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Queering US Public Mourning Rituals: Funerals, Performance, and the Construction of Normativity

by

Michelle Renee Baron

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Performance Studies and the Designated Emphasis in Women, Gender, and Sexuality in the Graduate Division of the University of California, Berkeley

Committee in charge:
Professor Peter Glazer, Chair
Professor Paola Bacchetta
Professor Laura Pérez
Professor Shannon Steen

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Abstract

Queering US Public Mourning Rituals: Funerals, Performance, and the Construction of Normativity

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Michelle Renee Baron

Doctor of Philosophy in Performance Studies

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University of California, Berkeley

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The state uses public funeral practice and large-scale national mourning as an opportunity to affirm cultural and sexual norms as state values, as evidenced in state and military funerals. My dissertation, “Queering U.S. Public Mourning Practice: Funerals, Performance, and the Construction of Normativity,” argues that funeral practice in fact exposes the precarity of traditional kinship and sexual practices while simultaneously constructing the heteronuclear family and heterosexuality as norms. I argue that public funerals appropriate practices and aesthetics coded as abject, socially excessive, and queer in order to demonstrate their distance from these national “others.” My investigation divides loosely into two parts. I begin by juxtaposing the funerals of national heroes (Presidents Lincoln, Kennedy, and Reagan and fallen soldiers of the Iraq war) with the funerals and mourning practices of LGBT people and people of color within these sites. These first chapters propose a politics of visibility which calls attention to the relationship between the invisible and the hypervisible. In the second half of the dissertation, I turn to funeral and memorial practices already framed by difference: New York’s African Burial Ground and the virtual altars devoted to the memory of Gloria Anzaldúa. With these two chapters I argue that the normative operates as a performative tool wielded to gain access and rights or as a foil to mourning practices that contest borders of memory and death.
Acknowledgements

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Chapter One
Introduction

Funerals in particular are so rich in revealing contradictions because they make publicly visible through symbolic action both the tangible existence of social boundaries and, at the same time, their shoddy construction out of inchoate otherness, and, consequently, their anxiety-inducing instability.¹

My interest in the intersections of theater, queer theory, and funeral practice began with a simple observation: in the second half of the twentieth century, queer poets, novelists, filmmakers, and playwrights often invoked funerals within their work.² The “why” is perhaps obvious; national heteronormativity relegated homosexuality to the space of social death, through both legislative and custom-based practices.³ Although the precise origins of a homosexual rights movement and the emergence of a homosexual subject as political agent is debated, the emergence of the AIDS epidemic and the prevalence of early death within the queer community cemented the necessity of a political movement as sexuality became newly visible through the landscape of disease and death.⁴ At the same time that these political discourses emerged, queer theory as a viable academic (anti)discipline, emerging from feminism, postcolonial studies, and critical race theory, entered the landscape of critical theory, shifting the grounds from

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³ I use social death as defined by Orlando Patterson, Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).

From this vantage point, the concept of the queer funeral is, at first, quite literal. Understanding queer as an identity category (an umbrella term for the wide variety of identities denoted by the initials LGBT and beyond), a queer funeral might simply denote a funeral ceremony held in the event of the death of a queer person. As one might expect, the mourning customs held on behalf of a queer person are complex and varied. Given the ways in which LGBT identity was understood as functioning in opposition to heteronormative kinship structures, performances of family and belonging were especially intense. Queers mourning other queers often employed a variety of disidentificatory practices in order to participate differently in heteronormatively structured mourning events. A striking example can be found in Leslie Feinberg’s autobiographical novel \textit{Stone Butch Blues}.\footnote{Leslie Feinberg. \textit{Stone Butch Blues}. (Ithaca, NY: Firebrand Books, 1993).} Attending the funeral of Butch Ro, an event tightly controlled by Ro’s rigidly normative biological family, the gender queer mourners don gender normative clothing, with butch women wearing frilly dresses, a painful act of drag. When protagonist Jess appears at the funeral in the men’s suit in which she feels most comfortable, the identity of the other mourners is exposed. Jess and the other queer characters, including Alice, Ro’s femme lover, are swiftly excised from the ceremonies. This incident within Feinberg’s novel demonstrates the complicated negotiations surrounding mourning practices, and the extent to which queer subjects must actively disidentify in order to access institutionalized rites of mourning.\footnote{I utilize the term “disidentify” in the manner in which José Muñoz has elucidated in his book \textit{Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics}. (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999).} This points to one reason why funerals and memorials held for queers by queers often either eschewed or “camped” traditional funeral iconography and practice, turning the “funeral” into “real fun,” as in the case of the 1999 \textit{Queer Duck} cartoon “Queer as Fowl”\footnote{Mike Reiss, Xeth Fineberg, dir. \textit{Queer Duck}, “Queer as Fowl,” (Macromedia animation, \textit{Showtime}, 1999).} as a demonstration of the former, or performing “high grief” as in the PoMo Afro Homo’s “Strange Fruit.”\footnote{PoMo Afro Homos. \textit{Dark Fruit}. In \textit{Staging Gay Lives}. John M. Clum, ed. (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1996).} Surveying artistic representations of funerals from this period (roughly 1969-2000), drag (both as celebration as well as a means of survival), camp, disidentification, and the
negotiation of acts of policing were common tropes. Queers, both in the social world and through artistic practice, took advantage of the structures of public mourning practice in order to resignify traditions of mourning into something that filled an emotional and political need.

While the work described above could easily be the subject of a dissertation, my focus instead responds to some essential theoretical questions raised by this history, which have important ramifications for the study of funeral and public mourning practice, performance, and queer theory. In many ways, queer practices of and within public mourning events were not only acts of “queering,” or putting pressure on and rendering evident the work of heteronormative structures. Instead, I argue, they point to something inherent in funeral practice itself; the theatrical and the performative elements which are essential to funerals are, at the same time, the structures which threaten to undo the normative function that funeral performances are intended to perform.

Shifting and adaptable funeral rituals constantly perform social structures. In the epigraph to this introduction, performance scholar Joseph Roach hints at this operation when he discusses the “anxiety-inducing instability” produced by recognizing funerals as performances of identity and social category rather than evidence of the naturalness of social hierarchy. Taking these claims a step further, this anxiety has been negotiated in national funeral and memorial projects through frameworks of nationalism: national identity (through discourses of race, gender, and sexuality, specifically), neoliberal economics, and militarization. The theatricality of funerals, which renders visible nature of these categories as constructed, operates as the volatile queer potentiality of funerals. These queer moments are appropriated in the name of nationalism, citizenship, and patriotism into normativity. One of my main aims is to examine how the rituals of funerals, imagined as sacred and deeply personal life passages and therefore outside of systems of nation and empire-building, are in fact fundamental to the perpetuation of social and economic systems. My dissertation thus performs a queer intervention in literary, performance, and anthropological discourses about funerals and their relationship to the formation and perpetuation of national values.

Although queer theory has become standard in many institutions, its definition becomes increasingly expansive as it is taken up across disciplines. As an umbrella term for non-heteronormative sexual identity, queer encompasses gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender individuals, among others. However, queer is also an intersectional category; as Cathy Cohen famously described, the potential of queer lies in its ability to forge a theoretical alliance between unexpected political allies; in her words, punks, bulldaggers, and welfare queens. My analysis emerges from this intersectional understanding of queer. Thinking of queerness as a site of abjection leads to the understanding of queer as an action – the marking and disruption of the so-called naturalness of the norms in a diverse array of social categories. Queer projects can do one or more of the following: be about LGBT subjects and sites, expose hidden or unrecognized LGBT behaviors or

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individuals (thus bringing new insights about sexuality and culture), or challenge norms as constructed to benefit some members of society over others, particularly heteronormativity. While all three elements are present in my project, I am most interested in this last definition, and it is in this spirit that I use queer to discuss American public mourning and funeral practice. Funerals *queer*; that is, funerals theatricalize social categories, removing the aura of naturalness that renders these categories normal in ordinary circumstances.

My definition of queer within this project is part of a larger debate within queer theory, as theorists adapt their frameworks to respond to contemporary political concerns, very different from the foundational politics and goals. Within our current global and neoliberal socioeconomic system, the framework for normativity has expanded and engulfed social identities previous marked as “other,” creating new margins for a rapidly mutating center. The question of priorities for the discipline has spawned diverse political and theoretical camps. Embarking upon a project within the discipline of queer theory, I’ve tried to imagine the container of queer beyond specific bodies and practices; the question of what binds and creates queer has become increasingly pressing. Always, the specter of homosexuality lingers, even as the meaning of homosexuality no longer holds the same notion of outsider-ness it once did, as evidenced by the increasingly successful movements towards marriage equality, the repeal of Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, and growing practices of LGBT families raising children (both biological and adopted). Throughout this project, I grapple with this tension inherent in queer theory. The funerals examined in this dissertation are held together theoretically by my own claims that they are queer, even while homosexual bodies are not necessarily present. Yet same-sex desire and practices haunt the margins of all of these sites, the performative excess that renders these funeral practices as exceeding the normative frameworks they attempt to shore up.

The parameters of normativity define the nation, and performances of nation are often exercises in performing the normative. I’m primarily interested in large-scale public funeral and memorial practices that are defined in some way as related to the idea of America. Nation, as a practice, is constantly defining and performing its constitution and limits, its norms. National funeral performances play an important role in this devising of national standards and identifications. The first half of my dissertation looks at official funerals – military funerals of fallen soldiers and state funerals, held on the occasion of the death of a US president. The second half turns to civilian funerals that frame themselves as national concerns.

As I was completing the dissertation, something happened that reminded me of the stakes of my research on funeral and public memorial practices. On May 1, 2011, President Obama addressed the nation, announcing that “A small team of Americans […] killed Osama bin Laden and took custody of his body.” The social and political funeral

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performances that emerged from this momentous announcement illustrate the range and central concerns of my research.

In order to analyze this event, as well as to demonstrate why this particular event is so salient for my project, I begin with the terms which frame my methodological and theoretical approach. First I delineate the term queer, its use as both a descriptor/identity category as well as an analytical and critical tool. Next, I examine the interrelation between theories of theatricality and performativity to those of loss and mourning, providing a definition of these key terms and identifying the productive tension that exists between theatricality and performativity. While they are not the same, it is the threat of their sameness that provides the critical leverage these terms hold. Lastly, I provide an overview of anthropological understandings of funeral practice, in order to clarify which types of objects are at the center of this dissertation as well as the ways in which my queer theoretical approach intervenes in and expands upon this discourse. I conclude by returning to the social performance of Osama bin Laden’s funeral(s), laying out the dissertation’s central claims and structure.

**Queer and Queer Reading**

Originally a derogative term referring to homosexuality, queer has been reappropriated and resignified both vernacularly as an identity category, and theoretically as a critical approach and field of study. As a noun, “queer” has been adapted as an umbrella term referring to gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transgendered individuals and other sexual minorities. Using the term queer allowed for sexual minorities to create a category of identity that bound them together, despite the vast differences between them. For many queer people of color, queer (along with other reappropriated terms such as dyke) became a way to disidentify with the gay and lesbian liberation movement, which was often laced with an internal racism that echoed the tensions within the feminist movement. The potential of using queer as an umbrella term was the flexibility it offered for the operation of an intersection of identifications. Unfortunately, queer as an identity category and queer as a theory have not always successfully negotiated these intricacies of identification. This has lead to the development of queer of color theories, which are able not only be culturally and ethnically specific, but also provide an analytical frame for projects that understand sex and sexuality as always already bound up in race, ethnicity, and other social categories. E. Patrick Johnson’s “quare” theory, “queer” with a black southern inflection is one such queer of color intervention.\(^{13}\)

Queer, signifying homosexuality and other so-called sexual deviance, also signifies something out of the norm. Something queer disturbs the status quo, points to the norm as a norm by inhabiting difference. Queer as a theory emerges from this aspect of the definition, and this is the crux of many of the tensions between gay and lesbian studies and queer theory. According to Karen E. Lovaas, John P. Elia, and Gust A. Yep, in their collection on the tensions between gay and lesbian studies and queer theory, LGBT studies tends to be disciplinarily linked to history and sociology, and is concerned primarily with uncovering the untold stories of sexual minorities, rewriting and reclaiming histories. Queer theory, however, has its disciplinary origins in literary theory and rhetoric, and tends to be focused on discursive formations of non-normativity, with a special focus on gender and sexuality as a critique of heteronormativity. Rather than understanding sexuality as an essence, a fixed and intrinsic biological trait, queer theorists advocate for a performative and non-essential definition of sexuality. One criticism of queer theory views “queer” as non-specific and anti-identitarian. For instance, theorist Max Kirsch see “queer” as a weakening of specific identity politics, which he views as a central component in the success of social movements. What is considered queer is always in relationship to a changing society, in which the limits of normal or abnormal are in constant flux. Thus how one defines sexuality is dependent upon the very specific operation of one’s multiple identity categories and performances of self and subjecthood as they signify at/in their present historical-temporal location.

I follow a movement in queer theory that attempts to use queer theory in a manner that moves beyond identity politics per se, thinking instead about the different alliances that can be contained under the rubric of queer. While much of this theorizing seeks to decentralize identifications based on same-sex erotic and sexual practices, I am cognizant of the way in which queer theory emerges from a very specific set of bodies and bodily

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practices. In this way, queer theorizing that attempts to question sexual identifications as the locus of queer theory finds itself in a double bind, harkening back to the tensions present between LGBT studies and queer theory explicated above. In this section, I trace a few queer theorists who have proposed ways of framing queerness and queer critique beyond an identity-based politics, pulling out the different nodes around which they have attempted to organize this slippery yet pungent critical term.

In his book *Aberrations in Black: Towards a Queer of Color Critique*, sociologist Roderick Ferguson defines queer as the radical sites of disruption to normativity/heteronormativity that arise from the conditions of surplus and excess created by capital accumulation and neoliberal structures. Ferguson’s definitions are particularly useful in the ways that he allows for queer to embrace a wide range of non-normative subject positions in its analytical grasp. Additionally, Ferguson draws attention to the centrality of queer and so-called surplus or excess populations to the structures of neoliberal capitalism. His suggestion that the position of being queer is essential to the propagation of systems that render one excessive in the first place opens up a platform for a queer critique and study of neo-liberalism and its norms from the very center of those systems. From a performance studies perspective, this is one of the main projects of this dissertation – examining how death, imagined as outside of systems of capital accumulation and economic drive, is in fact fundamental to the perpetuation of socio-economic systems, simultaneously made visible and erased through the rituals and performances of funerals. The position of belonging or not belonging is a crucially relevant factor for participation in social economy and social subjectivity, and these modes of belonging are highly theatrical in funeral performance.

Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s most recent work, *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, Performativity* proposes that queerness might best be organized around the concept of performativity. She begins to articulate the idea of a queer performative, bringing together two of this dissertation’s key terms. While discussing the work of Henry James, Sedgwick coins the phrase “queer performativity.” She writes, “In this usage, ‘queer performativity’ is the name of a strategy for the production of meaning and being, in relation to the affect of shame and to the later and related fact of stigma.” Drawing together a larger study of the affect of shame, Sedgwick is in fact proposing affect as central to rethinking performativity, identity formation, and identity politics. Rather than queer drawing together people based on same-sex eroticism and sexual practice, Sedgwick argues that the experience of shame performatively produces affective alliances which would better define queer. Affect, or the body’s capacity to be moved or affected (manifest in any number of ways, most often via emotion), creates community through shared emotional and embodied experience. Thus: “butch abjection, femmitude, leather, pride, SM, drag, musicality, fisting, attitude, zines, historionicism, asceticism,

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Snap! Culture, diva worship, florid religiosity; in a word, flaming.”

Sedgwick is not the only one to propose this movement towards affect as the new movement for queer theory. In defiant response to Lee Edelman’s No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive, which argued that queer theory needed to position itself with the death drive, in direct opposition to the subjects and practices of hetero-reproductive futurity (manifest in the figure of the Child), queer theorists turned to sexual practice and other embodied emotional experiences to propose modes of futurity that were not linked to biological reproduction. Such a turn often depended on a focus on embodiment and affect.

Sara Ahmed, first in The Cultural Politics of Emotion, but even more directly in Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others led the groundwork for this movement. In the former, she traces different registers of emotions, arguing that emotions “stick” to certain bodies, binding them together in ways that either create or disenfranchise political movement. Towards the end, she turns specifically to mourning as an affect that binds queer subjects, a particularly useful point of departure for this project. Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others, however, identifies queer as an orientation, playing upon the concept of sexual orientation. If heteronormativity orients its subjects in linear, hetero-reproductive time (borrowing from Judith Halberstam) queer orientation is conceived of as being disoriented, out of time and out of place. It is through this disorientation with the social world that queer comes into being, an alliance that can helpfully be shared across lines which move beyond sexuality. For instance, Ahmed is able to play upon the racial connotations of the Orient within orientation to render this point more fully.

Lastly, Jasbir Puar’s Terrorist Assemblages: Homonationalism in Queer Times follows this trend, characterizing queer as an assemblage, relying upon the work of Gilles Deleuze. The reformulating of queer is necessary to Puar because of …the powerful emergency of the disciplinary queer (liberal, homonormative, disporic) subject into the bountiful market and the interstices of state and benevolence – that is, into the statistical fold that produces appropriate digits and facts toward the population’s optimization of life and the ascendancy of whiteness: full-fledged regulatory queer subjects and the regularization of deviancy. Further, this sexually exceptional subject is produced against queerness, as a process intertwined with racialization, which calls into nominalization abject populations

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peripheral to the project of living, expendable as human waste and shunted to the spaces of deferred death.\textsuperscript{24}

Puar draws a distinction between queer as an identity category (one that is becoming increasingly privileged, especially as it becomes aligned with what she calls the “ascendancy of whiteness) and queerness. Queerness, as bound up in processes of racialization, marks the site of abjection, especially as whiteness is continually reaffirmed as the height of (hetero)normative America. I find especially useful Puar’s conjecture that queerness is not distinctively about a non-racially marked (aka white) sexuality, but rather that abject sexuality and racialization are co-constitutive. She clarifies:

Neither is the ascendancy of whiteness strictly bound to heterosexuality, though it is bound to heteronormativity. That is to say, we can indeed mark a specific historical shift: the project of whiteness is assisted and benefited by homosexual populations that participate in the same identitarian and economic hegemonies as those hetero subjects complicit with this ascendancy.\textsuperscript{25}

It is precisely due to the advent of the queer subject as normative and complicit with heteronormative imperatives that queer must be reconstituted as a non-identity based paradigm. Thus she proposes “While dismantling the representational mandates of visibility identity politics that feed narratives of sexual exceptionalism, affective analyses can approach queernesses that are unknown or not cogently knowable, that are in the midst of becoming, that do not immediately and visibly signal themselves as insurgent, oppositional, or transcendent.”\textsuperscript{26}

Here, Puar proposes an approach to queer theory that is in opposition to/moves beyond visibility identity politics, which she sees as inherently flawed for the ways that they produce new abject positions, as the definition of whiteness/heteronormativity widens enough to accept LGBT subjects within heteroreproductive paradigms. My position wishes to not do away completely with visibility and identity in order to center affect, but rather to understand how visibility and identity can be read through or linked to affect and ontology. We come into being not only through our affects but also through practices of interpolation, of relationships to the gaze, and to practices of making and performing identity. I’d like to think of an affective politics that also recognizes the play inherent in all cultural practices. However, funerals are theatrical and performative explicitly, at the same time that they are also inherently affective, about states which can never be fully theorized, understood, or explained. I propose in this dissertation that queer theory is tangled in and deeply dependent on both identity and visibility while at the same time recognizing the dangers of being solely reliant upon these structures. Queer theory cannot escape its reliance on homosexuality, even while trying to decentralize it. Jasbir Puar, for instance, deals with this conundrum by conceiving queer

\textsuperscript{24} Puar, \textit{Terrorist Assemblages}, Pg. 31

\textsuperscript{25} Puar, \textit{Terrorist Assemblages}, Pg. 31.

\textsuperscript{26} Puar \textit{Terrorist Assemblages}, Pg 204.
as a nexus, or assemblage. I see the tensions inherent in queer theory as aligned with the tensions at play between theatricality and performativity. The anxieties cultivated by the threat of becoming that thing which you perform, or which is being performed, are perhaps the queerest of all. It is with this in mind that I turn to theories of performance, theatricality, and performativity.

**Performance, Theatricality, and Performativity**

*Performance*

Funerals are performances. In performance studies, performance spans artistic representation and the social world, equally applicable to each situation. Turner’s model of the social drama, an anthropological explanation of the phases of ritual through the terminology of the theater, marks one key foundational bridge between artistic representation and the social world. As a key text for both performance studies and the anthropological writings on funeral rituals, I discuss it in detail in the next section. Turner provides one example of how performance maps on to structures of behavior in the social world. Raymond Williams’ keynote lecture “Drama in a Dramatized Society,” does something similar, explaining that the drama has become so pervasive in our society that it configures the way individuals narrativize their lives, and even understand themselves as subjects within the social world. Thus performance need not be confined to the stage. At the same time, however, the concept of performance relies on the conventions and vocabulary of formal performance (such as theater and dance) in order to unpack the layers of meaning, signification, and emotion present in the performances that constitute the social world.

Richard Schechner famously defines performance as “twice-behaved behavior” or “restored behavior.” In the context of theater, one part of this definition is perhaps obvious: on stage, actors attempt to recreate behavior from the real world in order to bring to life a drama. Even when enacting impossible events in unlikely places and improbably situations, the way events are presented relies upon a referent in the social world. However, the concept of restored behavior also allows nearly all social action to be understood within the realm of performance. From daily behaviors (dining with one’s family, going to work) to collective cultural and political rituals (parades, commemorations, celebrations, demonstrations, inaugurations), the narratives and behaviors enacted necessarily refer back to past events, ad infinitum. Performance thus is any repetition of previously enacted behavior, even though no repetition can ever exactly replicate the original performance.

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Joseph Roach brings together Schechner’s conception of performance as twice-behaved with definitions furnished by Victor Turner and Richard Bauman, in order to think about performance as follows:

These three definitions of performance – that is carries out purposes thoroughly, that it actualizes a potential, or that it restores a behavior – commonly assume that performance offers a substitute for something else that preexists it. Performance in other words, stands in for an elusive entity that it is not but that it must vainly aspire both to embody and to replace. \(^{31}\)

He thus characterizes performance as surrogation, or the act of (incomplete) replacement. As such, performance is always engaged with the notion of excess, of that which does not quite fit. In vainly attempting to be something it is not, the aspects of “not” become highlighted and strange. It is also there, in what does not fit, where meaning lies. That which does not quite fit, I argue, can be defined both as queer and as theatricality, which I will turn to in the next section. Roach’s important definition positions performance specifically in relationship to memory and substitution, in order to explain the workings of history, arguing that “performances so often carry within them the memory of otherwise forgotten substitutions – those that were rejected and, even more invisibly, those that have succeeded.” \(^{32}\) Performance is both a practice of memory and forgetting, and as such creates new stories, memories, and meanings in empty spaces. Funerals, therefore, best exemplify his definition of performance: “The three-sided relationship of memory, performance, and substitution becomes most acutely visible in mortuary ritual.” \(^{33}\)

Peggy Phelan argues that the central aspect of performance is not just that something is gone that needs to be replaced, but that it is performance itself that disappears, “Performance’s being … becomes itself through disappearance” \(^{34}\) This theme runs central to both of her landmark texts: *Unmarked: The Politics of Performance* and *Mourning Sex: Performing Public Memories*. In the latter, she writes: “Theater and performance respond to a psychic need to rehearse for loss, and especially for death. Billed as rehearsal, performance and theatre have a special relation to art as memorial. We are currently ensnared by what D.A. Miller has called ‘morbidity culture,’ and theatre and performance have especially potent lessons for those interested in reassessing our relations to mourning, grief, and loss.” \(^{35}\) These lessons that stem from the theater can be thematic, but are more importantly theoretical. In creating something that ultimately disappears and cannot be physically maintained for infinite amounts of time, the act of


\(^{32}\) Roach, Pg. 5

\(^{33}\) Roach, Pg. 14


performance and the practice of theater therefore act as rehearsals for the larger losses of our lives. As such, if formal theatrical performance is a rehearsal for actual loss, funerals then serve as the “real” to which staged performance refers. Funerals as ritual elevate the theatrical to the real, transform the performance into performativity, or that which constitutes the social world.

Also central to Phelan’s conception of performance as disappearance is a refusal to participate in the economic systems which traditionally govern the financial imperatives of a free-market economy. Although Phelan argues that each individual performance is a unique and un-replicable event, this conceit can be challenged by the market value inherent in rarity, as well as the notion that even if subsequent renditions of that performance are not equivalent to those that come after it, these secondary performances go up in value based on the reception of the original. Taking these ideas out of the context of the art world and into the world of ritual and social performance may seem to relieve these tensions from Phelan’s work. However, as I will argue in chapter two, even one-time events like Reagan’s state funeral, operate in relation to, or in collusion with, neoliberal economic imperatives, creating and maintaining economies of mourning.

Diana Taylor, in her book *The Archive and the Repertoire*, critiques Phelan’s notion of performance as disappearance. She writes that the archive and the repertoire represent two different ways of maintaining cultural memory, which, like performance, is constantly facing the prospect of being forgotten. While the archive, consisting of books and other tangible documents, is supposed to be the repository of memory, due to its supposed immortality, what Taylor calls the repertoire demonstrates that performance and other embodied practices provide another avenue for confronting the disappearance of cultural memory. Though she agrees with Phelan that individual performances disappear, “that does not mean that performance – as ritualized, formalized, or reiterative behavior – disappears…. Multiple forms of embodied acts are always present, though in a constant state of again-ness. They reconstitute themselves, transmitting communal memories, histories, and values from one group/generation to the next.”

