a process of constructing collective memory in such a way as to create moral unity within the community.

In 1985 a Kent State University committee recommended a memorial be built on the campus expressing the themes of inquiry, learning, and reflection concerning events of May 4, 1970, and its impact on American society. A national competition for a memorial design was conducted early in 1986.

This article analyzes the proposed building of such a public art work constructed to memorialize students killed and wounded on May 4, 1970 at Kent State University. We begin with discussion of several theoretical positions that together establish the foundation for a social process model. Emile Durkheim's discussion of collective representation and George Herbert Mead's theory of collective memory are merged with a more contemporary theoretical statement from Barry Schwartz. We derive from this theoretical perspective a social process model that develops from three components: community socialization concerning the event; significant personalities and groups who make a case for building the memorial; and involvement of powerful social institutions. Evidence from experience gained in construction of several earlier memorials, but most particularly the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC, is used to substantiate the social process model. With explication of the model completed, we analyze the recent history of a proposed construction of a memorial to commemorate events of May 4, 1970 at Kent State University.

The Theory of Collective Memory

For Durkheim (1961, p. 420), totems and rites are representations of a mythical past, and he stresses their importance in affecting the collective consciousness and memory. In speaking of rites as "glorious souvenirs" that give men strength and confidence, Durkheim frames the importance of invoking the ritual attitude through representations. For Durkheim, "the principal forms of art seem to have been born of religion," and therefore artistic representation is a primary component of the ritual attitude. In Durkheim's view, through performance of ritual, "…a man is surer of his faith when he sees to how distant a past it goes back and what great things it has inspired."

Recollection of historical events sacred to the collective memory, and presented to the community via various art forms, is functionally similar to use of the emblematic totem and ritual in making man "surer of his faith." An important aspect in this regard is shown in the ways a memory achieves legitimacy as a collective representation. Barry Schwartz (1982, p. 396) addressed this point by discussing the ways in which commemorative art is selected for appearance in the U.S. Capitol Building in Washington, DC. Paintings are not hung in the U.S. Capitol "because of their priority and factual importance but because this priority and this importance have become and remained convenient objects of consensus among later generations." This consensus of meaning significant to the present generation is a restatement of Durkheim's conviction about the ritual attitude.

The social process of establishing artifacts, which come to represent an aspect of collective memory, is discussed by a number of other authors including Schwartz (Halbwachs 1925, Mead 1938, B. Schwartz 1982, 1983, 1985, et al. 1986), who generally take a stance that past events are formulated to give significance and relevance to the present. Schwartz (1982, p. 376), in his discussion of Halbwachs' (1925) work on the social context of remembering and forgetting, notes that the earlier author "promotes the idea that our conception of the past is entirely at the mercy of current conditions, that there is no objectivity in events, nothing in history which transcends the peculiarities of the present." Halbwachs' radically relativist approach to the establishment of collective memory is modified by Schwartz, who takes the middle road between absolutist approaches attaching an objective and unchanging meaning to historical events, and the relativist approach where meaning is based exclusively upon the vagaries of contemporary observers.

According to Schwartz (1982, p. 396), "the past cannot be literally constructed; it can only be selectively exploited…" and "the exploitation cannot be arbitrary…" for "The events selected for commemoration must have some factual significance…" In another of his works, Schwartz et al. (1986) makes use of his theory of historical selectivity in collective memory to demonstrate how an aspect of Jewish history, the Roman siege of Masada in 73 A.D., was selectively used by modem Jews to provide a collective account for their contemporary experience in Palestine. Schwartz terms this process "recovered history," and quotes George Herbert Mead's interpreters (Maines, Sugrue, and Katovich, 1983 pp. 163-165), such that Mead conceived of the past as serving the present in accordance with two functions. The first function is in "redefining the meaning of past events in such a way that they have meaning in and utility for the present…" and "[Tlhe functional character of reconstruction is contained in its contribution to present meanings." The second function is to provide "practical value in solving situational problems." Schwartz discounts the second function of "the use value of the past" in favor of the notion that perceptions of the past are considered to be "valid not for their utility but because of their objective fit with reality" (Schwartz, 1986, p. 160). Schwartz terms this "objective fit with reality" the "congruence principle" and characterizes the pragmatist (Meadian) version as the ''pleasure principle."