Reminiscent of Schechner’s restoration of behavior, disappearing performances are therefore never completely lost as long as the traces themselves are re-iterated through other performances. In other words, traces of lost objects and histories incorporated into and re-presented through the body maintain their own presence. Our gestural languages speak to repertoires that exist because of and through loss. Funeral performances are constituted through this type of repertoire, with customs transmitted through the repetition of death’s attendant ceremonies. It is also in this repetition that the performance enters into the realm of performativity, creating the very thing it performs.

*Performativity*


37 Taylor, Pg. 21.
Performativity has two competing definitions. In many instances, it is used to indicate that something is in relationship to the concept of performance. For example, James Loxely notes the first strand of a dual usage:

...in performance theory it has been used adjectivally and quite generally to denote the performance aspect of any object or practice under consideration. Thus, for example, to address culture as ‘performative’ would be simply to examine it as some kind of performance, without the specific implications that would follow from an invocation of the line of thought first developed distinctively by Austin. ‘Performativity’ would therefore mean only the rather general quality something might have by virtue of being a performance.\(^{38}\)

In this dissertation, however, I work against this definition, instead wishing to ground performativity in the tradition of J.L. Austin’s speech act theory, Judith Butler’s use of the term in order to reconceive the meaning and practices of gender, Erving Goffman’s theories relating performance and identity, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s repositioning of the term in line with queer theory and the affective turn.

In *How to do Things with Words*, J. L. Austin distinguishes the performative as a particular form of speech.\(^{39}\) Whereas most utterances can simply be described as constative, or producing true and false statements about the world, performative utterances are different, in that their utterance is simultaneously an enactment of change upon the world. Thus the utterance moves beyond description to performing an action. Austin’s many examples of performatives include the wedding ceremony, wherein the utterance of the words “I do” and “I now pronounce thee...” have immediately recognizable and profound effects upon the social world and the movement of individuals through it. However, these words are not always performatives. It takes their utterance within the context of the wedding ceremony conducted by one “vested with authority,” as well the presence and official compliance of witnesses in order for these performatives to be felicitous, or valid. Without these circumstances, the performative is infelicitous, or unsuccessful. Interestingly, the context of a theatrical performance falls under the realm of what Austin calls “non-serious” utterances, noting that they are infelicitous in “a particular way.” In doing so, he draws a distinction from the ways in which performatives uttered onstage fail differently and under different circumstances than infelicitous performatives in other contexts. Implied here is the notion that, in order to be felicitous, performatives must not only occur in the proper context and under the right conditions, but that they must distance themselves from the theatrical definitions of performance, lest they fail in yet another manner. As I will turn to in the next section of this chapter, theatricality compromises the success of performatives.

In her groundbreaking work in gender and queer theory, Judith Butler takes up Austin’s notion of the performative in order to discuss gender performativity – a concept which has been embraced by performance studies, literary studies, and gender studies, as


well as a host of other humanities disciplines. Moving the notion of performativity beyond the linguistic to the embodied, Butler argues that the repetition of actions operates performatively, creating the very concept which it is taken to be a sign. In other words, girls love pink, play with dolls, and wear skirts. These acts both describe and constitute what being a girl means. Gender is thus a performative, in that it is a stylized repetition of acts which come to create the very thing they are understood to describe. Performatives, for Butler, are thus agents of normativity, in that norms must be constantly repeated (or at the very least, imagined to be consistently repeated, in order to exist as norms. Herein lies the tension and queer site of radical possibility: while performativity is the mode for the creation and naturalization of norms, performativity also produces its constitutive outside – the abnormal, the queer. Butler imagines repetition with a difference as a radical act which intervenes upon normative using the same tactics of performativity that rendered the normative normal in the first place. She writes:

Performativity describes this relation of being implicated in that which one opposes, this turning of power against itself to produce alternative modalities of power, to establish a kind of political contestation that is not a ‘pure’ opposition, a ‘transcendence’ of contemporary relations of power, but a difficult labor of forging a future from resources inevitably impure.40

This both/and relationship of performativity, as I have begun to describe and will continue to do in the final section of this chapter, is much in line with the tensions I find operating within the term queer – the friction that creates the term’s most potent potential and critique. This same tension exists within funeral performance. Putting the three together (funerals, performativity, and queer) can productively hone this critical leverage across intersecting disciplines. However, once again, the threat of theatricality haunts performativity’s efficacy. As Butler describes:

In the theater, one can say, ‘this is just an act’ and de-realize the act, making acting into something quite distinct from what is real. Because of this distinction, one can maintain one’s sense of reality in the face of this temporary challenge to our existing ontological assumptions about gender arrangements; the various conventions which announce that ‘this is only a play’ allows strict lines to be drawn between the performance and life.41

The framing of theatrical performance simultaneously announces the potential for performative intervention into social categories and also removes it from affecting the social world. For this reason, funerals are important sites as social performances, which both invoke the theatrical (sometimes as theatricality, and sometimes as just theatrical, the distinction which I will elaborate in the next subsection) but are deeply enshrined in the social world and off of the stage.

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40 Butler, 1993, pg 241 (as qtd in Loxley, 131).
41 Butler, 1990, pg 278 (as qtd in Loxley, 142).
Erving Goffman’s theories of the performance of self in everyday life elaborate the relationship between theatrical structures and performatives, as social actors perform themselves into their identities. Although Goffman does not utilize the term performative, I see his interventions in social performance as describing clearly many of the workings of performativity. Indeed, Butler references Goffman’s work in the development of her own. Goffman, who approaches performance from the field of sociology, argues that belief in the part one is playing is essential to any social performance. He thus distinguishes between two types of performance: cynical and sincere. Most interesting to this question of performativity is the moment where a cynical performance becomes a sincere one. Even though the original performances might have been based on false pretense, a deliberately theatrical performance, the end result is a transformation into something that is no longer saturated in theatricality, but instead the actual truth. As an example, Goffman describes the medical student’s transition to becoming a doctor. Although at first the new doctor does not believe that someone as unsure and green can legitimately perform the role of doctor, he reassures his patients through performance that indeed he is a highly qualified doctor. Sooner or later, he is taken in by his own act, and truly starts to believe in his own performance of doctor, so much so that the calm, capable doctor persona becomes the truth. We might consider Goffman’s description of belief in the part one is playing as connected with or in conversation with Louis Althusser’s conception of interpolation. Althusser describes the act of calling or naming as having a performative function, in which being socially understood as/in a particular category effectively transforms one into a member of that group, whether or not one sees oneself that way. The reality/efficacy of the performance is therefore reliant on the relationship between one’s perception of self and the perception others have of that self. The condition of theater is that these perceptions do not align, that at one or both ends the notion of “just pretend” is present and visible. When both the self and the not-self agree on the validity of the performance as reality, it becomes reality. For Althusser, even if the inner self does not agree with the interpolation, the identification may still become reality, as long as the ideological framework assures that one will move throughout the world interpolated consistently as that which society says one is.

Perhaps this is also part of the work of funeral practice. At a funeral event, eulogies are used to narrativize a life lived, often invoking the different roles and identifications the deceased played during his lifetime. The iteration of multiple eulogies creates an understanding of the deceased, one that is shaped by the dramaturgical decision of deciding which voices will be heard. To the extent that the individual’s lived experiences exceed the representational practice, the eulogy operates as an interpolation.

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which redefines and renarrativizes one’s life experience. Individual memories that do not align with the collective iteration, or which are not given permission to speak, become excessive to the funeral’s narrative. Moments of excess are thus of interest throughout the dissertation as the means through which funerals are regulated and controlled. Since there is no longer a “self” to perform with or against these eulogistic performatives, the means for reigning in and productively utilizing this excess operate as the potential which characterizes both the queer and the performative.

As discussed earlier, Eve Sedgwick’s *Touching Feeling* begins the work of drawing together the queer and the performative. The use of performativity as a means of consolidating politically motivated communities through affect and emotion represents an interesting turn in the discourses around performativity. Furthermore, Sedgwick’s listing of shame-inducing behaviors that performatively create a non identity-based “queer,” is brought together under the term *flaming*. As a descriptor of over-the-top theatricality, the adjective of flaming signifies unmistakable “gay” behavior (and therefore, at least according to Goffman’s logic, identity). Sedgwick seems to imply that both queerness and performativity are brought together through overt, insistent theatricality.

*Theatricality*

Tracy Davis and Thomas Postlewait’s collection *Theatricality* has provided an excellent collection of thinkers working through the critical term in theater and performance studies. In her chapter entitled “Theatricality and Civil Society,” Tracy Davis argues that the Oxford English Dictionary’s definition of theatricality does not provide an accurate or appropriately subtle definition. Theatricality is defined by the OED simply as pertaining to “the stage, scenic representations, or a performer; extravagance or showiness; or simulation,” the very same set of concerns contained in the definition of theatrical. In not recognizing a distinction between the two, Davis argues, something essential is lost. She reads through a collection of texts by Thomas Carlyle, whom the OED credits with inventing the term. Davis draws out a number of different strands of theatricality, a few of which are especially pertinent.

Carlyle’s coined the term theatricality in the context of the beginning of the Victorian age, the late eighteenth century. As Davis argues, “While social dramaturgy may account for the framing of human actions for scholars in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, theatricality serves an indispensable role in the dynamic operation of the public sphere in democratic theory in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.” I think that Davis’s historical delineations stand, but put forth the notion that even if theatricality is no longer the critical term of choice in the twenty and twenty-first centuries, there is still much to be gained from turning to our contemporary times through theatricality.

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47 Davis “Theatricality and Civil Society,” in Davis and Postlewait, Pg. 127

48 Davis, “Theatricality and Civil Society,” in Davis and Postlewait, Pg. 130
This is especially true given the heightened role of empire and nation as a part of the coinage of this term, concerns with which this dissertation project is centrally occupied.

Secondly, to quote Davis, “theatricality is not merely the condition of exhibiting any more than it is the exceptionalness of a circumstance. A spectacle is not a raree-show until someone decides to look on it as such.” In other words, theatricality is not an inherent or essential quality, but rather one agreed upon by spectators (whether collectively or individually). We might, therefore, also imagine thinking of theatricality as a mode of performance which a collective agrees meets certain standards of “theatricality” – namely an insistence on its demonstrative, dramatic, and (at the risk of being tautological) theatrical nature. What constitutes theatricality is historically, geographically, and temporally contingent.

If theatricality explains a representation which is always already empty of its reference and therefore inherently “false,” there is something about its continual repetition, especially in funeral practices, that, according to Goffman’s theories, renders the theatrical as having the potential to realize itself as real, given the performer’s belief in the performance. Just as Judith Butler argues in her analysis of gender performativity, with repetition, even the most unnatural actions become naturalized truth. Funerals, as performances, rely on the repetition of theatrical ritual in order to achieve social symbolism, meaning, and value. Given the gendered and sexualized implications contained within theatricality, its abundance in funeral ritual, and the ways this usually feminized mode of communication is utilized by patriarchal systems, is striking in also illustrating the ways queer practices, aesthetics, and even theorizing can be co-opted.

Ultimately, I want to push on this relationship between theatricality and performativity in funeral performances. I propose that the threat of the theatrical is its potential to be/become performative. This is perhaps demonstrated by the ways performativity must erase its reliance on the theatrical and theatricality if it is to become felicitous, as evidenced by the ways Austin and Butler always tip-toe around the theater/theatrical performance. This is also the same reason why Sedgwick embraces the theatrical – both for the theatrical’s longstanding relationship to gay and queer affect, but also for its rather queer potential.

**Funerals**

Funeral rituals render death normative, with the intention of providing a coherent narrative which places death in context. That funerals and death customs are crucial to understanding a society and its values is not a new idea. The customs of dying, mourning, and burial have long been of interest to scholars across disciplines. A rich history of anthropology engages funeral rites in a myriad of cultures, and provides a genealogy for how funeral rituals and death have been considered across time and space. My conception of the purpose and political potential of funerals draws in many ways...

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49 Davis “Theatricality and Civil Society,” in Davis and Postlewait, Pg. 129
50 Goffman. 1959.
from the long history of the anthropology and archaeology of death and dying. However, it departs from this genealogy in a number of key ways, namely through a framework which merges the theoretical concerns of queer theory with the analysis of ritual and performance.

Foremost among the characteristics that set humans apart from animals is the practice of burying the dead with ceremony. Archaeologists date the earliest evidence of burial grounds and funeral practice to 50,000-70,000 years ago by the Neanderthals as “among the first signposts that Man has evolved from mere hominoid and emerged as a higher being.” Given that anthropologists frame funeral rituals as a marker of humanity, their importance as cultural performances cannot be understated. If the ability to perform rituals for the passing of a community member is indeed intrinsic and central to human experience, the denial of such rites for either the deceased or the bereaved is of considerable consequence. The centrality of this theme both within anthropology and the arts attests to the stakes of funeral practice, as events which are simultaneously cultural, personal, and political.

Although there are many obvious nuances between cultures and how they handle the ceremonies of death and the disposal of dead bodies, anthropologists largely agree that funerals fulfill a few key tasks. Beyond the necessary undertaking of disposing of the body, the primary task of a funeral is to re-distinguish the world of the living from the world of the dead. This is done by helping the dead on their way to the next phase, whatever that may be, through acts such as prayer and preparing the corpse, and by

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54 For instance, it is no wonder that Aeschylus’s *Antigone*, about the denial of funeral rites, has been enormously popular, adapted and performed in especially in moments of social upheaval. Additionally, it has been of interest to scholars as a theoretical departure for considering human rights, subjectivity, and violence. See Judith Butler, *Antigone’s Claim*. (New York, Columbia University Press, 2000) and George Steiner. *Antigones*. (Oxford and New York: Clarendon Press, 1984).

affirming the living within the world of the living, for example through gathering in the presence of others, sharing a communal meal, etc. In addition to affirming the participants in the funeral ritual as members of the world of the living, the funerary ritual also functions to distinguish both the explicit and the tacit norms that the world of the living requires. Through narrativizing the life and accomplishments of the deceased, as well as publically recognizing the relationships sustained between the dead and the living through seating arrangements, ritual honors, obituaries, and oration, these unspoken norms are reinforced.

The first ritual task of a funeral is the disposal of the body of the dead. In his book *The Buried Soul*, Timothy Taylor claims that the concept of death emerged when humans began to distinguish the idea of a human soul as distinct from the physical body, thus marking the evolution of the modern human, as discussed earlier. The ceremony for the disposal of the body therefore honors the soul by acknowledging and honoring the body as the soul’s container throughout life. There are many different cultural attitudes towards what constitutes a respectful and proper care of the corpse. Although Mercedes Bern-Klug, David J. Ekerdt, and Mitsuka Nakashima identify four different options for the disposal of the dead (burial, entombment, cremation, or donation), they assert that “for most families in the United States the decision is between burial and cremation.” According to CANA, the Cremation Association of Northern America, approximately 20% of Americans choose cremation, while the other 75% opt for earth burial.

The existence of physical remains as a ritual object is of the utmost importance in fulfilling this primary funereal task. As anthropologist Gail Holst-Warhoft explains, the control over remains of the deceased is highly charged and politicized: “If bones and tangible remains are central to mourning, depriving families of the bones of their dead is a powerful weapon. It may be one of the most effective means of manipulating any population…” Corroborating Holst-Warhoft’s assertion, Diana Taylor’s *Disappearing Acts* traces the art and activism stemming from the violence of the Argentinean dictatorship of the 1970s, including *Las Madres de la Plaza de Mayo*, women whose children has been “disappeared.” Throughout, it is the lack of remains and concrete evidence of death that motivates the political action of *Las Madres* and other artists and activists. Thus while funerals are primarily about the disposal of the dead, they are also highly political. The centrality of remains and the lack of access to them often experienced by queer populations in

the 1980s and 90s explains much of the artistic and activist practice laid out at the beginning of the chapter. In their cultural history of memory and death, Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey state “what ‘remains’ of the deceased in either material or symbolic form is central to the cultural operations of memory,” once more marking the concept of remains as centrally important.61

The end result of the disposition of the body is a literal separation of the dead from the living, symbolizing the psychic and societal split the funeral ritual is meant to usher in. With the vast majority of American deaths resulting in earth burial, cemeteries are the domain of the dead, positioned as physically separate from the spaces of the world of the living. While cremation certainly complicates the idea of distinct physical realms for the dead, the EPA requires that the disposition of ashes must be registered and accounted for. Additionally, each individual state has its own set of laws regarding where and how ashes may be scattered, asserting the limits of the realm of the dead.62

The notion of the separation of the living and the dead has been much debated in scholarly work on funeral ritual. Archaeologists and anthropologists of early human history, the Middle Ages and into the Modern Era, such as Patrick J. Geary, and Christina Lee, identify a lively relationship and proximity between the living and the dead.63 With the rise of the Church, funeral rituals were largely regulated and controlled by state and religious figures, although scholars such as Éric Rebillard challenge the impermeability of this arrangement.64 According to Philippe Airés, one of the anthropologists at the forefront of a renewed anthropological interest in death and death ritual in the 1970s, the nineteenth century saw brought on a secularization of death.65 Alon Confino, Paul Betts, and Dirk Schumann explain:

In part this was due to the loosening of the churches’ long time monopoly over the rites and rhetoric involved in properly seeing off the departed. But such changes were also linked to a gradual “privatization of death,” best seen in the decline of public mourning and communal participation in a member’s passing. Increasingly the bereaved family turned inward, and grieving was driven indoors as nineteenth-century European society great more distant and indifferent toward the death of neighbors and fellow townsman.66

66 Confino, Betts, and Schumann, 2008. Pg. 5
New technologies, new patterns of migration, and an increasingly globalized life have led many anthropologists to condemn contemporary funerals as far removed from the sacred rituals they once were: Geary remarks that “[t]he present abandonment of the dead is the end result of a gradual process in Western society. … It was reached its culmination in the presentist world of the late twentieth century.”

Moller argues that “funerals have become superficial rituals, is based on the assertion that funerals have lost their viability as supportive mechanisms because American communities have been so dissipated by urbanization and individualism that the funeral can no longer realistically provide social support.”

While separation of the living and the dead both symbolically and physically is central to funeral rituals, I am in line with more contemporary scholarship which refutes many of the assumptions above. Cannadine and Richardson disagree with this line of thinking, arguing that mourning and ritual are still important and prevalent, but that scholars have been idealizing Victorian modes of mourning. Hallem and Hockey also challenge the argument that the dead are sequestered and left behind. Instead, they argue that rituals beyond the confines of a discretely bounded ritual continually evoke the dead, through personal customs such as wearing clothing of the dead and naming practices.

Disputing the notion that we have forgotten how to mourn and that our funeral rituals have lost their power goes hand in hand with another trend in anthropological writing on funerals. Renato Rosaldo, C.N. Seremetakis, and Hallam and Hockey define an expansive notion of ritualization as beyond the scope of the funeral ritual, which is thought to have a discrete beginning, middle, and end. This position is a direct criticism of earlier canonical work. Nadia Seremetakis’ work on mortuary ritual in Greece is particularly useful in this regard. Hallam and Hockey define her intervention as follows:

[Seremetakis] asks us to think in terms of the diffuse ritualization of death, rather than simply demarcated or bounded death rituals. The concept of ‘ritualization’ here refers to the ways in which death is represented across time in a multiplicity of sites and through a variety of practices. This approach shifts emphasis from the ‘public rites’ associated with death to those socially meaningful (death related) performances that are situated ‘within the flux and contingency of everyday events'.

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67 Geary, 1995, Pg. 2
69 Holst-Warhoft, 2000, Pg. 10.
For the purposes of this dissertation, funerary rituals are those which not only perform the mortuary tasks, but also any number of actions which carry on these ritual practices into the world of the living. For instance, the act of gathering together people to collectively view a corpse or a representation of a deceased person, or the articulation of the characteristics, life story, or influence of the deceased for an audience of living persons enacts the trope of funerary ritual. These practices continue the second primary task of the funeral: re-distinguishing the world of the living from the world of the dead.

Dying is thought to challenge the distinction between life and death; death is no longer distant, but rather present and close at hand. Arnold Van Gennep was the first to conceive of funerals as moments of transition rather than of separation, arguing that death places both the deceased and the bereaved into a social context outside of the world of the living. He writes that funerals mark:

…a transitional period for the survivors, and they enter it through rites of separation and emerge from it through rites of reintegration into society (rites of the lifting of mourning). In some cases the transitional period of the living is a counterpart of the transitional period of the deceased, and the termination of the first sometimes coincides with the termination of the second – that is, with the incorporation of the deceased into the world of the dead.

Funerals thus occupy a transition phase, during which the dead transition into the world of the dead, while the living transition back into the world of the living. Van Gennep delineated three distinct phases of the death ritual: pre-liminary, liminary, and post-liminary. Drawing upon Van Gennep’s work, Turner further clarified this transitional moment, the central phase of ritual. Liminal is rooted in the Latin word limen, meaning threshold. For Turner, liminality is a state of between-ness and flux, during which the established social hierarchies, order, and rules are unstable and undergoing transformation. As Christina Lee writes, paraphrasing Frederick Paxton, “...the dead have a liminal status, since they have crossed a threshold. The mourners, too, have suspended their normal activities. To close gaps and reinstate normal conditions of social life rituals are needed.”

73 Of course, this conception of death is a highly privileged one that does not take into account situations where death is in fact ever present: situation of war, famine, disease, or when one’s racial, ethnic, class, sexual, or gender identity puts one at odds with the norm, marking one as more susceptible to early death or higher mortality rates.


75 Van Gennep, 1960, Pg. 147 as quoted in Holst-Warhoft, 2000. Pg. 82.

76 Van Gennep, 1960.


been taken up across a wide variety of disciplines, and, according to anthropologist Arpad Szakolczai is particularly useful for examining “events or situations that involve the dissolution of order, but which are also formative of institutions and structures.”

Death and funerals operate in both registers of the term’s meaning. In contemporary America’s ostensibly biopolitical culture, in which, following the definition put forth by Michel Foucault, an obsession with the maintenance of life is central to the operation of political systems, death is an interruption of the status quo, bringing the issue of mortality into sharp relief. The fragility of life is evident, and the distance between live and dead unclear. Funerals as rituals are, in part, intended to grapple with and resolve this liminal state brought on by the death of an individual. At the same time, drawing attention to the use of liminality as a key term for understanding the relationship between “the dissolution of order” and the formation of “institutions and structures” shifts funerals from the realm of apolitical cultural practice to deeply enmeshed in the practices and production of nation and nationalism.

Victor Turner’s conception of the social drama, which occurs when the social order of a society or community experiences liminality by being in some way endangered or called into question, provides a framework for anthropological understandings of funerary ritual. According to Turner, there are four phases of social drama: breech, crisis, redress, and reintegration or recognition of schism. While death can arguably operate as a breech, the profound task of confronting loss and its liminality can be understood as both personal and communal crisis. The funeral itself attempts, not always successfully, the phase of redress, with the expectation that the end result is reintegration, although when reintegration is impossible, a recognition of schism. It is expected that as the ritual concludes, the realms of the living and the dead have been reestablished, the period of liminality at an end. As such, the funeral attempts to make sense of or normalize the fact of death and the consequences of loss. In the context of funeral ritual, Turner’s schema entails the resolution of the liminality brought on by death through reintegration or schism.

In his theorizing, Turner recognizes that a society or community that was (theoretically) unified can fail to reintegrate as a result of the social drama, in which community members recognize a rift in the social fabric and the going of separate ways of its members. Yet in either outcome (reintegration or recognition of schism), reintegration is ultimately the goal and often the effect. Either mourners reintegrate by signaling their healthy progress toward detachment from the dead (what Freud distinguishes as the normal path of mourning), or they refuse the “healing” the ritual

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is deemed to provide, find the ritual unsatisfying, or in other ways maintain an attachment to that which is gone, occupying an “other” position in relation to the rest of society (in Freudian terms, we might consider this classic melancholia).\(^8\) In clearly defining the limits of a society or community through recognition of schism, the non-integrated outside is effectively re-integrated into some sort of legibility, even if that legibility is abjection.

What I’m pointing to here is the way that the fourth phase of Turner’s social drama, which purportedly provides an avenue for change, in actuality is quite conservative. The schism itself, in being recognized, is subsequently normalized. The pathologization attendant to such refusal thus puts schism in its place, a place which is bounded and ultimately serves to reaffirm the community as it is able to point to that “other” which is un-integrated and therefore different. This societal division between what is in versus what has been excised is a normalizing move, containing and naming difference.\(^8\) Though I’m arguing that Turner’s social drama precludes the possibility of any true schism or position from which to radically envision social change, there is still within the performative technologies of difference-making an uncontainable excess. What distinguishes this excess from a Turnerian “schism” is its invisibility and illegibility. It’s precisely what’s queer, or outside normative technologies of definition, that makes even an acknowledgeable “schism” impossible.

Turner is not the only one to articulate the highly conservative nature of funerals, which brings us to the third task of funerals: reaffirming the social order, or normativity. While this task is bound up in the earlier tasks of redistinguishing the living from the dead, a few key theorists are worth mentioning here, as lending support to the framework of normalization. In 1925, Malinowski argued that “[m]ortuary ritual serves to emphasize the cohesion and continuity of the social order, to reaffirm relationships among the living and to resolve the dissonance created by the unpredictable loss of a community member.”\(^8\) For Malinowski, the very act of resolving “dissonance” and “reaffirm[ing]” the living requires not only upholding but strengthening the status quo of the social order. One need look no further than kinship practices, which are consistently affirmed through mortuary ritual: seating arrangements, ability to make decision, and participation in ritual action. For this reason, kinship is one of the key structures examined in this dissertation, across the variety of objects through which I examine contemporary national mourning. Archaeologist Deborah Shepard takes Malinowski’s assertions a step further: “An outstanding feature of ritual is its conservative nature – rituals seem antiquated and to persist unchanged. Even more (and on a different level) than daily activity, ritual is capable of creating, legitimating and perpetuating social

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\(^8\) Freud, Sigmund. “Mourning and Melancholia” (Standard Edition. 1917).

\(^8\) This difference that it names is not the living versus the dead, but rather solely in the realm of the living. This might mean differences in ways of grieving, differences in relationships to the deceased, or differences in remembering the deceased.

\(^8\) Malinowski, 1925 as paraphrased by Holst-Warhoft, 2000, pg. 95.
inequalities.” For Shepard, ritual (although her work focuses on funerary ritual in particular) does in fact evolve along with the social order, even while appearing to “persist unchanged.” By seemingly remaining the same, the ability of ritual to operate in support of evolving inequalities is heightened.

Yet the liminality of death makes possible a myriad of behaviors which are inconceivable under the structures of normativity that govern the realm of the living. In the face of loss, the severing of attachments (recognized or unrecognized) brings on unexpected and unpredictable emotion, bringing into sharp relief attachments and bonds that operate on levels that go beyond the scope of legislation, ritual, and social order. Affect is increasingly being accounted for in anthropological understandings of funeral rituals, although this area is still quite under theorized. The funeral ritual provides boundaries and outlets for the expression of emotion, particularly that which is outside of social norms. Within the liminal world of the funeral, during which the regular social order is temporarily in flux, these affective expressions are temporarily normative. This might include such behaviors as uncontrolled weeping and wailing, or the flinging of one’s body on a casket or in a grave. While these behaviors tend to be gendered female, even within mortuary ritual, the funeral provides a site where such behaviors might be easily contained and explained away. Thus recognition of usually unrecognized relationships, which such behavior might bring on in daily life, is easily discounted by the emotional nature of loss and grief.

The unpredictable nature of grief and the attachments of mourning can render tangible the ghostly traces of death which refuse the termination of liminality for which the social drama calls. The ways that death remains, through the haunting institutions of discrimination, racism, homophobia, sexism, and post/neo-colonial legacies, are part of subject formation itself. Here at the threshold of loss it becomes evident that some lives are deemed not lives at all, perhaps because they fall outside of conceptions of the human, society’s standards of value, thus occupying a space of “social death.” While these ideas are central to much scholarship in queer studies, ethnic studies, and their intersections, this dissertation brings them to the forefront of performance studies by considering how the performances attendant to rituals of death dramatize usually invisible attachments, identities, and inequalities.

The Death and Funeral(s) of Osama bin Laden

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86 The work of Hallam and Hockey as well as Holst-Warhoft are examples of powerful new work in this area.


Funerals, and particularly the large-scale national funerals at the heart of this project, are contradictory. As performances which operate to affirm and return normativity to a moment of liminality, the funeral also simultaneously exposes norms as contingent and constructed. Funerals operate as “both/and”: the ways that they define and destabilize life, death and “American” values. I define this potential, this quality of contradiction and simultaneity as queer.

As the astonishing news of Osama bin Laden’s demise went viral, funeral performances rendered his death normative. President Obama’s announcement and the plethora of bin Laden news coverage provided narratives of the deceased’s life and relationships, served the function of a eulogy, reminding the American public, and indeed, the world at large, who Osama bin Laden was, what he had done with his life, and why he was dead. The border between the world of the living and the world of the dead was drawn along national and ethnic lines. Patriotic celebrations which erupted in the wake of President Obama’s announcement completed this narrative – Americans continue their sojourn in the world of the living. Perhaps the most poignant performances of the life-and-death stakes of American-ness were showcased by news coverage focusing on the celebrations which occurred in Dearborn, Michigan, noted for its large population of Americans of Middle Eastern descent. Performances of American-ness, particularly for those interpolated as racially or ethnically aligned with bin Laden, operated as rituals to override the performances of surveillance and interrogation that closely attended brown-skinned people following the events of September 11, 2001. Even grappling with the meaning of these patriotic outbursts which contributed to the rendering normative of bin Laden’s death; in the wake of death, the rules for participation in the world of the living were debated and contested as equilibrium was sought.

CBS declared the events a “stunning finale to a furtive decade on the run,” the theatrical connotations of “finale” placing the death within familiar narrative terms, like a film or a novel that unfolded in just the way we knew it would, bin Laden’s death at the hand of the US inevitable, fitting. Adding to this narrative is Time Magazine’s red X cover page, the fifth in a visual narrative reserved for the likes of Adolph Hitler, Saddam Hussein, and yes, even Japan right after the dropping of the atomic bombs. Fig. 1 The red X, a symbol of death, further reinforced the line between living and dead, while simultaneously aligning these two categories with the differentiation between good and evil. It is because of the role funerals play in creating, upholding, and/or challenging norms that I insist that funerals must be read queerly, bin Laden’s death and subsequent funeral performance being both no exception and the point.

Because notions of what is normal and natural are at stake in funeral performances, and because funerals turn life and death into a consumable narrative, funerals and burial sites are highly politically charged. Perhaps this is why the most interesting part of President Obama’s announcement was that the US not only killed bin Laden but took custody of the body. While understanding the national performances that

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occurred around bin Laden’s death as part of the funeral ritualization, what about the disposal of bin Laden’s remains?

The strategic disposal of bin Laden’s body attempted to remove the charged issue of remains from the picture, recognizing that the site of the graveyard or the grave marker holds meaning for anyone invested in the deceased. Ultimately, Osama bin Laden was swiftly and quietly buried at sea. A small US team cleaned and prepared his body according to Islamic tradition, and, after a “native” speaker read from the Koran, bin Laden’s body was lowered somewhere into the Arabian Sea.\(^9\) The meaning of this attempt to divest bin Laden’s remains of their representational power is among the most charged elements of this national funeral. In the wake of no remains, bin Laden’s corpse is visually resurrected by a variety of different sources for a variety of different means (for instance, in cartoons as a “lesson” to terrorists, a doctored photo circulating virally to stand as proof, to name a few). The nature of these resurrections will continue to morph as the meaning of Osama bin Laden and the US war on terror shifts throughout history. Ultimately the Obama administration will not release the photos of bin Laden’s corpse. It’s compelling to believe that the efforts to perform a proper Muslim burial for bin Laden represent a performative follow-through to Obama’s statement that the US is not at war with Islam. However, the rapidity of the burial and the way it managed a complete removal of remains from the public suggests that there are other stakes. The heated debate amongst Islam’s religious leaders as to the validity of the funeral as properly Muslim attests to this suspicion.

By beginning with Osama bin Laden’s death, I in no way mean to say that the collection of national funerals I investigate in this dissertation are equivalent, or that the racial formations involved and/or stakes are the same. Rather, in thinking about how death and its ceremonies create and uphold norms, the disappearing of bin Laden’s remains point to the larger issue of rendering US imperialism and global power normative. The stories of national funerals that comprise the heart of this dissertation investigate how some national funerals construct and affirm norms, while others attempt to undo these norms. Others simultaneously perform both operations, affirming and contesting. Theatricality operates as the mode through which identities, excesses, and kinship structures are incorporated or resisted, disguised or broadcasted, or both.

Chapter two, “Reagan, AIDS, and State Funerals: Neo-Liberalism and the Dramaturgy of Excess” juxtaposes two distinct funeral moments held in Washington DC: Ronald Reagan’s 2004 state funeral and the 1992 display of the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt, culminating in a separate but related ACT-UP Action, during which the remains of people who had died from AIDS were launched onto the White House lawn. I read all of these events as “state funerals,” specifically for their invocation of national space, and argue that the latter two continually haunt the former. I trace the discourses and practices of these events that fall under the realm of “excess,” arguing that the excessive provides a crucial entry point for queer critique that can challenge the

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relationship of “queer” to “neoliberal” while also recognizing the (anti)discipline’s ambivalent and embarrassed relationship to these structures.

Chapter three, “(Hyper/in)visibility and the Military Corps(e)” argues that the US military is based around the practice of kinship, but that the queer undertones of this kinship are rendered (hyper/in)visible as part of the maintenance of war machines. Military funerals expose the complicated operations of queer structures, such as same-sex intimacy and alternative non-heteroreproductive futurity, within militarization and patriotism. I trace the history of US military funerals, perform a queer reading of Jim Sheeler and Todd Heisler’s article and book Final Salute, and analyze structures of kinship and melancholia in the contentious military funeral protest and counter-protests of the Westboro Baptist Church and the Patriot Guard Riders.

Chapter four, “The Heartbeats of the Past with the Pulse of the Present: New York’s African Burial Ground” confronts queer critiques of intersectionality, arguing for the necessity of thinking through race, kinship, and temporality queerly. Through a detailed reading of the 2003 reinternment ceremonies held at the former slave burial ground, I argue that conceptualizing the notion of “descendant” as born from historical and/or political concerns not only queers hetero-reproductive privilege, but also enables new modes of coalitional activism. Ultimately, the combination of reimagining descendant communities in conjunction with the West African notion of sankofa, which serves as the African Burial Ground’s icon, produces inherently multiple theories of temporality, kinship, and belonging which raise the stakes and relevancy of not only the African Burial Ground, but also the stakes of reading such sites queerly.

Finally, in chapter five, “‘The Inbetweenness of Earthly Existence’: Anzaldúa, Altars, and the Funerary,” I argue that Anzaldúa’s theoretical and creative work were profoundly indebted to her own queer experiences of funerals, primarily the death of her father. By performing a reading of two short stories and sections of Borderlands, I suggest that the funerary and its queer contradictions are instrumental to Anzaldúa’s oeuvre. This is particularly relevant to her questioning of the concept of nation, nationalism, and belonging. I then turn to the virtual altar created upon her death in order to examine how these theories played out in her own memorialization. The practice of the virtual altar reanimates the idea of a national funeral through a queer and feminist renarrativization of the meaning of nation.

Race, class, sexual orientation, disability and their intersections too often indicate a position of queerness, marking subjects as subjugated and/or excessive. As such, the welfare of the so-called “socially dead” is inconsequential to the state. Relegation to social death de-humanizes subjects, so that the perpetuation of war, epidemic, poverty, and racial and gender violence are of no consequence for subjects within the sphere of social life. These are the necropolitical conditions which make the biopolitics of first-world “civilization” possible. Contrary to the notion of death as the great equalizer, I

92 Patterson, Orlando. Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).
93 I use necropolitics in the manner first discussed by Achille Mbembe. “Necropolitics” Public Culture 2003 15(1):11-40. For further discussion of this theoretical concept, see chapter two.
argue that all deaths are not created equal, just as life does not play out equally; nor does death (whether literal or social) mean the end of one’s part within economic and nation-building projects. The management of a nation’s dead is in fact critical to its functioning, particularly within global neoliberal economic and political systems of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. How do the ghostly lives and deaths of the socially abject haunt national mourning projects? How are these lives co-opted into practices that perpetuate the very conditions that rendered them ghostly to begin with? Social ritual must be examined with double vision, looking for both what is not there as well as what is there-but invisible. The binary between queer and normativity is a false and dangerous construct. This is a risky proposal in that this binary structure serves as the very condition that makes queer theory and LGBT lives legible. It is at this contradictory juncture between queer and normative which my examination of funerals illuminates the both/and relationship to the future of queer theory: queerness is essential to the perpetuation of normative, hegemonic, and even oppressive and racist structures. The potency of queer can be most deeply felt in understanding how structures of normativity rely upon structures of non-normativity, masquerading as an open secret whose exposure risks those norms themselves and the distribution of resources and privileges they promote. These types of negotiations are therefore simultaneously visible and invisible. An exploration of this particular mode of the politics of visibility animates my analyses of ritual, nation, and performance.
Chapter Two
Reagan, AIDS, and State Funerals:
Neo-Liberalism and the Dramaturgy of Excess

Not surprisingly, grief’s excesses have always been feared. Figures of authority observing the behavior of mourners at a funeral have recognized that this is a site where emotions can be fired and revolutions sparked.94

The term “state funeral” describes a dramaturgically-specific funeral event: the rituals of burial staged as national mourning upon the occasion of the death of a current or former head-of-state. As defined by the US government, state funerals are the highest possible posthumous honor in the United States. Only a President, Ex-President, President Elect, or a person “specifically designated by the President of the United States” is eligible for a state funeral.95 By performing an assortment of specific rituals, state funerals, in the words of theater historian Harry Garlick, are a “large, public, ritualized statement about death,” which, in contrast to private, civilian funerals are “much more elaborate, with the element of ritual both more prominent and more formalized, and there is usually in a state funeral a far greater focus on the performative elements of the ceremony.”96 Additionally, “a state funeral is always a spectacle […] the produced performative elements are directed deliberately at producing emotion in the mourners, using the techniques of the theatre.”97 Together, these definitions provide a dramaturgy distinctive to state funerals: spectacular productions which performatively honor the deceased as worthy of national mourning, create a national community of mourners guided towards a collective emotional experience through theatrical techniques. The dramaturgy of state funerals provides a narrative about the nation’s relationship to death, symbolically rendered through the physical location of Washington D.C.

This chapter takes up the dramaturgy, or dramatic structure, of state funerals through what may initially seem to be a curious juxtaposition of three events: the state funeral of Ronald Reagan in 2004; the first display of the NAMES project AIDS Quilt on the Washington Mall in 1992; and ACT-UP’s “Ashes Action” Protest in 1992, in which the ashes of fifteen people who died of AIDS were defiantly hurled over the gates of the White House and onto the lawn. Though the first event is seemingly only marginally related to the latter two, the dramaturgy of state funeral practice is evident throughout.98

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97 Garlick, Pg. 2.
98 While I am grouping the ACT-UP and NAMES Quilt together for the purposes of this discussion, the two events were not officially linked or affiliated. Rather, the display of the AIDS Quilt provided a particularly rich staging ground for ACT-UP, which was critical of the Quilt’s efficacy as political
While there are many elements to the dramaturgy of a state funeral, I am focused primarily on the dramaturgy of excess which run throughout, and for different ends, each of these national mourning events. Like civilian funerals, state funerals also render death normative. However, it is through utilizing the spectacular, excessive, and theatrical that state funerals transform death into a consumable narrative, one that supports normative socio-economic systems, and enables selective memory and forgetting in the name of the state. This dramaturgical mode of excess is often aligned with the queer and the feminine, as something which goes beyond the normative and the rational, as I will discuss shortly. By considering the dramaturgy of excess of an official state funeral (Reagan’s) and the claims to nation inherent in both AIDS memorials (the Quilt and Ashes Action), this chapter exposes the relationship between state funerals and the practice of queering.

Excess, or that which goes beyond what is needed or expected, is a key term for both queer theory and theater and performance studies. The term “queer” originally served as a synonym for “odd” or “strange,” denoting something which doesn’t quite fit because it exceeds the boundaries of the normative. In his book *Aberrations in Black: Towards a Queer of Color Critique*, Roderick Ferguson defines queer as the radical sites of disruption to normativity/heteronormativity that arise from the conditions of surplus and excess created by capital accumulation and neoliberal structures. Queer is thus aligned with excess: that which does not fit within/is superfluous to social and economic structures. Ferguson suggests that the position of being queer is essential to the propagation of systems that render one excessive in the first place. This platform for queer critique and the study of neo-liberalism and its norms from the very center of those systems is essential, and why the alignment of queer with excess is both potent and relevant. Throughout LGBT and queer studies, the theme of excess emerges time and time again, from theories of queer necropolitics which understand the designation of excessiveness as the mark of death, to the camp aesthetics of drag which start from the base line of “too much.”

Indeed, the notion of excess is what links queer with theatrical. Within theater studies, excess is the marker of the theatrical, which is in turn gendered. As Tracy Davis and Thomas Postlewait detail in their edited collection *Theatricality*, considering the debates criticizing antitheatricality, and the origin of the term:

[A] series of related antimonies are in operation here: real versus false, genuine versus fake, intrinsic versus extrinsic, original versus imitative, true versus counterfeit, honest versus dishonest, sincere versus devious, accurate versus distorted, revealed versus disguised, face versus mask, serious versus

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playful, and essential versus artificial. All things theatrical are on the negative end of the polarity.

In telling ways, this opposition has also been used to distinguish between masculine and feminine traits, with women portrayed (From the perspective of the patriarchy) as duplicitous, deceptive, costumed, showy, and thus a sex inherently theatrical. The norms of natural behavior and sincere judgment reside within masculinity. [...] Long before the world theatricality appeared, aspects of the concept were well established in society and its rules of judgment.  

As Davis and Postlewait describe, there is a long history of theatricality being aligned with the same qualities as femininity, or the “wrong” side of the gender binary. These very distinctions perhaps explain why the theater and theatricality have long been aligned with homosexuality and other deviant sexual practices. When something is theatrical, it is always already demonstrating its difference from its referent. This difference is excessive or beyond the thing itself. The link between theater, theatricality, and queer positions are part of the reason why the theoretical language and (anti)disciplines of queer theory and performance studies have emerged in tandem. Given the gendered and sexualized implications contained within the theatrical, its abundance in funeral ritual, and the ways this usually feminized mode of communication is utilized by patriarchal systems, theatricality illustrates the ways queer practices, aesthetics, and even theorizing can be co-opted.

Both Reagan’s funeral and the AIDS memorials are highly invested in channeling excess into targeted affect. How is excess created and folded into neoliberal and neo-imperial systems? The official state funeral relies both on national and state symbols and icons along with the production of excess as a statement of normativity. The AIDS memorial and protest, held to challenge the designation of dying populations as excessive and therefore irrelevant, also depends on national and state tropes, while simultaneously invoking an excessive aesthetics. By drawing upon the dramaturgical threads of a state funeral, the AIDS Quilt and the Ashes Action queer, or make strange, the practice of the state funeral. Yet the relationship between state funerals and the AIDS memorial and activism as protest against the state, calls into question the privileged relationship between queerness and excess. Excess and the dramaturgy of excess thus proves to be an ambivalent performance genre, challenging the neatness of the presumed relationship between excessive and normal, state and anti-state, queer and non-queer.

The queer and the state are inextricably intertwined. While the scholarly work of Jasbir Puar, Lisa Duggan, and Scott Morgensen, among others, argues that subjects...
presumed homosexual in fact are often in collusion with state objectives, my focus shifts away from considering the relationship between certain populations (i.e. the homonormative) and rather considers the theoretical ground upon which the designation of queerness rests. Performances which create norms rely heavily upon queer structures, while queer performances may also be largely dependent on normative practices and narratives. This is not to rob queer of its potency, but rather to hone queer’s potential to truly understand the ways in which it is always already imbricated in normative and state practices and vice versa. Death, often imagined as outside of systems of capital accumulation and economic drive, is in fact fundamental to the perpetuation of socio-economic systems, simultaneously made visible and erased through the rituals and performances of funerals. The position of normativity, belonging or not belonging, is a crucially relevant factor for participation in social economy and social subjectivity, and these modes of belonging are highly theatricalized in funeral performance.

The stakes of state funerals are contained in the corpses invoked, drawn upon to perform political and economic work through the dual functioning of biopolitics and necropolitics. According to Michel Foucault, who originated the concept of biopolitics, the United States is a prime example of biopolitical society, in which we are obsessed with finding new ways to manage and control through the maintenance of life: thus the national preoccupation with health and weight (first lady Michelle Obama’s childhood obesity campaign, for instance). Necropolitics, however, are largely associated with the Third World; indeed, Achille Mbembe, an African scholar, discusses how death drives politics in third world countries as he refutes Foucault’s notion of a society run by managing life. Giorgio Agamben describes these same forces in terms of the concentration camps of the Holocaust, in which raw power is equated with the ability to decide who lives and who dies.

Corpses are perhaps the ultimate excess, the unanimated body stripped of its ability to perform as a social actor or to invoke power, a consumer to drive markets, or a member of the labor force to create consumer goods. Funeral ceremonies exist, in part, to manage this excess, transforming this process into a ritual of healing and closure. This process is exemplified in the state funerals examined here. In Reagan’s funeral, excess is normalized through naturalizing the excessive performances invoked as part of a state funeral through appealing to long histories of tradition, spectacle as the “natural” and, moreover, normal place for excess. Additionally, excess is understood as the natural consequence of affect, an unavoidable side effect of any funeral event. The AIDS funeral produced by the NAMES Project AIDS Quilt and ACT UP’s Ashes Action are both performances which hinge upon corpses as excess, but interestingly because they are fighting against the notion of a “social death” in which gay men in particular are seen as excessive corpses even in life. Thus the signifier of the corpse becomes an especially

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106 Patterson, 1982.
charged one, and it takes an excessive number of representational corpses, or the excess of “realness” in the Ashes Action, to render those on the outskirts of normative society not excessive to the state, but rather something that should be a central concern. The AIDS Quilt and Ashes Action become complicated precisely at this question of excess, at the juncture where excess can be read as something simultaneous, as a both/and, a neither/nor.

The state funeral and the AIDS memorials, wittingly and unwittingly, haunt each other. In her book *Ghostly Matters*, sociologist Avery Gordon argues that the ghostly underscores American culture. Haunting, according to Gordon:

…describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities, the ghost is just the sign, or the empirical evidence if you like, that tells you a haunting is taking place. The ghost is not simply a dead or missing person, but a social figure, and investigating it can lead to that dense site where history and subjectivity make social life. The ghost or apparition is one form by which something lost, or barely visible, or seemingly not there to our supposedly well-trained eyes, makes itself known or apparent to us…

Gordon suggests that haunting is a performance, one which probes “taken-for-granted-realities,” performed by unusual or unexpected actors. Reading Reagan’s funeral set against the AIDS protest and memorial is a ghostly summoning, making visible what is unseen in one event through the presences of the other. Though the strict protocol and elaborate rituals of Reagan’s funeral attempt to direct and control which ghosts it will acknowledge, ghosts of the un-mourned and the unrecognized seep through the expansive ceremonies which occur on the Washington Lawns. The NAMES Quilt and ACT-UP’s performances of mourning and protesting the AIDS dead resurrected ghosts that would haunt Reagan’s state funeral; however it is ultimately state memorial practice itself which is haunted, challenging the complicated dance of remembering and forgetting which comprises social performance.

The Washington Lawns are deeply haunted national space, in which past uses of the site are ever-present in the actions which occur in the same location today. Dramatically, all three performances are deeply site-specific. The political poignancy of the AIDS funeral events explicitly draws from their citation of state and military funerals within the charged space of Washington DC’s Washington Mall, White House, and Capitol complex, which, for the purposes of this chapter, I call the Washington Lawns. The Washington Lawns are evoked as a sacred national space, the literal site of democracy and its workings. Funeral ceremonies held in and around the Washington Lawns purposefully resurrect the spirit(s) of US heroes and leaders. These are the ghosts state funerals deliberately summon. Yet it is the nature of the Washington Lawns as a palimpsest, or heterotopia, which invites un-invoked ghosts which have been rendered

socially excessive to this national narrative. In his essay “Of Other Spaces,” Michel
Foucault describes the concept of heterotopias:

The heterotopia is capable of juxtaposing in a single real place
several spaces, several sites that are in themselves incompatible. Thus it is
that the theater brings onto the rectangle of the stage, one after the other, a
whole series of places that are foreign to one another.\(^{108}\)

The space functions multiply, excessively, with uncontrollable resonances and
unexpected meaning. It is not that Reagan’s funeral is inherently queer, but that the
Ashes Action and the AIDS Quilt, among other performances enacted on the Washington
Lawns, queer it, through seething ghostly practices.\(^{109}\)

How does the funeral performance illustrate and/or create the value attached to
the lives being honored? How does the funeral performance utilize and/or reject or
otherwise respond to national symbols and rituals? How is theatricality utilized, and to
what end? Ultimately the queer workings of funeral practice’s potential to incite “anxiety
producing instability,” unearths theatricality, expressed through the dramaturgy of excess,
as a mode that is saturated with the performative, a relationship that state funerals,
ofﬁcial and otherwise, rely upon in order to operate.

“Morning in America”: The Funeral of Ronald Reagan

"Because the networks had so long to plan for this production, and
because Nancy Reagan is a master dramaturge, [Ronald Reagan’s funeral]
was the most precisely mounted news event in modern times. Each gesture
was minutely choreographed, every tear strategically placed."\(^{110}\)

“The pomp was nearly unprecedented in American annals, more than two
extraordinary hours of thundering organ, swelling chorus, haunting
silences and eloquent prayers.”\(^{111}\)

\(Architectures/Mouvement/Continuité\), October 1967. “This text, entitled ‘Des Espace Autres,’ and
published by the French journal Architecture/Mouvement/Continuité in October, 1984, was the basis of a
lecture given by Michel Foucault in March 1967. Although not reviewed for publication by the author and
thus not part of the ofﬁcial corpus of his work, the manuscript was released into the public domain for an
exhibition in Berlin shortly before Michel Foucault’s death. Translated from the French by Jay Miskowiec.”

\(^{109}\) We see this type of ghosting as a queering of space again through the presence of the African Burial
Ground below Wall Street’s economic hustle and bustle in the fourth chapter.