Schwartz (1986, p. 161) argues that "we may trace the content of collective memory to a congruence principle rather than a pragmatist version of the pleasure principle." For Schwartz, coupling of an event from the past to the present does not involve a self-serving selection of arbitrary bits and pieces whittled and fashioned to fit conveniently into a slot in the present. Rather, we shall say, the past fits and is analogous with the present because it has been *appropriately selected* by the historian, sociologist, or poet.

Schwartz's inference is that the past fits appropriately with the present because in some way the past is structurally the same as the present in that past events set forth the template for all future events. Schwartz (1982) touches upon

this notion in an earlier work quoting works of Levi-Strauss (1963), Eliade (1963), and Shils (1975), thereby showing the structuralist influence and importance of origins in providing patterns for the present. Thus, he strives to steer a middle course between the extremes of absolutist and relativist approaches. Though it is not completely clear how he can then make use of the terms appropriateness and selection (because to select or appropriate the past to fit with the present is a radically creative act devoid of a structuralist underpinning), his approach is useful in that he implies the inference of comparing past with present analogically. The present is truly unique and does not fit easily into an old prefabricated box from past construction. The work of applying an analogy is involved with creative selection of aspects that appropriately fit with entirely new circumstances; therefore, history repeats itself only in the sense that the historian can strive creatively to demonstrate similarity. The analogy is objective only in the sense that its constituent historical facts are generally agreed on; and the analogy is relative only in the sense that historical facts are selectively superimposed on presently existing circumstances to fulfill cogent mnemonic needs of the community.

Though Schwartz discounts the pragmatist Meadian version accounting for collective memory, a merger of Schwartz and Mead is fruitful in explaining collective memory as it pertains to memorialization. This merger leads us to a theory of historical analogy. In constructing an analogy between the present and the past, a representation is generated that supplies meaning for an event. Use of the past to form an interpretation of the present is therefore involved both with the congruence principle and the pleasure principle. The present is similar to the future in that its meaning is essentially unknown, and to provide the present with meaning, it is critical that meaningful reference be made to the past.

The creation of analogy is one of the most important and complex elements of human cognition because it provides us with abstract, symbolic meaning. For example, use of analogy is a primary element in Common Law jurisprudence where the principle of *stare decisis* or precedent provides linkage with well-established past decisions. The artist or poet grasps this analogous or metaphorical linkage with past works when she sculpts a shape or turns a phrase thereby reintroducing commonly known forms in extraordinarily different terms. T. S. Eliot (1932, p. 247) explains this artistic coupling in his statement:

> When a poet's mind is perfectly equipped for his work, it is constantly amalgamating disparate experiences; the ordinary man's experience is chaotic, irregular, fragmentary. The latter falls in love, or reads Spinoza, and these two experiences have nothing to do with each other, or with the noise of the typewriter or the smell of cooking; in the mind of the poet these experiences are always forming new wholes.

Though the content of analogy is important, it is but an ephemeral vehicle in providing meaning, for as C. S. Lewis (Black 1962, p. 38) cautions us, analogy is "a temporary tool which we dominate and by which we are not dominated ourselves, only because we have other tools in our box." Similarly, Durkheim (1961) stresses the point that content of the rite or significance of the totem is of much less consequence than the solidarity these symbolic items convey to the community. The social process of memorialization involves building an appropriate physical artifact that analogically links past community events with the present, establishing meaning for the collective memory, and thus enhancing community moral unity.

A Social Process Theory of Memorial Building

Howard S. Becker (1974, 1982) has stressed that art is a form of collective activity. This is most evident with forms of art that are public, such as art that memorializes community personalities or events. Public memorials are intricately enmeshed in a network of social conventions, forgotten beneath the weight of stone, iron, or bronze in the artifact rising from the desert at Giza, striding the Champs Elysees in Paris, or welcoming the ships in New York harbor.

We divide our social process theory of collective memory into three parts: socialization of the community to the building of the memorial, making a case for building the memorial by significant personalities and groups, and the part played by the powerful community institutions (bureaucracies associated with the art world).[1] The theory will be explicated using the example of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and then applied to the proposed memorial at Kent State University commemorating the events of May 4, 1970.

Socialization of the Community to the Building of the Memorial

Community events are associated with a stock of knowledge. Events occur of national and international moment, but their importance or meaning is not immediately evident. Later, an account of the extraordinary event is created to situate it within the stock of historical knowledge available to the community. The event in this way is coupled by analogy with the known history of the community.