\(^{110}\) Richard Goldstein. “Das Rongold: Reagan’s funeral as a Wagnerian opera.” The Village Voice, June 15,

\(^{111}\) Von Drehle, A01. Though Von Drehle does not offer which occasion of presidential pomp outstripped
Reagan (implied through the phrase “nearly unprecedented”), I presume he refers to the state funeral of
Abraham Lincoln, commonly used as a basis for the traditions which now make up state funeral protocol.
When Ronald Reagan passed away after a ten year battle with Alzheimer’s disease in 2004, it set a large and complex state funeral into action. The result was one of the most lavish state funerals the United States has ever seen, particularly for the natural death of a former president, involving multiple cross-country flights, wakes, viewings, and processions, the participation of hundreds of military personnel and tens of thousands of American citizens, dignitaries from around the world, and a global audience of millions via television and the internet.\textsuperscript{112} Washington Post journalist David Von Drehel drew comparisons to J.F. Kennedy’s state funeral in 1963. He wrote: “The Kennedy procession was black and white; Reagan's was Technicolor,” both literally referring to the nature of the globally televised broadcasts as well as alluding to the spectacular feeling evoked by the Reagan state funeral – a dazzling array of colors as opposed to monochrome.\textsuperscript{113} In a separate article, Von Drehel also characterized Reagan’s funeral as “fit for a king.”\textsuperscript{114} Analyzing the cost of Reagan’s funeral to taxpayers (estimated loosely as “millions”), journalist Shihoko Goto remarked “the presidency is the closest thing the United States has to royalty and the pageantry that goes with it,” concluding that “perhaps Reagan's funeral was a small price to pay to bring the nation together after all.”\textsuperscript{115}

The abundant pageantry of the Reagan funeral is centrally important in the way it guides and directs “excess” into theatrical modes which produce and control affect on a national scale. Although private ceremonies are also invested in the production of emotion in mourners theatrically, as I will discuss more thoroughly in chapters three and five, the aim of producing national mood and sentiment through state funerals raises the stakes for the performance. The use of symbolism, mythology, and affect create and amplify the production and manipulation of excess in order to direct, produce, and control national feeling. Operating on a grand scale, playing to the imagined community of the nation, the staging of these elements constitute a dramaturgy of excess. The theater of the state funeral sets the stage for the dramaturgy of excess to take on a life of its own, extending into national life through media, both professional and amateur.

Reagan’s state funeral was not only about mourning the death of an individual person. It was about mourning an icon, a sign of the nation and the times incarnate. As Avner Ben-Amos and Eyal Ben-Ari write in their article about state funerals of the Third Republic in France, the media and state bureaucracy together invoke symbolism and excessive pomp in order to both demonstrate and inspire national loyalty and unity, and dramatize the

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\textsuperscript{112} While many of these elements are traditional for a state funeral, the sheer volume, as well as the combination of all of these elements, rather than just one or two, created a larger-than-normal state funeral.
state’s power and importance. By ushering the deceased out of the world of the living and into the world of the dead, a president is performatively inaugurated into historical legacy, transformed into a national hero. The act of witnessing and participating in this performance is simultaneously the unification of a nation through civic participation in the rites and rituals of mourning.

The first epigraph to this section comes from an article in The Village Voice, in which writer Richard Goldstein attacks the very elements that define a state funeral, particularly the trappings of both religious (Christian) ceremony and national pageantry. He likens the Reagan funeral to a Wagnerian opera, calling every tear “strategically placed.” By pointing out the theatricality of the funeral, he argues that the lavish pageantry marks spectacle rather than genuine mourning. These observations point to the dramaturgy of excess, in which the stigma of theatricalized excess means that no emotion is a genuine one, but rather planted with the aim of creating a desired national catharsis that can bind Americans to one another. His attack on the sentimentality evoked from Reagan’s funeral confirms Garlick’s analysis of the operation of state funerals. However, as any theater practitioner knows, a swell of emotion is not any less real for having been evoked through theatricality. In fact, the prevalence of dramatic structure in contemporary society means that the public is primed to respond emotionally to events that play out theatrically, as Raymond Williams famously argued in his address “Drama in a Dramatized Society.” Thus Goldstein’s criticism of Reagan’s funeral is simultaneously correct and misguided. His assertion that the state funeral is operating according to a carefully laid out dramaturgy is irrefutable. However, this dramaturgy heightens its efficacy rather than detracting from it, particularly because of its dealings in excess, its Wagnerian scale.

Media coverage of the event both produced and portrayed a national catharsis in which “grown men wept” and “Ronald Reagan's political allies and political enemies alike stood together in sorrow.” The second epigraph comes from Washington Post reporter David Von Drehle’s multi-day coverage of the Reagan funeral, demonstrating both the dramaturgy of excess in operation as well as the framing through which the American public could access the funeral: vis-à-vis news coverage. The stakes of this theatricality become evident when considering the events away from which national affect was being directed. As journalist Dan Froomken proposes, “Reagan's death is thoroughly distracting from stories the White House was eager to bury: The sudden interest in Bush and Vice President Cheney apparently expressed by the special prosecutor investigating the leak of CIA operative Valerie Plame's identity; the oddly timed and mysterious resignation of CIA Director George J. Tenet; the grim news out of Iraq; the revelations of brutality at Abu Ghraib; the increasingly bizarre story of Ahmed

That these stories broke just a few months before Bush’s re-election campaign made the timing of Reagan’s funeral all the more fortuitous for the Republican party to ensure that the “right” kind of affect was created during this event. While there was no way to foresee the national circumstances at the time of Reagan’s death, the savvy understanding of the dramaturgy of excess exhibited by Nancy Reagan, the Bush administration, and the Republican Party created an excessive and lavish event in order to promote and direct national sentiment.

The journey to Reagan’s death as a global event began shortly after he first took office in 1981, when the details for his state funeral were first predetermined. Working with the Houston based company Service Corporation International, which assists the government with high-level funerals, the Reagans were able to adjust their plans for the state funeral throughout Reagan’s presidency, in order to better respond to shifts in national mood. Additionally, this meant that the symbolism utilized by the Reagans and the Republican party, and disseminated by the media could be selectively tailored for dramatic impact. While it’s impossible to argue definitively that the symbolism utilized in Reagan’s campaign and presidency was designed with the impact of his eventual death and state funeral, it is striking that the thematic trope of linear temporality dominated the most successful elements of Reagan’s re-election campaign, and that this thematic was carried through his journey towards death.

The following text is the narration to Reagan’s famous re-election campaign advertisement “Prouder, Stronger, Better:”

*It's morning again in America.*

*Today, more men and women will go to work than ever before in our country's history. With interest rates at about half the record highs of 1980, nearly 2,000 families today will buy new homes, more than at any time in the past four years. This afternoon, 6,500 young men and women will be married, and with inflation at less than half of what it was just four short years ago, they can look forward with confidence to the future.*

*It's morning again in America, and under the leadership of President Reagan our country is prouder and stronger and better. Why would we ever want to return to where we were less than four short years ago?*

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120 This is standard procedure for presidents and presidents elect, although Reagan’s status as the US’s oldest president surely played a factor in this advance preparation. See Julian Guthrie. “For Reagan Mortician, Honor of a Lifetime.” *San Francisco Chronicle.* June 9, 2004.
Dawn breaks over a boat in a busy harbor. A taxicab delivers its customer to work in a bustling downtown urban center, already swarming with men and women in suits. A farmer looks over his shoulder as he plows his fields, the sun rising behind him. These scenes of a diverse national productivity begin “Prouder, Stronger, Better,” more popularly referenced by its catchphrase “Morning Again in America.” Scenes of the workplace transition into the domestic arena, wherein families experience key moments: watching a father go off to work, buying a home, entering into the covenant of marriage, illustrating the statistics spoken by a soothing male voice. Throughout, one generation embraces another as they live, work, and dream within an idealized scene of day-break: this is the future the campaign video promises under the continued leadership of Ronald Reagan. According to the ad’s narrative, Reagan has already brought morning to America; the campaign video urges the American public to recognize this assertion as fact and to enable the continuation of this trajectory. “Why would we ever want to return to where we were, less than four short years ago?” the video asks in conclusion.

Morning is understood as seeped in opportunity, a fresh start in which everything is at its inception. The advertisement anthropomorphizes the United States as a blushing bride, at the very beginning of a (re)productive life. The cycle from sunrise to sunset is aligned with the cycle of life – one which Judith Halberstam sees as normative temporality, which she delineates in her definition of queer temporalities: “Queer subcultures produce alternative temporalities by allowing their participants to believe that their futures can be imagined according to logics that lie outside of those paradigmatic markers of life experience – namely, birth, marriage, reproduction, and death.”

Reagan’s campaign video focuses on the idea of youthful optimism and the building of this idealized “Leave it to Beaver” life – in which homes are purchased and heterosexual two-parent families rear their 2.5 children. The rosy hues of dawn are the bride’s flushed cheeks, and America is poised and ready to continue the fruitful path it carved out for itself by electing Reagan president. Reagan’s re-election campaign advertisement is successful in the way it carefully constructs nostalgia towards the past as a simultaneous looking forward into the future. The articulation of time highlighted in this campaign is striking in the way it draws upon the fickle nature of memory, flattening the past into an idealized nugget of a simpler and more conservative time, in which traditional “family values” reigned supreme. “It’s morning again in America” quickly became a catchphrase to describe Reagan’s administration and its effects on the nation by his supporters. Its Americana theme and nostalgic vision clearly delineates American normativity, and its promises are framed as in reach for those who align themselves with the values and lifestyles affirmed in the images and narration: heterosexual marriage, home ownership, economic stability.

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By drawing upon the rhetoric and strategic aim of the advertisement campaign, which was considered successful for its ability to speak widely to Americans, the state funeral was poised to utilize the ideology and imagery of Reagan as the basis for creating national unity cemented through an articulation of normativity in chronological and heterosexual terms. When “Prouder, Stronger, Better” aired in 1984, Ronald and Nancy Reagan had already laid the ground work for Reagan’s eventual death and funeral. When announcing the news of his diagnosis with Alzheimer’s disease, Reagan returned to this metaphor, writing “I now begin the journey that will lead me into the sunset of my life. I know that for America there will always be a bright dawn ahead.”

This carefully crafted statement alludes back to the temporal trajectories at the center of “Prouder, Stronger, Better.” By referencing the normative framework of the re-election campaign, Reagan positions himself as having led the quintessential American life. Mourning Reagan thus also means mourning for an exemplary life, the boundaries of which are set up by the ad campaign, both rhetorically and visually. The ad is devoid of people of color, a typical “oversight” for 1980s America. Through the hyper-visibility of whiteness, people of color are rendered doubly-excess: either they are so unimportant to the national story as to not merit representation, or, more insidiously, the nation is at its best when the labor of people of color is incorporated in such a way as to render them invisible. The same can be said of queer people, those who do not enter into the institution of marriage, who are invisible within the ad’s temporal trajectory. In a Washington Post article on Reagan’s funeral, civilian Linda Kelly is quoted as saying “We can best honor Ronald Reagan by living the kind of lives he demonstrated…By going out to be Americans, by honoring our country and our history.” She articulates a distinction between the kind of lives which would honor Reagan (standing in for the country and its values) and alludes to those which would not, the very ones absent from the ad campaign. Given Reagan’s response to the AIDS crisis, which was understood to affect gays, Haitians, and drug users almost exclusively, such queer positions are invisibly and indelibly marked as those “kind of lives” that fall outside this distinction. While this sort of biological warfare appears more subtle than the kinds of killing which Mbembe discusses in his definition of necropolitics, it illustrates an intertwining of biopolitics (the focus on health and extending of life) with necropolitics, use of power to control through the threat of death. This death by neglect disguises the theatricality of necropolitics, which often relies upon displays of death and the way to gain or wield power. Instead, in the Reagan funeral, biopolitics are emphasized through the hyperbolization of the symbolism of the ad campaign.

The flow of daybreak-to-sunset that serves as Reagan’s central metaphor for his ad campaign, American, and his own life, also serves as the frame for the funeral, reinforcing the temporal and ideological narrative. The news of Reagan’s passing at his

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ranch home in Southern California on June 5, 2004 was made public in the evening. After the body was cared for at the Kingsley and Gates Funeral Home in Santa Monica, California, Reagan’s body lay in repose at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley beginning June 7. Over 100,000 people came to view the body, pay tribute to the former president and/or witness a slice of history. On the morning of June 9, Reagan’s corpse was taken via motorcade to the Point Mugu Air Force base, where hundreds of civilians and soldiers watched Air Force One depart for Andrews Air Force Base in Washington DC as the sun rose in the sky. Once the mahogany casket holding Reagan arrived at Andrews, the caisson, an artillery wagon built in 1918 used specifically for funerals, was pulled by six horses to the Cathedral followed by over 64 groups, including representatives from every branch of the US government and military. Marchers stepped in time at a cadence of “100 steps per minute.” A riderless horse (specifically a black thoroughbred known as Sergeant York) followed the caisson. A pair of boots, one in each stirrup, faced backwards, symbolizing a fallen warrior, an honor given former commanders-in-chief, regardless of whether or not their background includes military service. Mourners, tourists, and DC residents lined the streets to watch the procession bring Reagan’s casket, wrapped tightly in an American flag, to the Capitol Rotunda. Reagan lay in state in the Capitol Rotunda upon Abraham Lincoln’s catafalque. From June 9 until the State Funeral on June 11, 104,684 visitors were processed by the United States Capitol Police. Visitors waited hours for the opportunity to view Reagan’s casket. On June 11, which then-president George W. Bush declared a national day of mourning, Reagan’s state funeral was held at the Washington National Cathedral. At the end of the ceremony, a motorcade delivered Reagan’s casket back to Andrews Air Force Base, where Air Force One flew the Reagan family and their entourage back to Southern California, delivering everyone on time for a much smaller, “private” sunset funeral, where Reagan’s body was laid to rest overlooking the ocean.

129 This tradition is thought to originate from the days of Ghengis Khan, when the warrior’s horse was led to warrior’s grave and killed so that the warrior and his horse could go on to the next world together.
131 On a national day of mourning, Wall Street and all government offices are closed, with the exception of the necessary offices to support maximum security for the state funeral.
set in Empire, right on cue. Dramaturgically, scheduling the funeral to begin at day break and end with a sunset recalls the messages conveyed throughout Reagan’s campaign and administration, drawing upon his own history.

In order to frame Reagan’s personal history within the larger scope of American History, the state funeral is full of symbolic elements from the repertoire of military funerals. The Department of Defense (and more specifically the Joint Task Force-National Capital Region (JTF-NCR))’s guidelines for state funerals contain many different traditions from which the president and his family can choose. Each tradition, from the music played, the military and government resources expended, to the specific equipment used, as well as how and at what point the symbols are displayed, marks the deceased as the center of the nation in a manner meant to convey the profundity of the loss of a leader and evoke a united swell of mourning. This is made possible through the repetition of ritual aspects of some of the earliest state funerals as well as the re-use of artifacts from the state funerals of popular historical presidents.

Benjamin Franklin’s death and funeral in 1791 is largely considered to be the first national mourning, followed closely by the multiple funerals held in honor of George Washington’s death in 1799. Individual funerals were largely local affairs, however; mourning was not centralized, but rather moved piecemeal through the nation as the news spread, with “mock funerals” held in major urban centers. These early colonial-era state funerals, eschewed pomp and circumstance as reminiscent of the trappings of the British. This all changed, however, with Abraham Lincoln’s assassination. Lincoln’s state funeral in 1865 is considered the first occasion of unified national mourning, and the first American funeral to lay the groundwork for the dramaturgy of excess that characterizes contemporary state funerals. Traveling via funeral train, Lincoln’s body itself made the rounds to various urban centers en route from Washington, DC to Springfield, Illinois so that a wider net of national subjects could pay respects to the

fallen leader through ceremony. Before the funeral train departed, however, Lincoln was the first president to lie in state, a term designating the coffin’s presence in the Rotunda of the US Capitol.  

Due to the nature and timing of Lincoln’s death, many of the practices (such as lying in state) and artifacts from his funeral are highly symbolic and are utilized during state funerals to this day, such as the catafalque upon which the presidential casket lays.

Today’s state funeral customs are largely drawn from Lincoln’s funeral, and Reagan’s funeral was no exception. Each of these traditions is steeped in history, drawing upon military funeral traditions, as well as past state funerals, linking a larger-than-life President to a performed, and largely (re)constructed, glorious past. Examples include the flag on the coffin, the selection of music (“Hail to the Chief,” “Amazing Grace,”), the rider-less horse, and the gun salutes required at every US military base across the world. This dramaturgy relies upon the theatricality of historical symbols and their historicized emotional resonances. By temporarily transforming the Washington Lawns, and therefore, symbolically, the nation, into a space of mourning, the state funeral transforms the space into a heterotopia, bringing the state funerals of historic presidents into the picture. By aligning Reagan with universally revered past presidents (such as Lincoln and Kennedy), the state funeral promotes and displays national unity, ushering Reagan into the black-and-white annals of History. This performative act ignores the extent to which he was also widely protested both during and after his presidency, actively utilizing ceremony to rewrite historical narrative and shaping the boundaries of normative American life.

As I’ve demonstrated, the dramaturgy of excess can be seen through the use of symbolism and mythology, which draw on epic narratives, sweeping notions of time and history. In order to manifest these symbolic and mythological elements, a vast amount of resources were expended by the US government, both material and human. However, these elements might be considered typical of a state funeral; even though the amount of national symbols invoked and the scale of Reagan’s funeral was on the high side for this kind of national event, the elements chosen were all within the roster of possibility for a state funeral. It’s worth noting that in past state funerals, the level of pomp and circumstance at Reagan’s funeral had only been seen at the funerals of presidents who had been assassinated during their term (Lincoln, Kennedy). From this fact alone, we can see the dramaturgy of excess in operation in the state funeral for an ex-President who had died of natural causes. However, the dramaturgy of excess can perhaps be most keenly observed in the ways affect and emotion were channeled, the transformation of excess into a usable, directed sentiment to complete the narrative invoked by the state funeral and its intervention into historical memory.

The tears of George H. W. Bush during his eulogy to Reagan demonstrate that the dramaturgy of the state funeral transforms typically taboo emotion, specifically the emotion of men for one another, into socially appropriate and state-affirming affect.

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137 http://www.thefuneralsource.org/trad09.html
138 John F. Kennedy’s funeral perhaps drew the most explicitly from Lincoln’s funeral. This was a very deliberate reference. Reagan, in drawing from Lincoln, also draws from Kennedy.
During the memorial service held in the National Cathedral, both Presidents Bush delivered eulogies, along with former Canadian Prime Minister Brian Mulroney and former British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (although her comments were delivered via video due to her own failing health). Reporters characterized the eulogies as heartfelt and quite moving, but none so much as George H. W. Bush, who had served as Reagan’s Vice President, whose voice choked with tears mid-speech. Much was made of the presence of many international dignitaries, but especially Mikhail Gorbachev, who reporters noted stood as a symbolic reminder of Reagan’s Cold War negotiations. Bush’s emotion (while perhaps an example of the “choreographed tears” to which Goldstein refers) represents a slippage, a moment where the veneer of stoic masculinity is cracked, and the intimacy of the relationship, one both familial and reverent, between Reagan and Bush shines through. This affective exchange or demonstration of intimacy between men is usually considered unbecoming or inappropriate, but framed within the context of the funeral is instead lauded, remarked upon by news commentators as one of the most touching moments of the ceremony. The homosociality of patriarchy becomes acceptable under the façade of patriotism, when done for the purposes of promoting national unity, an issue I discuss in detail in chapter three. Bush’s tears, which might indicate queer affect in other situations, are effectively de-queered through spectacle and pageantry. The dramaturgy of excess exchanges the queer and theatrical nature of male tears for the excess of spectacle.

While Bush’s tears featured prominently in the global media surrounding Reagan’s funeral, homosocial affect swept through unofficial media channels, demonstrating that the dramaturgical framework of the funeral event itself seeped into national response to Reagan’s death and state funeral. YouTube tributes to Reagan, the Reagan family, and the Reagan funeral also demonstrate this veritable out-pouring of highly sentimental and over-the-top affect. The popular video-sharing website is riddled with videos honoring the late Reagan and his family, in which citizens of both genders lovingly construct a bricolage of footage composed both from personal and public media footage, facts, and photos, expressing their adoration and respect for Reagan. The aesthetic of these tributes is so deeply earnest as to immediately and inadvertently become campy. One video created by 23 year old Jamie Farrar attempts to recreate the courtship of “Ron and Nancy” through photos of the couple throughout their lives, including images of Nancy kissing Reagan’s flag draped coffin. In the background a country love song crooned by Sara Evans speaks of undying love – the kind that can only be matched by God. The video maker speaks directly to Nancy at the end, hoping that the former First Lady drew comfort from her video. Another video, created by 53 year old Curtis, shows news footage of Americans cycling through the Capitol and paying respects to Reagan while his body lies in state. A jazzed up version of “The Little

Judy Woodruff: “I think I was more touched by President George H.W. Bush than anyone else. It was a very personal eulogy that he gave.”
140 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QHY4RHlmVvY&feature=related
Drummer Boy” plays in the background – a rather humorous choice for a funeral held in the middle of the summer. When questioned in the comments section, the video maker apologetically notes: “I originally had Ray Charles, America the Beautiful and it was very appropriate and added to the video but then the song was removed by the recording producer.” Yet “Little Drummer Boy” draws upon the trope of ritual offerings present at Reagan’s funeral, referencing offerings to the baby Christ, a “new born king.” Even the sound track operates in hyperbole, vaulting Reagan to the status of a god, or someone who will be born again. Both videos seamlessly blend church and state, and work to catapult Reagan to the ultimate mythological and iconic status, godliness. These videos not only demonstrate the teeming excess surrounding Reagan’s death, which goes beyond the funeral event itself, but also illustrate the ways in which this excess is an essential part of re-creating Reagan as a national icon.

The dramaturgy of excess involved in Reagan’s funeral and memorial is evident on multiple fronts: the weight and importance placed on highly performative symbols, the mythological and epic scale of the event, and the overt, melodramatic theatricality that permeated both the funeral and national mood. The Washington Lawns provide the necessary staging ground for this national mourning project. While Reagan is immediately placed back in the geographic and symbolic context of the political decisions he made during his presidency, they are strikingly absent from the ceremonies themselves, save brief mention in a handful of newspapers. Most importantly, it was during his presidency that the Washington Lawns were transformed into a cemetery for thousands of victims of HIV/AIDS. For some of those dead, the White House lawn is literally their last resting place. Most queerly of all, Reagan’s funeral takes place in the very location where thousands of deceased AIDS patients representatively (through a quilt panel the size of a cemetery plot) lay. Threaded through metal barricades, conversing amongst themselves, over 100,000 individuals participated in the unfolding national drama of Ronald Reagan’s funeral. Placing the image of mourners lined up to view Reagan’s body next to the image of the AIDS Quilt spread across the White House lawn activates the queer potential inherent in the funeral ceremony, bringing to light the disparity of value placed on the lives of all the dead who lay there. Fig 2 and 3 The absence of discourse around AIDS both during Reagan’s presidency as well as his funeral is both predictable and invisible. Through lavish theatricality, Reagan’s last rites erase the ghosts that haunt it.

141 http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b4KPeB5FUWA&feature=fvw
142 “Reagan Hailed as Leader for ‘the Ages’” David Von Drehle. The Washington Post. 12 June 2004. Pg. A01. www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/articles/A35593-2004Jun11.html While 100,000 people viewed Reagan’s casket while he lay in state in the White House Rotunda, 100,000 also filed past his casket while it lay in repose in the Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, CA. Solana Larsen reports on opendemocracy.com that white 29 people have lain in state in US history, “none – not even John F. Kennedy’s funeral in 1963 – has ever commanded lines that stretched as far as the eye could see, hordes of police and security officers, and five-hour queues for nearly twenty-four hours.” “Going to the Casket” Solana Larsen. June 14 2004. Opendemocracy.net/people-ronald-reagan/article_1955.jsp Of course, the “participants” might number infinitely more if we consider participation through media and technology.
Mourning in America: The AIDS Quilt and Ashes Action

“...back in 1985, when I had the idea [for the AIDS Quilt], I saw that picture in my mind so clearly. I saw the entire National Mall from the Washington Monument to the steps of the Capitol, and in my mind’s eye I could see it just as clear as day.” Cleve Jones.143

“[The AIDS Quilt]...exhibited on the Washington Mall, the ‘space it was originally designed for.’”144

While the Reagan funeral used theatricality, epic narrative, mythology and symbolism, and media as a tool of biopolitics, highlighting the qualities of a “good life,” American heroism and patriotism, the theatricality of the Quilt and of ACT UP’s Ashes Action exposes the dramatic undercurrent of necropolitics in the US, the death by neglect which surplus populations suffer. While the death of one national figure (in this instance, Reagan) can induce the President to authorize the spending of millions of dollars and the labor of thousands of government employees, hundreds of individuals came together to illustrate the death of thousands in order to garner a response from an administration that remained shockingly silent in the face of an unprecedented health crisis. The strategic display of corpses, both representational and literal, dramatically rendered visible a previously invisible phenomenon: the rapid devastation of substantial populations of American citizens. But because these populations by and large fell outside of the category of “the kind of life [Reagan] would want us to lead,” there had been no public occasion of mourning, or any sort of government response to the crisis. Though AIDS was first diagnosed in 1981, and even declared a national health emergency in 1983, it wasn’t until 1987 that Reagan first spoke publicly about AIDS. This gap in government support and acknowledgement of the AIDS pandemic is hugely symbolic, given Reagan’s reputation as the Great Communicator, and the very moving speeches he delivered in regards to other national tragedies which occurred during his presidency, such as the Challenger explosion in 1986. By the time “Prouder, Stronger, Better” aired in 1984, the US AIDS death toll was over 1,800. Morning for normative America was in fact mourning for America’s “surplus” population, mourning the losses of a silenced and under-researched disease which had been framed in the media as an epidemic striking a specifically gay population. AIDS activists, fully aware of the politics of mourning and burial practice, took up the theatricality of funerals in order to stage a national intervention, a “large, public, ritualized statement about death,” to return to Harry Garlick’s definition of state funerals.145

145 Garlick, 1
The national space of the Washington Lawns and the highly mediatized position of presidency are key factors in the dramaturgy of state funerals and excess employed both the AIDS Quilt and the Ashes Action. For this reason, I am framing these AIDS funerals as state funerals. Both funeral performances operate through the metonymic space of the Washington Lawns as the space of the nation, relying upon scale and excess to make a political statement. By bringing AIDS to the vicinity of the White House and the seat of US government, AIDS activists visually interrupted a long silence, placing responsibility and blame squarely on the government’s inaction. This framing was deliberate for both performances, and in fact key to how both performances were conceived and implemented. See Fig 2 and Fig 3

Although the AIDS Quilt and Ashes Action were conceived of by two different organizations and saw themselves as addressing the AIDS crisis from two divergent political positions, they share the tactic of referencing the dramaturgy of state funerals. Each responds to the politics of national mourning, particularly by engaging with a dramaturgy of excess, related to, but significantly distinct from, the dramaturgy of excess of Reagan’s state funeral. Although both AIDS memorial performances occurred before Reagan’s state funeral, they rely upon the some of the same traditions of national mourning that Reagan’s funeral would eventually cite. The excesses are different for each event. Ultimately both memorials use the dramaturgy of excess in an attempt to transform marginalized, queer corpses into lives worthy of national attention and affect.

On October 11, 1987, the NAMES AIDS Quilt was inaugurated in the same spot where presidents past and future had been and would be ritually ushered into power, and where Reagan’s mourners would eventually crowd. 1,920 twenty panels blanketed the Mall that day, stretching towards the White House square by square. Each square, the size of a standard burial plot, had its own unique design, representing a different victim of AIDS as memorialized by those who knew him or her. From 1987 until 1996 the Quilt returned semi-annually to the Mall, growing to a size of 45,000 individual panels, symbolically transforming the Mall into a vast representational cemetery. Though Reagan was in office at the time of this inaugural visit, he did not come to see the memorial.

The combination of scale and location give the Quilt its representational power. As the epigraphs make evident, the Quilt was always intended to perform on a national stage, at a national scale. Started by San Francisco-based gay activist Cleve Jones, the Quilt was inspired by the notes left at a march held in 1985 to commemorate the assassination of Supervisor Harvey Milk. The collage of notes, scribbled on index cards and affixed to the wall, reminded Jones of a quilt, and shortly thereafter he and a

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146 The NAMES AIDS Quilt was displayed on the National Mall in 1987, 1988, 1989, 1992, and 1996. The invocation of a cemetery was deliberate.
147 President Clinton was the first US President to officially visit the Quilt, in 1996, during the Quilt’s final display on the Washington Mall. “Cleve Jones Interview.”
148 The first openly gay city Supervisor, Harvey Milk was assassinated alongside Mayor George Moscone in 1978.
host of volunteers started creating and collecting panels for a national quilt.\textsuperscript{149} Three feet by six feet, each panel stood in for a person who had died as a result of AIDS and could be created by anyone, for anyone.\textsuperscript{150} The leap from index cards measurable in inches to quilt panels measured in feet lent weight to the embodied nature of the deaths. Not just names on a list, each quilt panel took up the amount of space an individual body would be afforded at death. As Marita Sturken points out, many of the AIDS dead were cremated, leaving only ashes behind.\textsuperscript{151} The Quilt re-membered these bodies theatrically by representing the corpses which no longer remained. At the project’s inception, the goal was to bring the Quilt to Washington DC, to be displayed for the American public.\textsuperscript{152} Other displays of the Quilt before its trip to Washington DC in 1987 were fundraisers to make the journey possible, rehearsals before opening night, so to speak. In October 1992, the Quilt traveled to Washington DC. Like the Reagan funeral, the Quilt took over the National Mall; however instead of Americans queuing up to enter into the White House, the lawn itself became the grounds for reckoning with the departed. Its literal blanketing of the space operated in radical ways, mostly by making palpable the immense amount of life lost as a result of the AIDS epidemic. The scale of the Quilt thus demonstrates the importance of a collective of lives rendered “surplus” (through Reagan’s silence as well as an anti-gay rhetoric which understood AIDS as a “natural,” self-inflicted genocide)\textsuperscript{153} and therefore expendable. Through its scale and location, the Quilt theatricalizes this instance of American necropolitics, staged in order to provoke some sort of national response.

Upon its inception, the AIDS Quilt drew national attention as a particularly effective and innovative grass-roots memorial, specifically for its theatricality. In her article in \textit{American Theater}, Elinor Fuchs wrote that the AIDS Quilt was “more theatrical than anything previously imagined in the protocols of mourning.”\textsuperscript{154} In making this assertion, however, Fuchs does not consider the intense theatricality of state funerals, even while the presence of the quilt in DC can’t help but evoke this history. Though both occasions bring vast numbers of Americans winding their way through the Washington Mall, one event, Reagan’s funeral, marks national unity and collected patriotic affect, an homage to the neoliberal accumulation of capital and free market society by shutting these very institutions down as an official “day of mourning” for the death of one very powerful individual. The other, meanwhile, marks the exponential spread of a viral

\textsuperscript{150} Kistenberg, 137
\textsuperscript{151} Sturken, 197
\textsuperscript{152} Julia Bryan-Wilson, lecture “The AIDS Quilt: Craft Remains” lecture delivered at UC Berkeley March 7, 2011.
\textsuperscript{153} Letters to the Editor in newspapers across the country are especially demonstrative of this train of thought in the American imaginary, most of which draw on quotes from politicians and religious leaders. See “AIDS Letter Gets Stamp of Disapproval” Steve Blows, \textit{The Dallas Morning News}, Oct 7, 1992. Pg. A27, for instance.
\textsuperscript{154} As quoted in Kistenberg, 1995. Pg. 152.
epidemic and the thousands of lives claimed as the national response operated either ineffectually or not at all.

In operation, the AIDS Quilt works as a theatrical device to provoke the affect of mourning from witnesses. Solemn volunteers, clad in white, ritualistically unfold each block (a 12 foot by 12 foot collection of eight individual panels). The blocks are folded in a special manner invented by the NAMES project – a lotus fold, based loosely off of military flag folding protocol. As the volunteers unfold the individual blocks, an announcer intones the names of the deceased commemorated by the panels through a loud-speaker, designating individual grief within a collective spectacle of mourning. These gestures of preparing, united action, matching costume, and folding and unfolding cite state and military practices. The spectacle of people dressed alike ritualistically engaged in choreographed movements is legible as serious, solemn, and important. By enlisting its volunteers to wear uniforms, and by reading a seemingly unending list of names as the panels were individually unfolded, the Quilt draws upon funereal tropes to catalyze grief and catharsis, much in the way theatrical tragedy is intended to unify audiences in an emotional trajectory. The AIDS Quilt is often described as highly moving, as those who engage with it are confronted by the dead, many of whom died painful and drawn out deaths in their youth. The dead stretch symbolically as far as the eye can see, in the traditional blocks of a quilt, panel after panel. Viewers must confront not only the messages of grief inscribed by mourners onto individual quilt panels, but they are also faced with the presence of other mourners who have come to the Quilt to grieve. This confrontation with embodied grief can also evoke an affective, or at least empathetic, response.

In order to induce emotion, educate, and serve as a political tool for gaining support and recognition of the silenced disease, the Quilt relies upon national symbols. The American quilt is an icon of domesticity and of family values. Recalling the comforts of home and the safety of familial bonds, the Quilt’s message of death and mourning provides a provocative challenge to normativity. Furthermore, connecting the stories of a disease that caused the further ostracization of those inflicted by it to a familiar and comforting symbol was a large part of what made the Quilt accessible to a broad audience. The AIDS Quilt is lauded as bringing a queer issue to the forefront of American consciousness. The “queering” of traditional symbols and ceremonies is part of what garnered so much praise for the Quilt and an understanding of it as profoundly radical. The practices of Americana folk art and feminized domesticity – long held symbols of “traditional” America – are understood by popular and academic critics alike as being effectively and provocatively queered, sending an overt and theatrical message about the American-ness of the AIDS dead.

The merchandizing and marketing which were necessary to ensuring the Quilt’s continuation was the root of much of the criticism of the Quilt. Like the Reagan funeral, the Quilt necessarily operated through neoliberal strategies of managing and transforming excess, although ambivalently so. Funded completely by private donations and run through volunteer efforts, the AIDS Quilt relied on a number of fundraising strategies in order to ensure its operation. At the height of the Quilt’s expansion, roughly in the early and mid 1990s, panels were often submitted to the Quilt along with donations; the
average donation per panel was approximately $200 until 1996, when retroviral drugs entered the market and changed the face of AIDS, and the Quilt. In addition to these donations, the AIDS Quilt created its own line of merchandise, ranging from coffee table books with detailed images of individual panels, to calendars and Christmas ornaments. The symbolic red ribbon was conceived as part of the efforts to merchandise the Quilt, and has endured as not only a symbol of the fight against AIDS but has also been appropriated as a performative object in other health-related causes, most famously the fight against breast cancer (pink ribbon). Pamphlets advertising the work of the Quilt were also instrumental in accumulating funds and garnering panel submissions. In her forthcoming book Crafting Dissent: Handmade Art and Activism Since 1970, Julia Bryan-Wilson analyses these pamphlets, illustrates that the images presented of people making quilt panels avoids homosexual implications. There are no images on the pamphlets of two men even standing together, even though many of the panels being made are for gay men. This representational gap was purposeful, as the Quilt attempted to reach out to gain the support and sympathy of normative America, feeling that visualizing homosexuality would work against this goal. Homosexuality is oddly present-yet-not-present within the Quilt’s politics, an ambivalence which led activist group ACT-UP to harshly criticize the Quilt as “kitsch,” and overly sentimental.

The Quilt is by and large regarded as a failure or as embarrassing by activists and scholars alike. Either regarded as “selling out” through the merchandising and advertising campaigns, as discussed above, or seen as overly concerned with mourning and healing in a moment when anger and justice were seen as “better” political goals, such as Douglas Crimp discusses in Mourning and Militancy, the emotional catharsis invoked by the AIDS Quilt is viewed as problematic for engendering a process of “moving on.” Many AIDS activists who viewed the quilt, while perhaps originally supportive of the endeavor, came to resent the easy catharsis it induced. ACT-UP Chicago member Carol Hayse described her reaction to the quilt:

I generally remember being a little contemptuous of the Quilt. A little. I also cried at the Quilt. I mean, I was aware that these were people’s lives being represented… But I was a little contemptuous of the Quilt, ‘cause in some ways, it seemed to divert energy from anger. It seemed to say ‘mourning is the valid response,’ and not to say the other thing that needs to be said with that:…. ‘turn your mourning into anger.’ … And so it seemed a bit reformist and diverting of energy to a lot of us.

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155 Julia Bryan-Wilson lecture.
Like the excesses of Reagan’s funeral, perhaps there’s something conservative about the excess presented by the AIDS Quilt. This memorial went from staging an intervention on the lawns of the Mall to being invited to do so, and thus becoming co-opted by the government structures which refused the AIDS funding in the first place. While the diminishing of the Quilt’s impact over time does not take away from its original power, it does suggest that the what constitutes queerness at one historical juncture cannot be counted on as continuing to signify queerness in another historical moment. Indeed, this type of gay participation in civil life has been deemed by part of a homonationalist project by queer theorists.\footnote{Though Jasbir Puar, the originator of this term, does not explicitly connect it to the AIDS Quilt, the leap is easily made, and has been done by Bryan-Wilson among others.}

However, thinking about the Quilt within this binary framework of success versus failure does not do justice to the nuanced ways the Quilt affected those who interacted with it. In her analysis of the Quilt, Bryan-Wilson argues that most assessments do not spend time looking at the individual panels and blocks themselves, and that the power of the project lies in the textuality and medium of the project itself. For instance, a closer look at the Quilt reveals that at least five panels contain human remains (ashes) as part of the design, generally sewn into little pockets onto a panel.\footnote{Julia Bryan-Wilson, lecture.} Additionally, individual panels illustrate that makers of the Quilt panels themselves were hugely ambivalent. A member of ACT-UP created a memorial panel despite his anti-Quilt stance, an ambivalence that is reflected in the panel’s message: “Terry Sutton hated this Quilt and so do we!” \footnote{Both the 1992 Ashes Action and the 1996 Ashes Action coincided with the display of the AIDS Quilt in those years.} Fig 4

Despite this ambivalence towards the political and cultural work of the NAMES Quilt, however, ACT-UP’s own funeral protest, the Ashes Action, was staged during a display of the Quilt.\footnote{Marita Sturken, 1997. Pg. 162.} Furthermore, it is characterized as being in conversation with the Quilt by activists who participated in one or both events, as I will discuss shortly. The tension between these two practices, and the ways that they both utilized theatricality in order to evoke emotion places them in dialogue with the state funeral of Reagan and the queer politics of managing excess.

Indeed, the dance of mourning and rage fueled much of the famous theatrical activities of ACT-UP. ACT-UP (AIDS Coalition to Unleash Power) first formed in March of 1987 in Manhattan. The radical group is known for its use of overtly theatrical tactics to draw attention to its demands, generally aimed at the government and large corporations whose actions either impede AIDS funding, research, and resources or discriminate against people with AIDS. With many of ACT-UP’s members coming from public relations, advertising, and theatrical backgrounds, many of their protests capitalize on this skill set, leading ACT UP to be characterized by its ability to convert “sophisticated cultural analysis into public spectacle.”\footnote{Marita Sturken, 1997. Pg. 162.} In what dance scholar David
Gere labels as the “most dramatic cases” of ACT UP protest, the remains of the AIDS dead were brought to the White House itself. Though Reagan had recently stepped down from office, the ashes action came about in direct response to the silences and inaction of Reagan’s administration, seen as continuing its reign through the presidency of George H. W. Bush, especially given that Bush had served as Vice President under Reagan.

Drawing upon the wishes of the dying, as well as the numerous protests held by ACT UP which utilized fake blood and bodies, the idea for Ashes Action was born. Fig 5 is ACT UP’s flier used to advertise their protest. While political funerals had been held all over the country for AIDS victims, in which mourners took the caskets of the deceased into the streets as a campaign to both draw attention to what was happening as well as to advocate and agitate for change, none had explicitly occurred at the home of the President. The flier illustrates the State through the image of the White House, while words take the place of cremains in an urn, overlaying the Washington visual. By highlighting the presence of “actual” ashes, ACT-UP shifts from an entirely theatrical action to a performative one. This shift hinges on the invocation and presence of the “real” in order to render the threat of bringing the dead to the President’s doorstep felicitous. As previous protests staged dying in a solely theatrical manner, through the presence of fake blood and inert but ultimately live bodies, Ashes Action marks a shift away from the type of theatricality present in both their earlier protests as well as in the AIDS Quilt. While the Ashes Action does rely on the theatrical by engaging in a symbolic act, it largely distances itself from the aesthetics and implications of earlier actions, opting instead for a stripped-down and angry affect. The theatricality is present through gesture, setting, and the immediate and visceral meaning of real human remains. The meeting of the theatrical and the performative in this protest, and the intensity of investment in remains and funeral ceremonies, gives this action its power.

During the 1992 display of the AIDS Quilt on the National Mall, Avram Finklestein describes his participation in ACT-UP’s Ashes Action as follows:

One by one, we called out the names of the dead: without a podium, a loud-speaker or celebrity spokespeople. The procession was the Quilt come to life – walking, shouting and storming the White House…. The ash bearers charged the gate, surrounded by crews [of activists] with linked arms. A gust of ashes blew through the fence and the urns were hurled…. We chanted and cheered and our dead floated over the immaculate green sod…. [After the action] I walked back to the Quilt

166 Gere writes explicitly about Jon Greenberg’s political funeral, held in New York City. This funeral and Tim Bailey’s political funeral is documented in ACT TV: Tim Bailey and John Greenberg Funeral Public access series directed by James Wentzy, Produced by DIVA TV (Damned Interfering Video Activist Television), ACT UP, New York, 1993.
hoping to see [his deceased lover] Don’s panel before the rains came…. I wanted to snatch it up and heave it over the fence, where it really belonged. 167

Finklestein’s description of the Ashes Action highlights the ambivalence of his relationship with the Quilt. By drawing attention to the lack of “podium, a loud-speaker, or celebrity spokesperson,” he is naming specific aspects of the AIDS Quilt about which members of ACT-UP were critical. This event is stripped down, without the intervention of technology, but simply the presence of bodies, dead and live. Yet, the ambivalence of Finklestein’s relationship to the Quilt is manifest in two ways. First, he calls the Ashes Action “the Quilt come to life.” By doing so, he implicitly gives the Quilt prominence as a reference point, even while indicating that the Quilt needs animating. The Quilt must also, eventually, be folded and put away, where as the ashes of Ashes Action will remain forever as a part of the Washington Lawns. Secondly, he draws attention to the fact that his deceased lover has a panel in the Quilt. Whether or not Finklestein himself crafted the panel, or whether he is aware of its presence even though it was made by someone else, he narrates a connection to the Quilt, an unavoidable relationality within these two state AIDS funerals. Lastly, even though the Quilt is often criticized by activists because of the sense of catharsis it provides, Finklestein demonstrates that there was a sort of release achieved with the Ashes Action; yet there is still the unfulfilled longing to throw the quilt panel over the fences and onto the White House lawn as well. This desire underscores the tension between these two modes of mourning and protest.

Enraged, mournful, and militant activists brought the cremains of loved ones to scatter on the White House lawn in “an act of grief, and rage, and love.” 168 They began their march from the Capitol, and marked a path across the Mall where the AIDS Quilt was being displayed. Though the action began with just eleven mourners, the crowd swelled to 8,000 people.169 At the White House lawn, the mourners were met by full police force, on horseback and in riot gear. Thanks to the amount of bodily mass, the mourners were successful in being able to scatter the ashes, but under conditions of extreme duress. In 1996, during the final display of the AIDS Quilt, ACT-UP restaged this “Ashes Action,” spreading the cremains of AIDS dead, in order to draw attention to the Clinton administration’s handling of AIDS policy, which was felt to be too timid an approach.170

Ashes Action shares elements in common with the state funeral of Reagan – not just the historically resonant location and the masses gathered there, but also the act of policing. While during the Reagan funeral, the role of policing was to funnel national affect, the goal of policing at the Ashes Action was to prevent action altogether. These

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167 Avram Finklestein as quoted by Deborah Gould, 2009.
168 The Ashes Action was repeated again in 1996.
queer alliances bring new resonances to Reagan’s 2004 funeral. The role of policing and the invocation of militaristic measures dramatically recall both state funeral practice as well as queer theorizing about AIDS activism. Donald Crimp’s well-known theorization of ACT-UP poignantly draws upon the combination of mourning with militarism that was most successful in both delivering political results as well as creating activism which also served to respond to grief, attempting to channel the range of emotions from rage to melancholia into political activism.\textsuperscript{171} Like the Reagan funeral, large amounts of police officers were at hand, and the presence of authority in both cases signifies an effort to control and contain unpredictable emotion and action.\textsuperscript{172} However the type of policing which occurred at the Ashes Action was intended to stymie the event rather than to ensure its smooth execution. The goal of the Reagan funeral was national catharsis; while the Ashes Action provided a sense of catharsis for the individual mourners and those who joined them on the Washington Lawn. However, this second catharsis met resistance.

It’s easy, at first glance, to understand the Ashes Action as a queer funeral: the funeral was not official, officiated, or sanctioned; the deceased were queer, both in terms of their sexuality and their position as removed from the realm of the normative for their sexuality and for their health; it was conducted by a radical queer political group. However, the Ashes Action stands in stark contrast to the Reagan funeral in terms of its aesthetic and dramaturgy. Rather than a lavish event of far global reach and pomp, the Ashes action reads as simple, stark, and militant. The “excessive” nature of the Ashes Action does not exist in resources expended, like the Reagan funeral, or even in the number of dead invoked, as in the AIDS Quilt. There’s nothing remotely kitsch-y or camp-y about this action, even while other ACT-UP actions may have read as such at times. The overt symbolism present is a symbol of audacity and outrage: placing an “ordinary” (at best – queer/abject/ostracized may be a better descriptor) person in the context of a hallowed ground for American heroes. This excess is in direct relation to the position of queers as excessive – falling outside, beyond, and in excess of normative, sanctioned bounds. Furthermore, the excess of the Ashes Action lies in the sheer weight of the use of real remains. Before the Ashes Action, ACT-UP’s dramatic protests largely relied on symbolic or metaphorical corpses, much like the AIDS Quilt. For instance, in their Die-In protests, ACT UP members utilized their own bodies to signify the bodies of the dead. By literally placing the remains of the dead in national space in Ashes Action, ACT UP crosses the line from theatrical to actual. While Ashes Action is a theatrical and

\textsuperscript{171} As Crimp discusses, this particular affect could not be maintained, and political burnout often plagued chapters of ACT UP. Douglas Crimp, 2002.

\textsuperscript{172} A quote from an MSNBC article best exemplifies this point: “The only real purpose of that sort of etiquette and protocol is to make the most people comfortable,” said William Seale, a White House historian and author. “It’s a trying time, a difficult time. You have to take care of the crowds, the emotions.” “State Funerals Bound by Rules, History, Judgment: Reagan’s service to be at National Cathedral on Friday” (Associated Press, 6/8/2004) http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/5151474/ns/us_news-the_legacy_of_ronald_reagan/
performativ funeral, it also is an actual funeral, in that the remains of the dead are ritually and ceremonially laid to rest.

The queer militant march across the Mall for the Ashes Action, does not necessarily try to re-script the paradigm that places men of power (Reagan and other past presidents) in the position of the ultimate American, but instead demands that the ghostly queer bodies of AIDS dead be reckoned with in the face of overwhelming silence from the government. Attending Reagan’s funeral (even as a voyeur-type spectator) is considered patriotic, where as participating the Ashes Action is a criminal action, as evidenced by police activity attempting to halt the activities of mourners.

Part of why ACT-UP and the AIDS Quilt are so effective is because of their reinsertion of theatricality in order to demonstrate the necropolitical elements of the AIDS crisis. In *Precarious Life*, Judith Butler elaborates on the relationship between the psychological and the social, through which she calls out queer subjects as having “ungrievable life,” characterized by a lack of public grievability. Throughout *Precarious Life*, Butler argues that grieving is not the privatized emotional experience, but rather it “furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order.” This political community is simultaneously a national one, particularly in the case of state funerals.

**Conclusion: Economies of Mourning and Necropolitical Networks**

Juxtaposing Regan’s funeral, the NAMES AIDS Quilt, and ACT UP’s Ashes Action demonstrate a number of queer hauntings that emerge between these sites. Each event is part of an ethos of national mourning. I label nationalism and nationalist endeavors as norm producing projects that rely on structures widely understood as contrary to the normative. Linked by the dramaturgy of state funerals, particularly the staging of excess, these three events culminate in a picture of the stakes of national mourning.

History and memory are written and rewritten through a carefully scripted national drama which narrates national values and norms, as well as patriotic unity/American pride. While this is true for state funerals writ large, it’s especially important in considering these three funerals. Of Reagan’s funeral, civilian Steve Ross is reported to have described his experience as follows:

‘It was a little piece of history unfolding,’ says Steve Ross, in town from Los Angeles on business, smoking a cigar as he sits against a tree. He's a lifelong Democrat and blames Reagan's policies for making life more difficult for his mentally ill sister. None of that matters to him at this moment. ‘In a very fundamental way, I just feel very, very proud to be an American.’

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174 Butler, 2003, Pg 22.
175 “A Final Journey Through Washington” *The Washington Post*, Thursday June 10, 2004. Susan Kinzie wrote the section from which I quote; there were multiple contributors.
Mourners who participated in the Reagan funeral, either through attending one of many funeral events or witnessing them live via televised broadcast, express a feeling of being part of something larger than themselves, becoming part of a national story. They illustrate that Reagan’s funeral was incredibly effective in accomplishing these goals, and that the precise and tightly controlled symbolic and ritual actions performatively conjure and create American identity and national unity vis-à-vis the body of its leader, in life but especially in death. Thus a democrat who largely disapproved of Reagan in life finds the ceremonies that honor the ex-president a moving affirmation of his own patriotism and national belonging. The transformation of Reagan the man into an historic American icon/hero is completed through the management of his death: by recycling tropes from his life as US President, and utilizing national symbols and rituals. The employment of theatricality in the multi-day funeral, and the channeling of excess (of emotion, resources, and scale) into producing national value and monetary value promote the economic and national systems he both represented and inaugurated: neo-liberalism. As described earlier, the AIDS Quilt had a similar effect, drawing in even folks like Avram Finklestein, who described himself has frustrated with the Quilt’s politics. Finally, the sheer increase in the number of participants the Ashes Action drew in during the march across the Mall to the White House lawn demonstrates a similar phenomenon at play: the magnetic impact of ceremonies of mourning.