Aileen Saarinen (Carter 1978, p. 52) has commented that conceptions of events and personalities must reach a maturity before memorialization can even be considered. Time must pass to heal wounds and fade conflicts generated by events, but time also nurtures reflection, and provides maturity for memory invoking a perspective that situates experience within an appropriate historical context.

The historical perspective is necessary to determine the significance of the event as it applies to subsequent experience. When the community senses a need to recollect the past in the form of a material statement such as a memorial, specialists are called upon to create the appropriate statement. The specialists' work involves crystallizing all the bits and pieces of memory into a single objective representation in accordance with the art world's current genre. The meaning of the memorial is created both through the social process whereby it is conceived and in the activities it generates after construction.

The artifact used to memorialize is a part of this social process. The Statue of Liberty is now a hallowed memorial to many notions currently interred in the American consciousness, but the current meaning of this memorial was not evident before or at the time of its construction. It is inconceivable that a similar monument of its scale and aesthetic bearing be repeated, as has been proposed, in San Francisco harbor or anywhere else! The type of monument exemplified by the Statue of Liberty is a product of the nineteenth century. Not only is it a symbol of liberty and a remnant of a certain way of memorializing, but something much more. Modem abstract monuments as Eero Saarinen's Gateway Arch (1962-1966) in St. Louis, Missouri and so-called "living memorials" such as memorial bridges or highways show a different conception and set of conventions for memorialization, but they

[1] We have made use of Becker's work (1963) associated with the labelling perspective for the general organizational structure of the social process model.

have taken on a multitudinous set of new conceptions. The present meaning of these artifacts has come to be very different from conceptions of memorial originators. Community socialization makes use of an analogy with past experience which instigates building the original artifact, but these analogy-artifacts are eventually cast aside onto the conceptual midden of past generations. The current meaning comes to appear as sovereign truth and reality.

Saarinen's requirement of maturity for memorialization of collective memory has been achieved by the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on a somewhat accelerated basis. The instigation for memorializing the fallen soldiers of the Vietnam war was originally based on a similar need as with all wars-to stimulate memory of the past conflict-but each war is unique and the unique meaning eventually comes to be imposed upon the memorial during the building and after its construction, making this memorialization completely independent of past conceptions. Socialization of the community as to the events of Vietnam is still marked by that era's "Hawk-Dove" (pro and anti-war) schism. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial manifests the continuation of wartime ideational differences on the war: part of the memorial commemorates the soldiers who died (the black granite walls), and part (the three bronze soldiers) represents a more traditional and heroic, though subdued, depiction of events, similar to the Iwo Jima Second World War memorial.

Making a Case for Building a Memorial by Significant Personalities and Groups

With a stock of knowledge available within the community concerning an event from the past and its establishment as a significant marker in the community's history, a case must be made for commemoration of the event. After a memorial is built, accounts of its relevance seem obvious as do reasons for its original erection. This *post hoc* corpus of knowledge is not nearly *so* obvious before construction because it developed as a result of the monument itself. The original fact that the monument was built signifies an initial importance to the event in the context of history, but the event, itself incarnate as with all experiences remembered and forgotten, has no intrinsically imbedded meaning. The meaning must be established.

Bartholdi's Statue of Liberty, which now possesses an admirable reputation, was much less venerated in 1886 at its unveiling. A case had to be made for the appropriateness of the statue. First, just the torch from the statue was displayed in the United States, and attention was focused on the appropriate virtues of the statue for several years before it was built. After having been shipped to the U.S. from France it was stored in warehouses until the American community was sufficiently prepared for its erection. Even after erection much community comment continued to explain further its appropriateness. Emma Lazarus' poem ("Give me your tired, your poor, …"), inspired in 1883 by early renditions of the statue, played a major role in establishing the statue's significance. The "Mother of Exiles" meaning was crystallized in 1903 with the inscribing of Lazarus' poem on a tablet in the pedestal. The "New Colossus" in New York harbor had taken on a meaning which was not *so* neatly evident in Bertholdi's original conceptual motivations for its creation. Most Americans are now convinced of its significance as the gala festivities during the summer of 1986 displayed.

A good argument can be made that Bartholdi's statue was motivated as a memorial to himself (Gschaedler 1966), but in order to realize construction a more generalized public account was necessary. Whatever the original stimulus for construction, to promote American-French friendship or a symbol of the "Mother of Exiles," the public monument is ultimately the subject of an ongoing community negotiation where advocates argue their case and thereby eventually establish community consensus.