Economies of mourning link all three funeral events. When Reagan died, a national day of mourning was declared by Washington, which shut down both government operations (with the exception of the funeral, of course) and Wall Street. Millions of dollars were spent in order to carry out the precise and lavish ceremonies of mourning, which stretched over several days. Yet this pageantry was considered appropriate, and indeed aided the continued accumulation of capitol. Even those who had opposed Reagan and his policies found themselves commemorating the day, simply by having the day off of work, which encouraged consumer activities, such as going to the local bar for a tribute to the passing of the 80s. The activism of the AIDS Quilt and the Ashes Action both, in their separate ways, also attempted to halt the normal activities of the nation. ACT UP in particular protested the complete lack of attention paid, the way people acted as if nothing had changed when their lives, and the lives of their loved ones, had been changed so fully and drastically. Even though the bodies of the dead were symbolically thrown into the cogs of national production, the wheels kept turning, maintained by official government forces, working against the militant grieving of ACT UP. What are the implications of an economics of mourning which consumes the dead in order to maintain national norms?

The economics of neo-liberalism follow a classical liberal economic philosophy, ultimately supporting a market-driven approach to economic and social policy. Cultural theorists, such as Aiwa Ong, have utilized the term to understand the relationship between economic systems and the cultural world. Thus neo-liberalism stands in for a

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rhetorical and ideological shift to emphasizing individuality, markets, efficiency, and consumer choice. Ultimately, these economic strategies lead to transitioning meanings of the human, of autonomy, individuality, and citizenship. For David Harvey, neoliberalism and neo-conservativism mark a new imperialist logic which explains the nature of our contemporary conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.\footnote{David Harvey, \textit{The New Imperialism}. (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).} As mentioned earlier, queer theorist Roderick Ferguson reads the shifting meaning of queer against neoliberal logics in order to understand queer as that which is excessive to but also central to the perpetuation of free-market capitalism (at the heart of neoliberalism). The relationship of the excess to the system which creates and demarcates that excess provides the crux of my argument about queerness and state funerals. If the position of excess, and the quality of being excessive is a queer one (and these two are both simultaneous and independent, against and for the system), what do we make of the ways that excesses are created and folded into neoliberal and neo-imperial systems? A queer reading of Reagan’s funeral goes beyond the framework of the homonormative and the “truly” queer to put pressure on how excesses are created and normalized, to what means excesses are put, and which excesses resist (whether consciously or not) reincorporation.

The transformation of excess (spectacle, emotion, and sheer number of people/mourners) is a strategy that is poignantly aligned with neo-liberalism as rendering surplus into commodity, something of value. Excess is often aligned with queer and marginal aesthetics and positionalities. Contemporary queer politics often work towards shifting LGBT from an excessive, “queer” position to an integrated and productive position.\footnote{Of course these are the terms around which radical queer politics firmly diverge from “homonormative” ones.} It is at this juncture where the juxtaposition between state funerals and AIDS funerals, and the ways they align, becomes potentially instructive as queer politics and state politics continue to evolve in relationship to one another. Theatricality and excess as dramaturgy and aesthetic contain the possibility to both expose and hide necropolitical networks. Nowhere is this more evident than in state funeral practices. Claims to state-ness as well as to mournability can be dramatized to either draw attention to uneven experiences of power, or to affirm and perpetuate inequality. Most common, however, is a contingent, ambivalent relationship. Just as the NAMES AIDS Quilt and ACT UP’s Ashes Action drew upon and queered state funeral practice, so can the state draw upon and utilize queer modalities. Closely related to state funerals, military funerals, the subject of the next chapter, illustrate this very tension.
Chapter Three
(Hyper/In)Visibility and the Military Corps(e)

“I have to be honest,” [Jo Burns, mother of the deceased Marine Lance Corporal Kyle Burns] said later. “I didn’t believe all that brotherhood bull-----. I thought it was just a bunch of little boys saying things that boys say.

“I never believed it until after he died.”

The rhythm of a military funeral is a slow and steady march; silent and stoic military personnel return the body of a comrade to its final resting spot beneath a mute gravestone. Rituals punctuate the ebb and flow of mourning; men in uniform meticulously fold the American flag into a bulging triangular package and solemnly speak the words of an official script as they turn this artifact over to the next of kin. A bugler sounds the haunting notes of taps, cloaking the ceremony in military time, signaling the last “day’s end” for the fallen soldier.

In the summer of 2005, this precise rhythm and ceremonial landscape was pierced by hate speech, in the form of shouted slogans, profaned national military anthems, and blazing neon signs which proclaimed “God hates dead soldiers,” and “Thank God for IEDs.”

The Westboro Baptist Church, already infamous for its inflammatory protests during the funeral of Matthew Shepard, set the media ablaze with its protests at military funerals of fallen soldiers. An interview in the St. Louis Post-Dispatch reported, “[Reverend Fred] Phelps protests homosexuality by proclaiming the death of soldiers as holy retribution against ‘a fag army – don’t ask, don’t tell – for a fag-loving agenda of a

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180 Jim Sheeler, “Final Salute” (Rocky Mountain News, November 9, 2005), 10S.
181 Due to a diminishing number of military buglers, taps may be “performed” by a recording played at a funeral. Office of the Secretary of Defense, “What is Military Funeral Honors?” Military Funeral Honors FAQ, http://www.militaryfuneralhonors.osd.mil/faqpage.html
182 IED stands for Improvised Explosive Devise, another name for a roadside bomb. These types of explosive devises are most commonly used in guerilla warfare, and have been used prominently in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. An estimated 60% of American casualties in Iraq and 50% of American casualties in Afghanistan are the result of IEDs. Clay Wilson, “Improvised Explosive Devises (IEDs) in Iraq and Afghanistan: Effects and Countermeasures” August 30, 2007 http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/weapns/RS22330.pdf
183 Matthew Shepard, a gay college student at the University of Wyoming in Laramie, died on October 12, 1998, the victim of a brutal, homophobic hate crime. His death inspired nationwide memorials and vigils, and was covered extensively by media worldwide. Shepard’s funeral was attended by hundreds of mourners and reporters from across the country. The events surrounding his death have also been memorialized theatrically through Moisés Kaufman, The Laramie Project, (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 2001) and Moisés Kaufman, The Laramie Project, DVD, Dir. Moisés Kaufman (New York, NY: HBO, 2001). Shepard has quickly become a rallying point for LGBT activists working to fight homophobia and hate crimes nationally.
fag-loving nation.” Thought one might expect military funeral protests during a highly controversial and unpopular war, the focus of the Westboro Baptist Church was not on national policy or human rights. Instead they violently exposed the homosexual implications of the highly homosocial institution of the US military. In doing so, they seemingly re-scripted the drama of military funerals, casting soldiers as gay lovers, the nation as the land of the queer and home of the depraved.

A grassroots counter-protest movement emerged as a responsive foil to the anxieties provoked by Westboro Baptist Church’s hostile takeover of military funerals. Mobilized in November of 2005, the Patriot Guard Riders unofficially reestablished the national pageantry of military might. Comprised mostly, but not solely, of veterans, the Patriot Guard Riders formed an “honor guard,” blocking out the “uninvited guests” through a wall of motorcycles, leather, and American flags. Riffing off of the historical figure of the vigilante patriot, they ride to military funerals in a blaze of revved engines and national banners and restore the sacred nature of the military as both honorable and undeniably, excessively, masculine. This portrayal of military and national honor transforms the Westboro Baptist Church Protest into a distasteful spectacle of free speech gone wrong, promoting the Judeo-Christian ideal of “turning the other cheek” as a masculine, manly, patriotic pursuit ostensibly protecting the nation and the individual (heterosexual) family unit.

Indeed, it is the heterosexual family unit at the center of this military funeral pageantry which provides the Patriot Guard Riders justification for such an elaborate show of national manhood, brotherhood, and machismo. While the membership of the Westboro Baptist Church is comprised almost entirely of the progeny of leader Fred Phelps’s, in a hyperbolic celebration of its own excessively heteronormative values, the kinship structures of the military provide an altogether more complicated paradigm. While the members of the military care for their own through military kinship structures, the performative pageantry of the military funeral ceremony constructs the next of kin as the proper mourners, overshadowing these homosocial bonds. A visual paradigm is created through the privileging of the biological bonds of parenthood and the legal ties of heterosexual marriage within military funeral protocol. Although the members of the military are hyper-present in their uniformed attendance as they conduct the labors of death care and military funeral honors, the scope and depth of these bonds as kinship bonds is simultaneously rendered invisible by the privileging of the next of kin.

Members of the military as mourners are (hyper/in)visible – simultaneously visible and invisible. Seen but unseen, the care of men by men in a homosocial family structure is what the Westboro Baptist Church violently forces into visibility, and what the Patriot

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184 Adam Jadhav, “Anti-gay protesters target small-town soldier’s funeral” (St. Louis Post-Dispatch, December 9, 2005).

Guard Riders, through their networks of grassroots performances, propel back into (hyper/in)visibility, even as they themselves are enacting the homosocial care network. Though it seems as though the Patriot Guard Riders are indeed successful in reestablishing this precarious (hyper/in)visible balance, the ghostly specter of homosexuality stubbornly lingers in what Avery Gordon describes as haunting: “the paradox of tracking through time and all those forces that which makes its mark by being there and not there at the same time.”

In response to the new presence of the Patriot Guard Riders, the Westboro Baptist Church added a new sign to their repertoire: “Biker Chicks,” complete with a stick figure rendering of anal intercourse between men. In doing so, they continue to evoke the homosocial undertones of the military by identifying it in the performance of the Patriot Guard Riders. The Westboro Baptist Church points to the “Pride Parade” undertone identifiable in the visual image of a large group of men in leather on motorcycles. The Patriot Guard Riders ignore this provocation, continuing to perform homosocial military might as their national membership of swelled exponentially, climbing to over 180,000 members by the end of 2008.

I begin with these two hyperbolic performances of national masculinity because these exchanges and the ripple effects they have pose a number of pressing questions about the relationship between queerness and war. What is at stake in military funerals, especially the performance of kinship they present? The US military can be understood as enacting queer kinship in (hyper/in)visibility. The military’s own queer structures simultaneously uphold and threaten the “‘war without end’ that has come to stand in for ‘peace’” in our current war on terror. There is a national dedication to queer memory keeping in the military funeral and its reliance on the care-labor/love of soldiers for one another which simultaneously mask its own legibility as such. These considerations take on further urgency with the Obama administration’s repeal of Don’t Ask Don’t Tell, as well as the continued escalation of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

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187 Patriot Guard Riders, Homepage, [www.patriotguard.org](http://www.patriotguard.org)
188 This protest/counter-protest exchange has rippled through our cultural landscape. New legislation has been passed regarding funeral protests, with 41 states ratifying new laws. In the fall of 2010, the Supreme Court heard the case Snyder v Phelps, No. 09-751 in which Snyder attempted the curb the activities of the Westboro Baptist Church on the grounds of inflicting emotional distress. However, Phelps won the case on the basis of free speech. Additionally, the mission and function of the Patriot Guard Riders has undergone a transformation in which they serve as professional mourners. They have gained a place in military culture at large, with overseas bases flying the Patriot Guard Rider flag. On a more meta-level, all of these things reflect on the current debates around Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell. For more information about the explosion of legislation surrounding these issues see First Amendment Center, David L. Hudson, Jr., “Funeral Protests Overview” [http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/assembly/topic.aspx?topic=funeral_protests](http://www.firstamendmentcenter.org/assembly/topic.aspx?topic=funeral_protests)
190 The road to repealing “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” has been a long and winding one. At the time of the writing of this article, California Federal Judge Virginia Phillips ordered an injunction against “Don’t Ask,
Military funerals engage same-sex and opposite-sex kinship relations. I designate the same-sex intimacy detailed through ritual and affect as queer, not only for its reliance on same-sex engagement but also for its articulation of an non-hetero-reproductive futurity that lives beyond the biological families of the fallen Marines, practiced by the Marines who survive them. I realize that describing the US military as queer is a provocative move. In applying queer theory and analysis, I am not making claims that any of the individuals discussed, or the institution of the US military, are gay. Rather, I utilize queer to mark a point of tension to normativity, especially but not exclusively heteronormativity. I don’t foreclose the possibility of sexuality entering the picture, but I don’t take it as a necessary component or starting point for engaging in queer analysis. I take queer beyond its location as inherent in certain non-normative bodies and consider instead queer as an act of provocation, of challenging the naturalness of established categories, sexual and otherwise. Yet in doing so, I illustrate the entangled nature of national, anti-queer projects with queer lives, aesthetics, and politics. The two are deeply, intricately wound, particularly by patriarchy in the name of the nation state. In discerning the queerness in military funerals, I tease out the tension between biopolitics and necropolitics at work, and suggest, as Jasbir Puar does in her book *Terrorist Assemblages*, that there are queer elements at play in these two methods of centralizing power and regulating which lives are considered meaningful and valuable.

Although there are a number of popular representations of military funerals which could serve as appropriate examples of this (hyper/in)visible interplay of queer military kinship, I focus on two pieces of investigative journalism, both by Pulitzer Prize winners Jim Sheeler (writer) and Todd Heisler (photographer). Published originally by the *Rocky Mountain News* on Veteran’s Day 2005, the article “Final Salute” showed the journey of Marines engaged in the duty of performing military funerals and serving as Casualty Assistance Officers – working with the next of kin of fallen soldiers from the moment of informing family members of the death until the interment. By publishing this story and accompanying photographs in the midst of Bush’s imposed Dover Ban, which forbade the showing of images of the caskets of American casualties, Sheeler and Heisler provided Americans with stories and images to fill the lacunae the Bush administration mandated. While this publication was neither sponsored nor commissioned by the United States government, its representations and national reception augment the effects of military funerals. This work was continued with Sheeler’s subsequent publication of an expanded version of his article into a full-length book, also called *Final Salute*. The volume featured Heisler’s dramatic photography. For these reasons, *Final Salute* is a

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192 I use biopolitics and necropolitics as defined by Foucault and Mbembe, respectively.

fitting case study to illustrate the complex queer kinship so richly present and military funerals and this queer kinship’s (hyper/in)visible status at these ceremonies. Highlighting this queer kinship is valuable for three interlocking reasons: First, understanding the ways that its (hyper/in)visible operation is crucial for the perpetuation of the contemporary war machine; second, following Jasbir Puar’s proposal that we understand the ways that queer formations are a part of militarization and the "normative" project of US war making; third, merging both to reveal the condition of national normativity in the figure of the American hero as a primary cog in the maintenance of US military operations. Certain lives come to represent the values and aims of the state specifically through their deaths. I begin with the history of military funerals, turn to official military funeral protocol, and then analyze images and stories from Sheeler and Heisler’s article. Lastly, I return to the contentious site of the Westboro Baptist Church’s military funeral protests and the Patriot Guard Rider’s counter protests to frame my analyses within a larger debate as well as to suggest that the ramifications of queer military kinship extend beyond our contemporary moment and our current military engagements in Iraq and Afghanistan.

**Historicizing Military Funeral Practice**

“Give me liberty or give me death,” Patrick Henry famously orated to an enthusiastic crowd of discontented colonists in 1775. The voices of Henry’s Revolutionary era compatriots echo his sentiments, providing both the Revolutionary War and the fledgling nation with a cornucopia of similar phrases, all of which articulated the founding of the United States in terms of death and sacrifice: “Live free or die,” “I only regret that I have but one life to lose for my country,” “The tree of liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants.” These aphorisms weave together the notion that the most noble thing one can do for one’s country is to sacrifice one’s life for the cause of promoting justice and freedom – the inalienable human rights laid out in the US Constitution. Under this banner, war has played a crucial role in the evolution of the United States of America, and has shaped not only literal borders, but also the nation’s vision of itself.

Funerals and memorials are a fundamental part of the activities of war and are among the many sites where national imaginary and ideology are created and cemented. The history of American military funerals is as long as the history of the United States itself. As colonial soldiers perished on the battlefields of the American Revolution, their fellow soldiers were responsible for managing the corpses that littered the fields of war. Since many of the Founding Fathers were also military leaders, most famously first

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195 According to the New Hampshire Almanac found on the official state website, “Live Free or Die” was first expressed on July 31, 1809 by distinguished Revolutionary War hero General John Stark. This phrase became the New Hampshire state motto in 1945.
196 These words were spoken by Nathan Hale on September 22, 1776 before he was executed by hanging by the British.
197 Thomas Jefferson, 1787.
president George Washington, it is certain that many of the men who drafted the Constitution also participated in the earliest American military funerals. The development of the U.S. military funeral, while relying upon traditions from antiquity (ancient Greece, as well as British rites), has been concurrent with the creation of a national identity. The military funeral too has evolved, not only materially, with the advancement of technologies for forensic identification and transportation, but also as a political mechanism for creating and disseminating a vision of the nature and meaning of war, patriotism, sacrifice, citizenship, and freedom.

The handling of soldiers killed in combat has changed significantly from Revolutionary War practices into the customs and codes that are recognizable today. Previous to and throughout the Civil War, individual combat units were responsible for and forced to deal with their dead in the aftermath of battles. Fallen soldiers were frequently buried in hastily prepared makeshift military cemeteries on the site of the battlefield itself, most often by their enemies. Few technologies existed for identifying remains beyond an individual soldier’s own pre-emptive efforts. In the event that a soldier was properly identified, which was only true for 58% soldiers who fought in the Civil War, markers were hastily erected, generally from wood, which stood little chance against the elements.

The wars at the end of the nineteenth century, the Civil War and the Spanish-American War, mark the genesis of a great number of technologies and practices that changed forever the handling of fallen soldiers. Embalming, first practiced in 1861, for the first time allowed the possibility of returning the remains of the dead killed far from home back to their homes for burial. Both the technology of embalming as well as the transportation required to return bodies home made this a very costly endeavor and was practiced rarely, and only then by the very wealthy. At the end of the Civil War, the American public began to express wide-spread concern about the vast number of missing soldiers and unregistered graves.

During the Spanish-American War of 1898, President William McKinley deployed the first Quartermaster Burial Corps, the earliest American military unit entirely devoted to attending to the dead. Though the Quartermasters have existed since the American Revolution, their responsibilities were primarily administrative, coordinating supplies and transportation for the troops, and attending to the logistics of mobilizing and caring for an army. It was only at this moment that the care for the dead became part of their official duties. This move, argues military historian Bradley Lynn Coleman, “transform[ed] a private movement into official U.S. policy.”

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198 Alexander Hamilton and John Hancock both fought in the Continental Army against the British. Of course, the position of president is also a military one – commander-in-chief of the United States military.
201 Coleman, 2008.
202 Coleman, Pg. 184
This movement was further solidified during World War I with the establishment of the Graves Registration Service in November of 1917. The Graves Registration Service was the predecessor of the American Graves Registration Service, or AGRS, which was reinstated for World War II. Arriving on the battlefield after the fighting had ceased, this group recovered the remains and arranged their burial, whether in a temporary military cemetery on or near the battlefield or something more permanent. Amongst American citizens, a debate raged as to where the dead should be interred, abroad where they had fought or at home in their family (or military) plots. The question of what to do with the dead caused much controversy, with people falling on either side of the for-or-against repatriation question. Ultimately, individual families were allowed to decide where their kin were interred.

It wasn’t until the Korean War, however, that a proper system for identifying and repatriating the dead came into place. Under the AGRS, Brigadier General Kestler Hasting proposed the creation of an identification laboratory that could use scientific and anthropological methods to quickly identify the dead and allow for rapid repatriation of American remains. The majority of soldiers’ remains since this time have been identified though forensic analysis.

For the first time, the war dead could be returned to the United States even in the midst of active combat. This kind of rapid return, it was argued, would provide comfort to families who had sacrificed their sons, brothers, and husbands. The AGRS could return remains within a month of a soldier’s death. This move, though originally rejected, was inspired by and accepted upon the realization that a total victory was not possible in Korea. Since there could be no great triumphal return, after which all of the bodies could be returned home, bringing them home individually and rapidly was thought to better honor the sacrifice of the soldiers. Perhaps this helps explain why “Americans… attached great importance to retrieving the bodies of fallen comrades, and often went to extraordinary lengths to recover and evacuate remains,” a precedent set during the Korean War that continues to hold true.

With the Vietnam War, however, the policy of rapidly returning bodies home turned into a Pandora’s Box for the US government as protesters were able to literally see the numbers of fallen soldiers pouring back into the country from the war front. As G. Kurt Piehler argues in Remembering War the American Way, the repatriation of the war dead “reflected the ambivalence of the U.S. government and of the American public toward the conflict,” an ambivalence augmented by the work of photojournalists and televisual war coverage, bringing “the brutality of war into the comfort of the living room” (McLuhan). With advances in technology, both in forensic sciences speeding up identification, mortuary services improving embalming techniques, and transportation becoming faster and more reliable, the amount of time between a soldier’s death and the

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203 Official military cemeteries were also an invention of the Civil War, when both Gettysburg and Arlington were founded as sites for the burial of Union soldiers. Now there are 128 national cemeteries throughout the United States (and Puerto Rico).

204 Coleman, Pg. 188.

notification of the family, as well as the arrival of their body back in their hometown has significantly decreased. Families now can generally expect to receive the remains of their loved ones within four days of notification. Though these technologies were developed with the aim of comforting the families of the dead, in fact increasing expectations of rapidity of information and services has lead to anxiety from families when the process is delayed.

It was in the middle of the Vietnam War that the families began to be informed of casualties in person. Casualty assistance officers, in teams of two or more, drastically altered the precedent by knocking on the doors of the next of kin and officially informing them of their loss in person. Formerly, families were delivered this news via sympathy letters from commanding officers or notification telegrams. Such a shift was intended to demonstrate to the American people that the military and the government honored and respected the sacrifice of its soldiers and that the sacrifice was meaningful. Today, the notification is an official military mission, and casualty assistance officers are given scripts and protocol. These officers are then assigned to work with the families they have notified through the burial processes. Though the soldiers who handle dead bodies at the battle site are part of the Quartermasters, casualty assistance officers generally come from the corps of the division to which the deceased soldier belonged.

The Vietnam can thus be characterized not only by the increased visibility of the theater of war for the American public, but also an increasing immediacy of the losses of war, with the families of fallen soldiers benefiting from the technologies which allowed them to learn rapidly of casualties. These factors were important elements which brought about the rise of anti-war protests and disillusionment about the war. For this reason, the relationship between the American public and American war dead is taken very seriously by the Department of Defense. In the wake of 9/11 and the advent of the War on Terror, the question of whether or not to provide the American public with visual representation of the war dead has been, and continues to be, a highly contentious issue. This is in no small part due to the Dover Ban, which prohibits the presence of cameras and news media at Dover Air Force Base, where the largest US military mortuary facilities are located. Nearly all bodies returned to the United States pass through this mortuary for identification purposes. The bodies are then transported to the soldier’s

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206 Sheeler, 39.
207 A note about terminology: by “War on Terror,” I am referring to the military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan which began in 2003. The term “War on Terror” was coined by the Bush administration shortly after September 11, 2001 (although variations of the term have been used by previous administrations about different situations) and given its widespread usage to refer to a number of distinct yet related military operations at a number of distinct theaters of war, I will use it in this manner throughout this chapter. Interestingly, the Obama administration prefers to refer to these same war activities as “Overseas Contingency Operation.” See “‘Global War on Terror’ is Given New Name,” Scott Wilson and Al Kamen, (Washington Post, March 25, 2009).
208 Cameras and news media are also prohibited at Ramstein Airforce Base in Germany, which also contains mortuary facilities. Additionally, Ramstein is sometimes used as a stopping point in the transfer of bodies from Iraq to the United States. See Gan, “The Dover Ban.”
hometown or the national cemetery closest to the soldier’s place of residence, as per the wishes of the family.\textsuperscript{209}

Although the attacks of September 11\textsuperscript{th} created a national outpouring of patriotism, the declaration of war on Iraq by the Bush administration in March of 2003 was not met with united enthusiasm. Devised by the Pentagon, the “Dover test,” intended to measure whether the American public at large will find certain representations of war palatable,\textsuperscript{210} brought about the 2003 re-issuance of the Dover Ban by the Department of Defense. Fearing a reprise of the civil discontent in the wake of the Vietnam War, during which censorship of war news and imagery was at a minimum, the 2003 re-issuance of the Dover Ban was a careful attempt to cultivate patriotism and positive national sentiment towards the activities of war. The Department of Defense has, over time, issued a number of different bans, the first in 1991 under President George Bush, Senior. Under the Dover Ban, the corpses of soldiers are rendered invisible in the public eye, thus downplaying casualties and focusing national attention and energy towards victories.

The Dover Ban explicitly prohibits ceremony and the media, particularly photographers, from having a presence at this entry point for military corpses: "There will be no arrival ceremonies for, or media coverage of, deceased military personnel returning to or departing from Ramstein airbase or Dover base, to include interim stops."\textsuperscript{211} By eliminating ceremony, the Dover Ban suggests that there is no story for the media to cover, and therefore no need for their presence. The specific mention of “ceremony” in the Dover Ban’s language is particularly striking, given that its addition is a change of phrasing from the 1991 issuance of the Dover Ban during Desert Storm, which simply proclaims that “[m]edia coverage of the arrival of […] remains at the port of entry or at the interim stops will not be permitted…”\textsuperscript{212} When the military first repatriated fallen soldiers in World War II, the return of bodies to their home soil was an occasion for ceremony and fanfare, even if that original disembarkation point was not the

\textsuperscript{209}The practice of allowing the next of kin final say about the burial of their loved one first emerged in World War I, with debates surrounding repatriation, a practice which did not begin in earnest until the Korean War. However, during the World Wars, the next of kin could make requests about where their loved one was buried, for instance, making requests for siblings to be buried in proximity. For more, see Michael Sledge. Soldier Dead, The History of the American Graves Registration Service, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004. and Bradley Lynn Coleman. “Recovering the Korean War Dead, 1950-1958.” The Journal of Military History 71.2 (2008): 179-222.