An ongoing process of making a case and establishment of community consensus is evident in connection with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial both before erection and at the present time. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund began the task of amalgamating public support for the memorial. This small movement gained attention and support from a wealthy benefactor, leading eventually to the design competition and construction. However, the memorial is still very much involved in a process of building consensus about its meaning. This can be seen in the pattern of creative social uses the memorial is generating. The U.S. Department of the Interior maintains an archive of the various memorabilia, such as teddy bears, worn-out flak jackets, and combat boots, left by persons near a name on the granite walls; and the act of pencil-tracing the name of a friend or family member from the wall onto the Vietnam Veterans Memorial brochure has become an institution. Veterans wear old uniforms to the site. A television beer ad uses only the heroic bronze portion of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and not the black walls in appealing to its clientele; and one of the authors observed a copy of the Uniform Code of Military Conduct in laminated plastic ("I will never surrender of my own free will…" ***et ceteru)*** left at the feet of the three bronze figures, evidence of hardiness in an old schism between hawk and dove. It is obvious that the two portions of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, the walls on the one hand and the bronze statue on the other, have come together to symbolize a consensus about an agonizing time in American collective memory.

Characteristics of significant personalities and groups can be derived from Garfinkel's (1956) reference to "the denouncer" in his explication of status degradation ceremonies, though we portray the characteristics in a more positive light. The significant personality may occupy a public office, though this is not a requirement, but he must be, or at least must become, a public person. The case for a memorial must be presented as if the event has public significance, and though the significant personality has a vested interest, this interest is generated from public sources. Therefore, it is made to appear as a community effort and not strictly personal. Relevance of the event is not supported by personal interests alone, and the personality has authority to speak on behalf of the community only because he or she now represents those community interests. The significant personality acts as sponsor for the ultimate values of the community, and must, as Garfinkel (**1956**) notes, make the dignity of the supra-individual values of the community regarding the memorial salient and accessible to view.

Part of the work of the significant personality is in obtaining the support of others through creation of a voluntary association of persons who share similar interests. This association can capitalize on its power by gaining financial support from private and public sources and by pressuring formal and informal political groups such as lobbies and politicians. Obviously the job of the significant personality is furthered if the first portions of the process model have been fulfilled, in the sense that the community is well-informed of the event and the case has been made.

The role of Jan Scruggs (Scruggs and Swerdlow ***1985),*** an enlisted combat veteran of Vietnam, in the building of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial was critical and shows how a person with relatively simple means can "capitalize" an initially small asset into a very large enterprise (Hess 1983, Howett 1985). Scruggs began with his life's savings of approximately $2,000 from the selling of his small farm and used it to create an organization of veterans, The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund. Later this organization played a role in gaining support in Congress to set aside a plot of land for the project. Scruggs fulfills Garfinkel's requirements as a significant individual who personifies the role of a proper advocate for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Scruggs has personal interests, which are amplified by other veterans and survivors of the fallen. His marshaling of support from others to finance the memorial design competition fulfilled the practical requirement of creating the means for erecting the memorial. The fine-tuning of

the analogy with the past is thus performed by the significant personality or group making a case for building the memorial.

The Power of Community Institutions in Building the Memorial

Though significant personalities play a major role in generating community support for the creation of the memorial, existing community institutions have a role in regulating initial decisions to build the memorial as well as in actual construction. Part of the work of the significant personality is to engender support from powerful political groups, but it is then the role of administrative bureaucracies to filter, translate, and negotiate decisions to meet formally instituted community norms. The legitimate authority and role of community institutions is critical and can direct a case in a multitude of unpredictable directions. A bureaucracy whose authority includes evaluation of a memorial plan can change the direction of the original decision in a variety of ways.

Though community institutions or bureaucracies are usually thought to present impediments to creative attempts by the community, this is in no way always the case, for on some occasions these institutions can actually facilitate and protect community efforts from excessive incursion of special interests. The essential point in this connection is that these bureaucratic entities can act to place a conservative community filter on the entire process of memorial building, and, as is the case with a judge in a court of law, act as arbiter when contending community groups are at odds. Community institutions then act as arbiters in building the memorial and often have authority to provide final permission to proceed. If this arbitral element of the social process model is missing, a serious impediment may occur in the process, thus preventing construction.

Institutions played a significant role in building the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Because the memorial was to be built in Washington, DC, plans to build the design had to be filtered through a formidable system of bureaucracies. First, after Congress mandated the land, all considerations for the memorial design, landscape, planning, aesthetics- had to be approved by the National Capital Planning Commission, the Commission of Fine ***Arts,*** and the Department of the Interior. The architect, Paul Spreiregen, selected to administer the Vietnam Veterans Memorial design competition, has commented (Spreiregen 1986) that the Vietnam Veterans Memorial would not have been built without the "bureaucratic structure" provided by these institutions, for after the winner of the design competition, Maya Lin, was named some Vietnam veterans groups did not support the selection. However, the design was already in the bureaucratic works, making it extremely difficult to simply ignore, no matter how powerful the arguments and political power of opponents. Eventually a compromise was reached by the two sides through mediation within the bureaucratic structure.

Existing community institutions play an important creative role in interpretation and support of memorial building, and it cannot be said that these institutions' work is essentially disruptive. Because of the time it takes to filter design ideas through large administrations, this greater amount of exposure leads to a negotiated statement having a much larger constituency than would be the case otherwise;[2] therefore, the controversy has time to play itself out in the community milieu, thus softening particularistic influences from powerful elites and engendering wider community

[2] In a recent media announcement (WKSU, National Public Radio 1987) an Ohio association of nurses-veterans of Vietnam is petitioning to build a memorial near the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, DC. Though a nurse association is powerful, it does not serve nearly *so* large a constituency as the Vietnam Veterans associations, making it difficult to gain adherents for this advocacy.

legitimacy.

The marshaling of support from powerful groups and persons is critical to the success of memorial building. Obviously, politically powerful and wealthy persons play major roles; however, in memorial building specialized interest groups in the art world exert significant power due to the social deference and responsibility given them by the community. When memorial advocates decide to create an appropriate aesthetic metaphor, they defer to **art** world professionals, which, in the case of memorial building, means architects, sculptors, and landscape designers. This is a group of powerful elites, which has specific interests and authority. The interests and authority prevail in the selection of an aesthetic. If the aesthetic is to be imposed in a personal residence, or a corporate building, there may be criticism from the community, but critical vehemence is curbed because territory is private. **A** public monument presents a heightened level of emotion in the ensuing polemic because territory is not private. In the case of memorials, the aesthetic becomes an aspect of controversy with contending sides often consisting of community power against the interests of an art world elite.

In the case of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, Jan Scruggs was able to incorporate the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund to erect a national monument honoring those who had died in the war. **In** 1979, legislation was introduced in Congress to allocate land for the planned memorial and the project was eventually signed into law by President Carter in 1980. Though the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund was able to gain significant power from veterans and some of their associations, a key element in the initial impetus was from H. Ross Perot, the Texas computer magnate. Perot provided the seed money for a competition to select the memorial design.

In the Vietnam Veterans Memorial construction, significant controversy tended to be associated with the question as to the type of physical manifestation to be erected.[3] A compromise was reached between Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund supporters of Maya Lin's granite walls and Perot backed supporters of a more representational bronze design by Frederick Hart. Marshaling support from powerful groups provided the art world "support personnel"[4] for building the memorial. When a public possession, whether physical or symbolic, is being considered for some form of manipulation by the community, a single entity cannot legitimately impose itself without an outcry from other sectors. The drawing of an analogy is therefore a community-embedded creation.

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[3] According to Spreiregen (1986), Maya Lin, a Yale undergraduate architecture student, began her memorial project as a class project for the Vietnam Memorial competition, but with a strange twist, her class instructor wanted the students to do a satirical design. Lin's original design depicted dominoes (signifying the domino theory in Southeast Asia) sinking into the ground at an angle. Other students suggested it may be a good serious design. Her actual submission was a simplistic, near surrealistic pastel drawing of a black wedge on a green field. Her more illuminating written description of the design according to Spreiregen swayed and convinced the jurors.

[4] The notion of "support personnel" in the art world is derived from Becker's (1974, 1982) use of the term. Becker, in an example, notes, "Marcel Duchamp outraged many people by insisting that he created a valid work of art when he signed a commercially produced snowshovel or signed a reproduction of the Mona Lisa on which he had drawn a moustache, thus classifying Leonardo as support personnel along with the snowshovel's designer and manufacturer." The notion of support personnel can apply as well to political and bureaucratic entities.

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