\textsuperscript{210}Interestingly, in forecasting the response of the American public, the Dover test has been used to justify not only the issuing of the Dover Ban itself, but also the role of women in the military. Feeling that images of female soldiers returning home in coffins or body bags would decidedly not pass the Dover test, women are not yet allowed into combat. This, of course, does not mean that female soldiers are not deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan and are not killed; however, when they are in the line of fire, it’s not as a soldier on the front lines, but rather in a support role (medic, unit photographer, etc).


corpse’s final destination. Bodies were escorted by uniformed service personnel and greeted with music, more uniformed personnel, and speeches, all of which could be attended by the general public and were heavily reported in news media. Today, the ceremonies, undocumented by news media, are much smaller affairs, with only military personnel in attendance. The justification for eliminating these ceremonies lays in the (ostensible) desire to protect families and their privacy. If there are no ceremonies, following the logic of the Dover Ban, the families will not feel distressed if they are unable to make it to Dover. Furthermore, banning photographers means that the image of the coffin of a soldier won’t be circulated before the next of kin have a chance to see it. Others still argue that this is a strategic military move and a question of intelligence, designed to prevent terrorists from discovering the location of American corpses as well as from learning the exact number of American war dead. Though the legitimacy of these arguments is debatable and has been taken up by legal and political scholars and journalists, the result is that much reporting on the war dead from the War on Terror has been significantly censored from the mainstream media. By limiting the public exposure to war death and the ceremonies that respond to it, the Department of Defense’s actions illustrate the powerful effect of war death on the public (American) imaginary. The Dover Ban manipulates visibility and invisibility based on perceived public opinion; the mechanisms of the Department of Defense’s story telling are intended to create false perceptions about the excesses of war – the hundreds of lost lives either hidden or shown limitedly and strategically (i.e. acknowledgement on Veteran’s or Memorial Day only). The ways war death and its ceremonies are manipulated and disseminated (or not!) are viewed as instrumental to national sentiment writ large.

Writing about WWI, G. Kurt Piehler, in his article “The War Dead and the Gold Star: American Commemoration of the First World War,” demonstrates how national leaders utilized the war dead and war memorialization during World War I as a political tool for creating a favorable national memory. The nostalgia generated was then used by national leaders as a rallying point and launching pad for garnering public support for further military action. The construction of this national memory, asserts Piehler, is contingent upon cementing normative societal beliefs about the nature of memory and mourning -- in this instance, the gender of grief. The bond between mother and child was imbued with new, privileged meaning above any other kinship ties, and Gold Star mothers were upheld by the nation as the natural keepers of memory. According to Piehler, mothers were suddenly political subjects as they never had been before, granting women (albeit a certain kinds of women) a new type of citizenship, in which their opinions and actions had a certain political currency they had never before experienced.

214 Gan, “The Dover Ban”
215 The term “Gold Star mothers” refers to a woman whose son has died at war. Beginning in World War I, families would place a service banner with a blue star in their windows as a public marker that they had a family member(s) in the military – one star for each member in service. When news reached the family that their son had been killed, they would superimpose a gold star on the blue start, once again a signal to the community at large.
Although privileging mothers was intended, by the Department of Defense, as a political maneuver for generating a climate of national support, it had the additional effect of reconfiguring social hierarchies and redefining American citizenship. Thus government intervention in the realm of military memorialization had the unexpected effect of changing the very fabric of citizenship and of normative kinship structures. Military funerals and memorials today continue to both utilize and construct national norms. Though legislated censorship limits the parts of the corpse’s journey home that are accessible, representation is not completely erased, especially to those whose social and familial networks include members of the US military. The highly charged rituals of military funerals and memorials rely upon the presence of, and promote the visibility of, gendered, sexualized, classed, and raced understandings of mourning, memory keeping, and caretaking. The particular coding of US military funerals queer the norms found in civilian funerals while simultaneously presenting a highly patriarchal and norm-affirming (read: heteronormative) exterior.

Judith Butler’s theories on melancholia also provide a useful illustration of the stakes of visibility and presence in funeral and memorial practice. In *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler understands melancholia as intrinsic to processes of subjectification. She notes that for Freud, the processes of identification and incorporation inherent in melancholia are an important part of subject formation. Building upon this premise, Butler considers the ways power operates not on its subjects but through them. Acts of self-regulation occur through the incorporation of societal norms as the conscience understands the subject to be an object for itself. Her primary examples consider the relationship of queer sexuality to questions of melancholia. “What happens,” she writes “when a certain foreclosure of love becomes the condition of possibility for social existence? Does this not produce a sociality afflicted by melancholia, a sociality in which loss cannot be grieved because it cannot be recognized as loss, because what is lost never had any entitlement to existence?” As an example, Butler argues that the person who is HIV positive and/or has developed AIDS is considered, by society at large, as already lost, and therefore part of the inevitable “excess” of society. Later, in *Precarious Life*, Butler details how melancholia is the very mechanism which allows for wars and terrorism to occur; by considering the subjects whose lives are literally on the line as not “entitled to existence,” they are simultaneously constructed as inhuman. As non-political and non-human subjects, in relationship to dominant subjectivities, their pain and their deaths therefore don’t register as meaningful in the eyes of dominant culture. The practice of the obituary is Butler’s prime example. She explains that the *New York Times* refused to run obituaries for three Afghanis who had been killed by U.S. troops.

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216 This kind of structuring of power can be seen in legislation and other political speech acts, specifically about the Gold Star Mothers and service flags such as Public Resolution 123, 74th Congress, approved June 23, 1936 (40 Stat. 1895); and Department of Defense Directive 1348.20, 1 December 1967.


When dominant culture disavows the subjectivity of those who it injures by refusing public acknowledgement of their suffering, they are rendered outside of society, and outside humanity. These are the conditions which allow the perpetuation of further injury.

Borrowing from both Piehler and Butler, I argue that the politics of presence and visibility at/in funerals and memorials are essential for determining whose lives and bodies are nationally understood as mournable and therefore as citizens. The types of visibility and their accompanying invisibilities establish the very definition of citizenship and humanity, which, I argue, operate along lines of race, gender, class, and sexuality, maintaining hierarchical distributions of power that privilege raced, classed, gendered, and heteronormative kinship and familial models. The structures of normativity put forth through military funeral and memorial practices are incredibly complex and contingent. They are best understood through a queer lens, in which the visible is always already invisible, and the invisible overwhelmingly omnipresent; I call this (hyper/in)visibility and it can be best understood by examining U.S. military funerals: their protocol and practice as well as their representation in visual and material culture.

Military Kinship and Military Funeral Protocol

The military is structured around the concept of kinship. It is the thing for which the military exists: saving America and the world for our families, and especially our children, as the Navy’s 1970s recruitment campaign, shown in fig 6, demonstrates. The sailor holding the hand of the little boy fights so that the child may grow upon and inherit this “heritage.” Underlying this message is the notion that the boy will become part of the national family, by some day becoming a member of the Navy himself. These traditional kinship networks provide the structure through which the military best operates. The icon of “Uncle Sam” as the embodiment of the nation, as seen in fig 7, suggests that citizens relate to their nation as a family; members of the military understand themselves as “brothers” under this national parentage and are responsible for one another’s well-being in their units. It is notable that in these campaigns, the archetypical American family is white, framing white (heterosexual) America as the thing which needs protecting.219

This same familial framing device can be found in the protocol for military funerals. In 2007, the Department of Defense defined military funeral honors as follows:

The ceremonial paying of respect and the final demonstration of the country’s gratitude to those who, in times of war and peace, have faithfully defended our Nation. The military funeral honors ceremony consists of, at a minimum, the folding and presentation of the American flag and the sounding of Taps by a detail of two uniformed members of

the Military Services. At least one of the detail’s members shall be from
the parent Service of the eligible beneficiary. The military funeral protocol positions the fallen soldier as one
who is afforded special advantages, rights, and honors. Though the Department of
Defense does not elaborate on this distinction, one could extrapolate that the fallen soldier
is a special type of citizen, one whose life, in retrospect, is upheld and distinguished, via
ceremony, as emblematic of an ideal citizen – one whose blood “refreshed […] the tree of
liberty.” The once ordinary life of the enlisted military man or woman is, upon his or
her death, vaulted to a new and special status – American hero/ideal citizen – through a
series of ceremonial and ritual practices, which in turn rely upon a symbolic system of
signs. Protocol manuals, oral instruction, and government legislation issue a script of
symbolic action. This script is teeming with official signs, which are visual, aural, and
performative. As laid out in the definition of US military funerals, the flag, the uniformed
service members, and taps are the key elements for a felicitous military funeral. These
gestures and symbols are intended to account for, honor, and manage the grief and
mourning experienced by military families in the face of loss. These official rituals,
however, cannot contain the inevitable excesses of mourning, the affect and emotion
which disrupt even the most tightly prescribed rituals. Moreover, the military funeral, as a
scripted event, operates through structures of normativity. Military funerals are
constructed for a normative American family, and therefore the attendant rituals
acknowledge and privilege certain types of mourners. Therefore, in addition to the un-
containability of mourning, there are further slippages and excesses created through the
ritual’s normativizing structures. Turning to a few of the structuring symbols as examples,
these excesses become apparent.

221 Julian P. Boyd, Charles T. Cullen, John Catanzariti, Barbara B. Oberg, et al, eds. The Papers of Thomas
222 I use the term signs here very deliberately, invoking Roland Barthe’s understanding of signs as the
symbolic stand in for something else, wherein the signifier (the object itself) and the signified (American
citizenship, the American imaginary born from the trope of the love of liberty, etc) are joined in such as
way as to be indistinguishable from one another. Each of the elements of the military funeral is thus a very
complex sign in and of itself, which adds up to the sign-filled event of the military funeral itself. This
article unpacks this larger sign (which Barthes might call a symbolic system), to recognize the signifiers
and disentangle them from the signified, in order to understand how this signification comes to exist, and to
223 Taps is the bugle call which is used to signal Lights Out. It’s a uniquely American bugle call, adapted
from the French melody, Silas Casey’s (1801-1882) Tactics by Union General Daniel Butterfield (1831-
1901) in July of 1862. With the help of his brigade bugler Oliver Wilcox Norton (1839-1920), he rewrote
the French melody, which he felt was too formal, and the tune spread throughout both the Confederate and
Union Armies after its debut on a July evening. It was made a formal bugle call after the Civil War. The
first official reference to Taps’ use as a mandatory part of funeral ritual occurs in 1891, although it is highly
likely this tradition began before that point. Jari A. Villanueva. Twenty-Four Notes that Tap Deep
The stars and stripes of the national banner, perhaps the most self-evident state symbol, cloak the corpse throughout its journey from the battlefield to the cemetery. From the moment the corpse is placed in a coffin, which occurs almost immediately after the recovery of the body, the American flag is draped over the body, with the stars oriented towards the head. A member of the military is present at every moment of the corpse’s journey home and the flag always rests atop the coffin until the funeral. At the funeral itself, the attending military personnel carefully fold the flag and present it to the next of kin, reciting the words of an official script, slightly different for each branch of the military. Having accompanied the body from the earliest stages of its journey home, the flag is intended to provide comfort to families and functions as a relic: a little piece of the deceased delivered to those who loved him best. When there are multiple flag recipients involved (such as in the instance of divorced parents, or parents and a widow), two flags are interchanged throughout the journey.

Presumably, all bodies are rendered equal, as citizens, under the flag. As with the rhetoric of multiculturalism and plurality in the contemporary U.S., the flag functions as a “color blindfold” of sorts. The rituals surrounding the use of the American flag at military funerals are normalizing, creating a homogenous symbol of hero, a corpse which represents The Corps(e) of all-American heroes. Like with any act of blinding, however, difference is erased rather than honored and incorporated. Mirroring the discourse of families with which I opened this section, the position of all-American hero is actually a raced, gendered, classed, and sexualized position: white, male, and straight. The race, gender, and sexuality of the normative soldier is not merely happenstance, but historically grounded in the practice of creating armies and war heroes. While African-Americans and other ethnic minorities have a long history of service in the US army, segregation and unequal treatment were practiced legally until 1948, when executive order 9981 established “equality of treatment and opportunity for all persons in the armed services without regard to race, color, religion or national origin.” Similarly, though women have served in the US Army since the Revolution, sometimes disguised as men, it wasn’t until 1941 that the first Women’s Army Auxiliary Corps was established and women could enlist openly. To this day, however, full integration of women has yet to be achieved, with women kept out of the frontlines. Until 2011, homosexual men and women, while not forbidden to serve per se, were legislated into invisibility; their sexuality could be the basis for their dismissal at any time (Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell).

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224 Historically, one way citizenship could be acquired by an immigrant was joining the armed forces. In this way, for a fallen soldier, leaving the battlefield under the US flag might in fact be one’s first (and last) act as a US citizen. See the INA (Immigration and Nationality Act) as well as Julia Preston, “US Military Will Offer Path to Citizenship.” (New York Times. February 14, 2009).

225 Class is the one category which is slightly more variable. While the military is positioned as an institution through which one can gain economic mobility, heroes are usually positioned as middle class, or at least as individuals with middle-class aspirations.

226 Harry S. Truman, Executive Order 9981, “Establishing the President’s Committee on Equality of Treatment and Opportunity in the Armed Services,” July 26, 1948.
Contemporary representations of US soldiers reflect these biases. It’s not that America doesn’t imagine soldiers of color, but that it doesn’t imagine heroes of color. This normalizing process becomes more complicated and begins to break down around questions of kinship and family. A uniformed service member, preferably from the deceased’s “parent Service” transfers the flag which drapes the coffin from the care of the military into the care of civilians. This act theatricalizes the soldier’s joint membership in two distinct “families”: the biological or marital family and the military family. I am particularly interested in the dynamics between these two distinct families. While both “families” are normalized, this process occurs very differently and with very specific symbolic weight for each “family” model. The next of kin are the embodiment of freedom itself: the loved ones for whom security must be procured at all costs. The next of kin are so often pictured as war mothers, war widows, and young children, creating a distinct gendering of military mourning. However, the kinship of military personnel also operates in familial terms, but queerly, from the “parent Service” to the brotherhood of military personnel, to the intimacy and care exchanged by and for male-gendered individuals. But it is the next of kin, the official family, which is at the heart of the military funeral, the subject and object of military funeral display. Although queer military kinship is a highly visible and essential component of rendering military funeral honors, it is simultaneously invisible; that is, (hyper/in)visible.

In a military funeral, servicemen actively care for and mourn their fellow servicemen. Whether acting in an official capacity to render military funeral honors or

227 The website of the Department of Defense features stories on its heroes, almost in an “employee of the month” gesture. As a featured hero, a brief biography is recounted, along with a description of the hero’s heroic deeds. Of the twelve featured heroes, all are men, and all but one is white. [http://www.defenselink.mil/heroes/](http://www.defenselink.mil/heroes/)


230 By “male-gendered individuals” I am referring to the gendered position of soldier, which is undeniably masculine in a US national context. Although women have been admitted into many positions within the military, when they step into the position of “soldier,” they step into a new gender position, which, while not exactly male, is no longer only female. Furthermore, the manner in which female masculinity is understood a “lesbian” adds another queer layer. In this way, female soldiers are not excluded from my consideration of military funerals as “queer,” although they certainly occupy a double position as being insider-outsiders within this queer kinship network. Female soldiers are excluded from the vast majority of both journalism and scholarship that examines the military writ large, which is still understood, perhaps rightly so, as male dominated. They are also largely absent from media coverage of soldiers and military affairs, or else presented specifically as a fascinating anomaly. Given that I the objects I deal with in this article fit within this categorization, female soldiers do not play a large role in my discussion, however, it is my hope that their (hyper/in)visibility within this chapter draws attention to their absence, opening up avenues for future scholarship specifically addressing their (ab)presence.

231 Indeed, the presence of uniformed military personnel is the second official component of a military funeral.
acting as a surrogate for the fallen to support the next of kin at their time of loss, uniformed military presence elevates the funeral from a civilian burial to military honors. Despite their ostensible visibility, the acts and relationships that comprise queer military kinship are actually invisible, which is to say illegible in their scope, depth, and meaning in the context of the military funeral. Thus they operate in (hyper/in)visibility, as poignantly observable in the family dynamics of the flag presentation. The slash between the “hyper” and the “in” suggests that the line between the two is indeed thin; sometimes the supposed absence is the marker of an irrefutable presence, while hypervisibility can actually serve to create invisibility. The parentheses that contain this contradiction can hardly bracket this tension, as the nation’s “other” bodies become simultaneously (hyper/in)visible, ghostly yet material presences that haunt not just this historical moment and its mourning practices, but the “normative” within a more general US context.

**Queer Kinship: Final Salute and the Marine Corps(e)**

Both the article, “Final Salute,” and the book, *Final Salute*, exemplify the relationship between the production of a national imaginary and the (hyper/in)visibility of queer kinship structures; structures of normativity depend on the simultaneous flaunting and erasing of the non-normative structures that allow for the normative’s existence. Sheeler’s article reports a human interest story on military death and funeral practice as war activities in Iraq and Afghanistan were gearing up. The detailed journeys of a handful of fallen soldiers, from their battle-front deaths to their home-front burials and beyond make up the majority of the book. He and photographer Todd Heisler spent a year following Casualty Assistance Officer Major Steven Beck of the US Marines as he informed families of the death of their Marine and then facilitated and oversaw funerals. “Final Salute” immediately appealed to the greater public and received wide-spread praise. The *Seattle Post-Intelligencer* asserted “[i]t grips the heart and will not let go, forges new appreciation for what is being lost,” while the *The Wall Street Journal* lauded *Final Salute* as “a must-read accounting of [the] cost [of war] but most importantly a tribute to those who must bear it.”

It brought the plight of families suffering the loss of children and spouses from the war to the forefront, providing a framework for understanding the loss of American soldiers fighting abroad. Ostensibly about the particular grief of the next of kin of soldiers and the difficult work of informing and supporting these families, Sheeler’s text is remarkable in the amount of detail and attention it pays to the grief the Marines feel both for their fallen comrades. By placing Major Steven Beck as the narrative axis, Sheeler offers the reader a glance into the subjectivity of a Marine in mourning. With remarkable detail about the experiences of

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233 Both reviews are excerpted under “Editorial Reviews” on *Final Salute’s* Amazon.com page. http://www.amazon.com/Final-Salute-Story-Unfinished-Lives/dp/0143115456/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1279047335&sr=1-1
the Marines who carry out the military death care, albeit in service of the next of kin, *Final Salute* re-centers the complex subjectivity of and interpersonal relationships between Marines.

I would like to focus, as an example, on the story of the death and burial of 2\textsuperscript{nd} Lt. James J. Cathey, killed during combat while on his second tour of Iraq. Cathey’s pregnant war widow, Katherine, as well as Cathey’s parents figure as the central mourners in Sheeler’s “Final Salute,” but his best friend, Sgt. Gavin Conley, and other Marines function as Cathey’s second, and (hyper/in)visible queer family. I define a queer family as a network of same-sex care, intimacy, and affection, operating in juxtaposition to the heteronormative family, in which marriage and biology are the primary, legal definitions of family. The use of familial terms amongst the Marines enacts this queer kinship, challenging and transforming the limits of heteronormative understandings of family. Describing Conley’s relationship with Cathey, Sheeler explains: “All Marines call each other brother. [Sgt. Gavin] Conley and Jim Cathey could have been. They finished each other’s sentences, had matching infantry tattoos etched on their shoulders, and cracked on each other as if they had grown up together – which, in some ways, they had.”

Sheeler’s description emphasizes this bond of friendship as simultaneously a familial bond. Their brotherhood emerges from a temporal trajectory of growing up together, echoing recognizable sibling behaviors: finishing one another’s sentences, giving each other a hard time, etc. Matching infantry tattoos legibly link their bodies permanently as belonging together, a recognizable sign of connection.

Although the bond between Cathey and Conley is not a biological linkage, blood metaphorically still flows between them and their fellow Marines – blood risked, blood spilled. Furthermore, Conley has taken on caretaking responsibilities for Cathey, accompanying his corpse on the journey back from Iraq to Nevada. Other Marines, both who knew and didn’t know Cathey, assist in the care of his body, making sure that the fallen soldier had been properly cleaned, identified, and transported according to proper protocol – including a constant vigil to keep the American flag laying properly atop his coffin.

Mortuary affairs in the military are, by and large, taken care of in-house. The mortuary preparations and the direct handling of deceased bodies constitute an act of care by and for men.

In a family’s shared history, behavior patterns and a repertoire of repeated gestures accumulate meaning to its members, and these gestures become part of the family’s traditions. This is no different among the Marines. The gesture of the salute,  

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234 Jim Sheeler “Final Salute.” 2S.

235 Matching tattoos are one way that gay and lesbian couples, as well as others who may not legally wed and wish to chose alternative symbols of belonging together, replace the traditional “wedding ring” and mark their lifelong commitment to one another.

236 For a fascinating, and fictional, glimpse in the extensive preparation of military corpses, see Ross Katz, *Taking Chance*, dir. Ross Katz (New York, NY: HBO, 2009) starring Kevin Bacon. Interestingly, the labor of death care is particularly gendered and raced in ways that are perhaps more palatable to a general American audience but that do not necessarily reflect the labor breakdown in actually military death care operations.
from which both the book and article take their name, is particularly poignant. Describing Cathey’s official commissioning ceremony in which he received his lieutenant’s brass bars, Sheeler narrates “For Cathey, it was one of the most important days of his life, and Conley knew the best way to share his pride. At the end of the ceremony, Conley walked up to the new lieutenant and snapped his arm to his brow, giving the new Officer his first salute.” Sheeler marks this exchange of salutes as a rite of passage, in which the institution of the Marines at large recognizes the accomplishments of Cathey, leading to a change in status within that community. Perhaps more importantly, however, the salute performed by Conley represents a specific acknowledgement between “brothers” of growth, maturity, and hard work. As represented in the text, the salute is a shared signal between two people with an emotionally intimate relationship – Cathey and his best friend/brother. Military personnel quickly learn this particular gesture and its meaning when they enter the institution. It is a gesture of respect and obedience, signaling an understanding of the hierarchy within the military family and one’s place within it. The commissioning ceremony Sheeler details and its gestures characterize the “growing up together” that Cathey and Conley shared, providing each other emotional support in ways specific to the community to which they belong. Furthermore, Sheeler notes that there is something special about Conley’s relationship to Cathey that makes him the person who knows, above anyone else, the “best way to share his pride.” This description bespeaks an emotional intimacy and a shared affective bond that comes of pride in mutually recognizable accomplishment. Conley’s first salute to Cathey foreshadows the final salute Conley performs at Cathey’s funeral. But the salute must also be read for its queer valences which operate (hyper/in)visibly. Nothing is more visible than this salute, yet the meaning behind the specific gesture is opaque to the unknowing eye – what might seem an empty ritual to an outside observer (perhaps even to a biological family member) is teeming with queer significance. These queer valences become even sharper in relation to the queer care enacted through the ritual acts of the funeral itself.

While preparing for and performing military funeral rites, the dichotomy of Marine family versus legal/biological family plays out both along queer/straight lines and also in terms of inside/outside. Cathey’s corpse and casket are drawn upon by both the Marines and next of kin, with special attention paid to what is buried in the ground with Cathey’s corpse. The day preceding the funeral, Sheeler narrates, Katherine Cathey engages in a heartbreaking ritual of placing meaningful objects next to her deceased husband’s body, inside his casket. Under advisement by the military, the family opted not to view Cathey’s corpse. When Major Beck takes a pregnant Katherine to her husband’s open casket, an empty uniform lays atop of the shrouded body. Heisler’s photographs illustrate her farewell ritual, with Major Beck at her side. Sheeler describes:

[***Katherine*** placed the picture [of her and Cathey kissing] at the top of the casket, above the neck of the uniform. She bent down and pressed her lips to it. ‘I’m always kissing you, baby,’ she whispered.

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237 Jim Sheeler “Final Salute.” 13S.
She took several other photos of their lives together and placed them around the uniform. She gently added a bottle of her perfume and then picked up the dried fragile flowers of her wedding bouquet…

She placed the flowers alongside the uniform and then turned again to the major.

‘The ultrasound’ she said.

[…]

She stood cradling the ultrasound image and then moved forward and placed it on the pillow at the head of the casket. She stood there, watching for several minutes, and then removed it.

She walked the length of the casket and then stepped back, still holding the only image of James J. Cathey Jr.

She leaned in and placed it over her husband’s heart.238 Fig 8

Though Major Beck lingers throughout the story and images, Sheeler’s narrative focuses on Katherine’s scripting of the specifically heterosexual elements of her personal memorial: kissing, the wedding bouquet, and the couple’s future child. Though presumably other pictures might include the couple’s extended kinship networks, Sheeler does not disclose the contents of other photographs. It is through the placement of these tokens that Katherine reconstructs her husband’s body: the photograph of kissing ostensibly laying at Cathey’s lips, the ultrasound at his heart. Interestingly, however, Katherine’s careful constructions are reliant upon the knowledge of another: Major Steve Beck. Before bringing Katherine to see the casket, Beck meticulously prepared both the room and the body. As Sheeler notes, he had been the one to place the uniform, double check Cathey’s shroud, and to open and close the casket that held Cathey’s remains. Fig 9

When Katherine spends time “alone” with the casket, she is in actuality constantly in the presence of Marines. When she stands before Cathey’s shroud, unsure of how to relate to the veiled body, it is Beck who guides her hand over her husband’s remains, orienting her. Fig 8 Later, when Katherine requests to spend the night with her husband’s casket, the Marines too are there to guard both her and Cathey until the internment. Fig 10

Although Sheeler’s narrative and the strictures of military funeral protocol position Katherine and the structures of heteronormativity as having control over and access to the “inside” – literally the inside of Cathey’s coffin as well as being the “inside” decision makers – Marine presence positions this queer family as mediating this insider status, again in a (hyper/in)visible mode. Figure 11 shows the Marines as they take shifts guarding Katherine and Cathey’s corpse. The photograph is particularly striking for the feeling of shared domesticity it evokes, and illustration of the caretaking work the Marines perform for each other at the height of their grieving – even when that grief is positioned outside of the central story of grief. Fig 11

238 Jim Sheeler Final Salute. 109.
When the Marines attend Cathey’s funeral, they perform a ritual of their own creation. This addition to his military funeral is perhaps the most striking example of queer intimacy: one which, in relation to Katherine’s ritual, plays out on the outside. Sheeler explains:

The Marines, many of whom had flown in from Okinawa the night before, walked up to the casket. One by one, they removed their white gloves and placed them on the smooth wood. Then they reached into a bag of sand the same dark gray shade as gunpowder.

A few years ago, while stationed in the infantry in Hawaii, Jim Cathey and his friends had taken a trip to Iwo Jima, where nearly 6,000 Marines had lost their lives almost 60 years before. They slept on the beach, thinking about all that had happened there. The day before they left, they each collected a bag of sand. Those bags of sand sat in their rooms for years. Girlfriends questioned them. Wives wondered what they would ever do with them. One by one, the young Marines poured a handful of sand onto the gloves atop the casket, then stepped back.

Sgt. Gavin Conley, who had escorted his friend’s body to Reno, reached into the bag, made a fist and drizzled the grains onto the casket. Once again, he slowly brought his bare hand to his brow.

‘(The day after sleeping on the beach), we all did a hike up Mount Suribachi, where our battalion commander spoke, and we rendered honors to all the fallen on Iwo Jima,’ Conley said.

He looked over at the sand.

‘Now they can be a part of him, too.’

While Conley and his fellow Marines perform their devised ceremony during the official military funeral, its queer systems are (hyper/in)visible. The presence of the Marines, and their performance for the gathered crowd, is heightened by their uniforms. Yet the queer valences that are arguably present are masked through the reiteration of soldierly, masculine tropes, rendering queerness illegible. The presence of Marines as mourners and the distinct brand of kinship demonstrated through exclusively shared symbols and gestures, articulate an alternative queer lineage and queer futurity through non-hetero-reproductive tropes.

The sand of Iwo Jima is illustrative of the manner in which queer kinship rewrites the heteronormative biological genealogy of bloodlines and genetics, fashioning history, lived bonds, and shared experience and caretaking as the elements that create a family. Representative of a specifically queer genealogy, Cathey’s Marines articulate a vision of a family of men bound together by loss of life, the horrors of combat and war, but more

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239 Jim Sheeler “Final Salute.” 23S.
importantly, by love, care, and fidelity. From the moment Cathey entered the Marines, his daily care was the responsibility of the Corps, carried out by other members of the Corps. This did not change throughout his journey in death. Although the rites of death articulate a handing over of Cathey back to his “natural” biological and marital family, the sand of Iwo Jima and its invocation of a deep history symbolically claim Cathey within a distinctly queer lineage. Conley and the other Marines script a vision of life beyond death as entering and becoming a part of a genealogy and family tree that is male-centered and male dominated. The ritual of visiting the historical battle site of Iwo Jima together and, both collectively and individually understanding this sand as having meaning, constructs a narrative of ancestry. The Marines view the shores upon which other Marines bled and lost their lives as a sacred space, one in which the legacy and lineage of their queer family finds its origins. The sand is transformed into a relic through the actions historically performed upon the shores of its origins. Each grain of sand is one on which a Marine may have lost his life, may have bled in the act of protecting his brothers and his country. When Cathey’s Marines sprinkle this same sand upon his casket, they symbolically return the body to this space, and view him as joining this line of ancestors. The legacy of Marine brotherhood is extended to include Cathey, ritualistically transforming him into an ancestor, and part of this queer family lineage. In this way, his death enters into an historical future, in which Cathey’s death will become the act of heroism defines the lives of all Marines who enter into the Corps.

This reclamation is an exclusive and coded action, one from which women, particularly wives and opposite-sex partners are excluded. Sheeler specifically notes the way they “question” the Marines and “ponder” what meaning their Marine husbands could possibly find in a bag of sand. The Marines stubbornly guard their sand, and in doing so guarding the family that the sand stands for as the exclusive domain of their queer military family. Just as they have meticulously cared for Cathey’s corpse, they care for his memory as part of, and representative of, the legacy of the Marines. Lest the aspects of care, a highly feminized verb, expose this tightly protected bond, Marine comportment and the precision of the ritual place this ceremony back within the realm of the masculine and the militaristic, even while invoking funereal tropes that once again belie the rich complexity of Marine bonds.

*Final Salute*’s descriptions and photographs of the Cathey family throughout the process of Cathey’s homecoming and burial focus on highly demonstrative tropes of grief – weeping, wailing, and collapsing. The Marines are shown in a nearly opposite light. As trained, the Marines are stoic and still, with a precision of motion and striking lack of visible emotion. This affect contextualizes and protects the more vulnerable gestures to come. The Marines’ strip their hands bare of the pristine white gloves which formal dress requires. Remnants of an earlier mode of masculinity, the gloves contain the potential to contradict the austere masculinity with which Marines are associated. Through precision of motion and austerity of affect, the gloves worn by Marines are recast as symbols of containment and stoicism. The sand, so laden with symbolic resonance for the Marines, but framed by Sheeler as simply militaristic (“the same dark grew shade as gunpowder,” he writes, drawing upon simile) then sullies the pristine cleanliness of the Marine’s dress gloves. In removing their gloves, the Marines strip their
hands of their shield, suddenly exposed, open, and vulnerable. As they clasp the hands of one another and of family members as a gesture of shared sorrow, they are no longer separated by the pristine white cloth of Marine uniform. The gloves no longer sheath the hands of the Marines but symbolically protect their fallen comrade, replacing the American flag that has been presented to the next of kin.  

Fig 12

The body of a Marine is an essential symbol for both the carefully scripted national stories of the military funeral as well as the queer stories that lie (hyper/in)visibly at hand. There are the literal bodies of servicemen and servicewomen, returning home on planes – the military corpse, that which demands a reckoning, recognition, and remembrance through its very materiality. The flag represents the membership of the individual corpse in a larger Corps, in this instance the Marine Corps, itself a living body of people and relationships that acts as a single unit. Each unit, a smaller body within the larger body, is an entity described in familial, kinship terms: a brotherhood. Cathey’s corpse, though shielded by many layers of tokens (the gloves, sand, and rose of the Marines) still serves as a raw reminder of mortality – particularly for the Marines who shared his duties, wore identical uniforms to his, and who could someday return home in an identical coffin.

The presence of Cathey’s corpse disturbs the wholeness of the Corps. Though the Marine Corps as a whole will absorb Cathey’s loss as a casualty as it recruits more Marines and replenishes its numbers, the grief felt by individual Marines for their specific friend shows that this kind of reincorporation can never be completely successful, given that the Corps is always made up of individuals with their own losses and grief. The relationship between the Marine Corps and the Marine corpse negotiates boundaries of the self and the other, and the institution of the military provides narratives which make create the unity necessary to turn an individual into a unified member of something larger than him/herself. This network of bonds is familial, an ironic institution of care. As illustrated by the passionate soldiers who protect the military funerals as sacred space against the injurious protests of the Westboro Baptist Church, however, this queer familial bond extends beyond one’s membership in a unit or active service in the military.

Psychic Life and Queer Kin: The Patriot Guard Riders

For anyone keeping tabs on the Westboro Baptist Church, there’s nothing especially unusual about their military funeral protests; indeed, the combination of large signs, singing, confrontational language, imagery of homosexuality, and provocative protest sites is their trademark. In response to the protests of the Westboro Baptist Church, a number of grassroots movements have emerged. “Angel Action,” a group founded by Romaine Patterson in response to the Westboro Baptist Church protests at Matthew Shepard’s funeral and at the trials of the two men who murdered him, is perhaps the most famous, due to its representation as part of Moisés Kaufman’s The Laramie Project. However, it wasn’t until the object of protest shifted from the funerals of explicitly homosexual people to fallen (heterosexual) soldiers that the media exploded,

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241 Kaufman, Moisés. The Laramie Project. For more on Angel Action, see Romaine Patterson’s website: http://www.eatromaine.com/index.htm
the public expressed outrage, various scales of government began to pay attention, and the Patriot Guard Riders were conceived.

There is no question that the Patriot Guard Riders emerged in response to the actions of the Westboro Baptist Church. The Patriot Guard Riders began as a small group of male military veterans, members of the Kansas American Legion Riders, who were appalled by the “desecration” of funerals by the Westboro Baptist Church and wished to protect the memory of fallen soldiers. They quickly mobilized and joined with others, utilizing their bodies, flags, and motorcycles to block the “uninvited guests” from the site of mourning. The name “Patriot Guard Riders” was determined on October 18, 2005 and the group’s formation was officially announced on October 27, 2005 at the funeral of E-4 Army Specialist (Spc) Lucas Franz.

On their website, this story is found under a tab labeled “history” and entitled “The Lineage of the Patriot Guard Riders.” By invoking the notions of genealogy and bloodlines, the PRG comprise another “family” institution in opposition to Phelps. Having come together under the guise of respect, honor, and patriotism, the family created by the PGR is one that is sired completely by men. The roster of founders is solely male; of the current five national leaders, four are men. Like the Marines in Final Salute, the PGR privilege homosocial formations of family and kinship. Yet this homosociality is protected under the umbrella of both nation and military, which obsessively refutes an alignment of homosexuality with homosociality. Indeed, the founding story of the PGR and its focus on its paternal lineage is not unlike the celebrated legends of the American forefathers; additionally its connection to the masculine, militarized army is illustrated by their choice of costume.

The Patriot Guard Riders portray masculinity, with an unspoken dress code of jeans, leather jackets, and hats. Most important, however, are their props: motorcycles and American flags. Not only do these costumes symbolize a national hyper-masculinity, but they also play an important role in the act of counter protest. The motorcycles are used not only as transportation, but also as noisemakers to drown out unwanted chanting, singing, or shouting. The flags do the important work of expanding the area of the body, allowing for a single PGR to block more protesters. Just as the flag which covers the casket of a fallen soldier shields and protects the corpse, the PGR wield the national banner in defense, protecting their own bodies, as well as the corpse, from the ridicule of the Westboro Baptist Church and creating a visibly united whole. Bodies of the PGR rhetorically become the embodiment of the nation as they are surrounded by flags, protecting internal “boundaries of decency” within the nation’s physical borders.

242 The “Respect for America’s Fallen Heroes Act,” signed by President Bush on May 29, 2006 bars protest within 300 feet of a national cemetery, and 150 feet from the main road, for an hour before and after a funeral (H.R. 5037--109th Congress (2006)). Individual states with legislation in response to the Westboro Baptist Church military funeral protests include Missouri, Kentucky, Kansas, Minnesota, South Dakota, Illinois, Ohio, New Jersey, Oklahoma, Wisconsin, Maryland, Arkansas, Florida, Indiana, Iowa, Louisiana, Michigan, Nebraska, South Carolina, Texas, Vermont, Virginia, West Virginia (as of December 2006).

243 Patriot Guard Riders, 2006

244 Patriot Guard Riders, 2006
Motorcycle clubs have a long-standing link to US military culture, having emerged as an outlet for veterans beginning after World War II to “just to be around kindred spirits and perhaps relive some of the better, wilder social aspects of their times during the war.” Indeed, US Armed Forces veterans are crucial to the formation of the PGR. Their reactions to the Phelps protest engage beyond the level of the protests in the here and now; the PGR view the protests and their disruption of a sanctified grieving space as a citation of past anti-military sentiment. For some of these vets, the act of counter-protest is reparative work for the mistakes and injustices of the Vietnam War. “It’s kind of like, we didn’t do it right in the ‘70’s” said Kurt Mayer the spokesman [for the PGR], referring to the treatment of Vietnam veterans. “This is something that America needs to do, step up and do the right thing.” That the PGR formed in counter-protest is striking in light of the role protest took in the Vietnam War. Unlike the picture of a nation brought together through patriotism often connected with World War II, the depiction of the US during the Vietnam War is instead highly fractured. Throughout the duration of the Vietnam War, large numbers of citizens came together in protest of US military action. Much of this sentiment was, in the eyes of an “exasperated cadet,” “anti-war, anti-draft, anti-military.” For the PGR, the act of counter-protest is an act of mourning and caretaking. They are not only grieving for the fallen soldiers and protecting their memory, but also mourning for themselves as degraded and forgotten citizens. Furthermore, they fight against with the emasculating claimed and performed by the Westboro Baptist Church. Lastly, they mourn the loss of a coherent vision of the America and its freedoms for which they fought, decidedly different from the American to which they returned home, in which the “gratitude of the nation” none other than the extreme freedom of speech practiced by the Westboro Baptist Church. It is an active grappling with the psychological effects of not only the loss of loved ones, but the loss of oneself that accompanies that loss, as described in theories of mourning and melancholia.

In his seminal piece “Mourning and Melancholia,” Freud describes mourning as a “normal” response to loss, writing “[m]ourning is regularly the reaction of the loss of a loved person, or to the loss of some abstraction which has taken the place of one, such as fatherland, liberty, and ideal and so on.” Melancholia, on the other hand, is a pathologized, obsessive, and unconscious refusal to mourn. E. Patrick Johnson summarizes: “Melancholia… manifests itself in the unconscious as an unacknowledged loss of a love-object and therefore a refusal to grieve this loss. The refusal to grieve becomes a part of the formation of the ego through a complex process of loss, denial, and

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246 Although for younger vets, it may instead be about the Gulf War, or even for those already discharged, Iraq.


248 Shako, 30 May 1967 as quoted in Macauly, Alex. “‘An oasis of order’: the Citadel, the 1960s, and the Vietnam antiwar movement.” *Southern Cultures* 11.3. Fall 2005: p. 35(27).

identification.” Freud’s formulation of melancholia points to a subject that engages in a self-directed refusal to mourn, presenting the melancholic subject as stubborn and refusing to let go (albeit unconsciously). He elaborates, “[i]n some people the same influences produce melancholia instead of mourning and we consequently suspect them of a pathological disposition.” In other words, Freud views melancholia as a psychological disease, one created within and by the melancholic subject himself.

I’d like to suggest, however, that melancholia is not always the product of an unconscious refusal. Instead, perhaps the “same influences” that Freud puts forth in his theories are not in fact the same to all people. Institutionalized mourning practices and/or circumstances within normative bounds forcibly disallow certain subjects from participation: first through ridicule and/or denial of loss (in this instance, the Westboro Baptist Church), and secondly through policing of access, identity, and memory in relation to the lost object (the specifically proscribed role of veterans and military personnel in military funerals). The state-created melancholic subject is then pathologized and pushed to the margins of society. In her book *Raising the Dead*, Patricia Holland offers “discontinuous readings of death – as a cultural and national phenomenon or discourse, as a figurative silencing or process of erasure, and as an embodied entity or subject capable of transgression.” These readings allow for an understanding of “social death,” in which certain subjects are deemed as excessive and superfluous to the state. As such, they are, in life, already occupying the space of the dead. When these subjects do in fact pass on, it is of little consequence to the state’s socially live subjects, who have not considered their social counterparts ever truly alive. The people who survive these subjects, then, cannot grieve fully as long as their loss is deemed to be excessive, inconsequential, or beside the point, a formulation that often goes hand in hand with either a denied access to the rituals designed for mourning (as we saw in the introduction’s discussion of AIDS funerals), or normative rituals for mourning that fail to meet the needs of non-normative communities (the affects of the (hyper/in)visibility of military funerals, perhaps). Holland demarcates black subjects as occupying the space of social death, particularly queer black subjects. We can also understand veterans within the rubric of social death, particularly queer veterans and veterans of color, whose losses are so often masked through representation of normative veterans, as in Sheeler’s text and the media coverage of the PGR and Westboro Baptist Church’s funeral clashes. Additionally, however, the grief of veterans for other veterans (aka their queer kin) also goes unacknowledged by society at large. As “socially dead,” the subjects are denied a publically recognizable outlet for their grief, as it operates illegibly through representations that privilege weeping mothers and widows.

In order to transform their mode of grieving from melancholia to mourning, non-normative subjects must create alternative practices and codes for mourning, ones that

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operate in a disidentifiatory manner – through the very institutions that exclude and disallow their grieving. For the Vietnam veterans, and the growing number of veterans from the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, this is the work of the PGR, simultaneously allowing for their own healing and reentry into the nation as “whole” subjects, while protecting new generations of vets and their families from state erasure and invisibility. Joining the PGR is an act of caretaking, of continuing to nurture their familial bonds to the military. In the counter-protests, the PGR therefore make a national lost object(s) (the uber-masculine soldier, vehemently denied by the Westboro Baptist Church) hypervisible as a tactic to stymie the ridicule of Westboro Baptist Church. This act itself is a process of transforming melancholia to mourning, and then engaging in mourning. Within the structure of the military funeral, and especially one that is framed by the vitriolic messages of the Westboro Baptist Church, the PGR are able to create new codes and new embodied practices of mourning. This becomes evident when one traces the evolution of the PGR. Though they initially only appeared at funerals when given explicit permission from family members, the PGR now also carry out their form of embodied patriotism at other events, such as military homecomings or the dedication of war memorials. They have been able to shift their original paradigm to continue the acts of transformation, grieving, and healing even beyond the trajectory of the funeral. At all of these events, the presence of American flags and motorcycles is still prevalent, even when there are not protesters to block.

The lost object(s) of the PGR are made hypervisible through their counter-protest. This act carries with it an inevitable invisibility that accompanies their creation of the hypervisible – once the image is everywhere, it is also nowhere, in that it becomes the normative, all that is seen. In becoming visible, the queerness of this object fades into normativity, leaving new invisibilities in its wake as its hypervisibility simultaneously renders it (hyper/in)visible. This process is tied to the process of identification and subject formation. Freud discusses the relationship between the melancholic and the lost (or abandoned) object, stating: “the free libido was not displaced on to another object; it was withdrawn into the ego. There, however, it was not employed in any unspecified way, but served to establish an identification of the ego with the abandoned object.”

Through their costuming and self-presentation, we can observe that masculinity and nation are objects of identification for the Patriot Guard Riders, and that the process of identification is simultaneously a process of making visible. However, the scale, scope, and engagement with patriotism suggest that beyond identification, the PGR also embody their own US national imaginary. As with all nationalisms, it is crucial to consider the (hyper/in)visible. In mourning an impossible “lost” US national imaginary that rests upon righteous white, militarized, (hetero)masculinity, there is a deeper loss: the citizen of color, the queer, the feminine. Through the hypervisibility of the white Patriot Guard

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253 My use of the term “disidentification” comes directly from José Muñoz’s *Disidentifications*. Muñoz defines disidentification as a strategy of resistance which “works on and against dominant ideology… a strategy that tries to transform a cultural logic from within” (11-12). In doing so, minority subjects are able to utilize certain aspects of dominant culture, while rejecting and transforming other aspects.

254 Freud, 249.
Rider, the queer, the non-white, and the under-privileged are re-lost. This is not simply a theoretical loss, however; the presence of the PGR at military funeral protests performs an appropriation of the lives and achievements of service men and women of color into their vision of the nation which celebrates white masculinity.

**Conclusion**

The Marine Corps motto, *semper fidelis*, Latin for “always faithful,” demands that Marines stay faithful “to each other, to the Corps and to country.” This language is strikingly reminiscent of the bonds of marriage, which also demand fidelity “in sickness and health, for better and for worse… til death do us part.” I find the queer structuring of military intimacy, one that is shrouded in (hyper/in)visibility through performances of homosociality, masculinity, and nationalism, particularly valuable in pointing out the ways that the military, as the embodiment of patriarchal, colonial structures, is in fact reliant upon queer structures that it constantly needs to denounce, repress, and/or call by another name. Thus to assertions that queer structures operate as a carefully constructed opposition to the normative that drives war machines, I offer that there’s a way that “queer” is too part of the operations of war machines.

The visibility of fallen US soldiers signifies the emotional heart of the project of war. Though the recruiting of military personnel is not a massacre or organized social slaughter on the level at which Mbembe talks about necropolitics, there’s a serious disjunction between the make-up of the US military and the representations of those who stand for it in representations of military funerals. All of the fallen Marines and their families who serve as the subject of the article “Final Salute” are white. In the book, one fallen Marine is a Lakota Sioux, and the descriptions of his funeral and posthumous homecoming are focused on the ethnic difference found at his funeral. Sheeler justifies the inclusion of this particular story by noting that the Lakota Sioux are the ethnic group with the highest percentage of its population serving in the armed forces. However, much is missing by leaving out the many other cultures and ethnicities that comprise the military and Marine Corps. Secondly, there’s very little discussion of class within Sheeler’s analysis. Reading between the lines, one can see that the bulk of the families of the war dead included in Sheeler’s book and article are socio-economically stable; Cathey, for instance, comes from a certain amount of economic privilege, as illustrated by his wife Katherine’s laptop in figure 10. Sheeler never mentions whether or not class factors into the each man’s decision to enlist in the Marines. Another glaring omission is the absence of a case following the death of a female soldier. Though Sheeler interviews one or two female soldiers who play a role in some of the death care, there’s no coverage of a military funeral for a fallen woman soldier. Lastly, all of the soldiers Sheeler discusses have traditional families awaiting their return home. There’s no mention of a soldier without a family, wife, or fiancée, thus painting a specific picture of the American

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256 Achille Mbembe, “Necropolitics.”
family. In leaving all of these factors unexplored, Sheeler paints a picture in which the return journeys of all soldiers are eerily similar, from weeping gold star mothers and stoic dads to pregnant war widows. Thus, if one was to glean an image of the quintessential fallen soldier from Sheeler’s iconic work, that soldier is a young, white, heterosexual, middle-class man – the all-American hero icon who serves as the symbolic hypervisible face of the war machine, despite the actual make up of the US military forces, the labor and lives lost that literally perform the warfare.

The carefully scripted military funerals cultivate the American hero icon which operates as a way to manage the lives and deaths of Americans lost during the war in order to perpetuate the war itself. The war dead are used not only to propagate the war machine but also to uphold the image of the US nation and US citizenship – this is in stark contrast to those who are imagined to be the enemy. The American hero exists in opposition to the terrorist, the enemy, but also to the ways non-normative bodies are being used to carry out the practices of war in a dangerous nostalgia and rhetoric of Revolutionary War values: liberty and freedom at any cost. Instrumental to the cycle of war death and the surrogations it engenders is the spotlighting of the next of kin/nuclear family. This spotlighting renders (hyper/in)visible the queer affect and queer kinship through which the military itself operates.

Ultimately, the successful performance of a military funeral transforms the military corpse from the excess of war into the very justification for that war. The individual corpse was once a member of this larger Corps, itself a living body of people and relationships that act as one. Each unit, a smaller body within the larger body is an entity described in familial, kinship terms: a brotherhood. I’ve argued for an understanding of this brotherhood as a queer system – a network of same-sex care, intimacy, and affection. These queer practices tug at the iconizing of the fallen, as the deep care between soldiers is both that which creates the unity of the Corps as well as that which potentially disrupts it. This both/and structure speaks to what’s queer about military funerals: the seeds of exposing and disrupting the norms military funerals create are part of the practices themselves.

In Final Salute, the location of queerness is in this very brotherhood, the Marine Corps. The Corps protects its own and mourns the loss of its members, behaving like a family and drawing upon its own male-centered lineage, stretching back to the beginnings of the US military. This is evident in way the military performs its own mortuary care-work, as well as through the foundation of specialized military cemeteries. From Final Salute: “It’s like a little family,’ Mrs. [Terry] Cooper [mother of the deceased Marine Lance Corporal Thomas Slocum] said of the Marines buried near each

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257 The term “Gold Star” refers to a woman whose son has been lost at war. Beginning in World War I, families would place a blue star in their windows as a public marker that they had a son in the military. When news reached the family that their son had been killed, they would exchange the silver star for a gold star, once again a signal to the community at large. See Kurt G. Piehler “The War Dead and the Gold Star: American Commemoration of the First World War.” In Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity. Ed. John R. Gillis. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1996.
other. ‘They’re all there together…”  

By containing its own set of rituals of meaning, and separate practices and codes, the military corps sets itself apart from civilians and normative kinship structures: a queer family. Even beyond death, this family continues to care for its own – disseminating stories and memories to the generations the institution recruits. The queerness of the military Corps operates in (hyper/in)visibility – so present and obvious that its meaning becomes illegible and unrecognizable as such. This (hyper/in)visibility protects the queer military family, even as “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” is a prominent feature of this queerly functioning institution. It is (hyper/in)visibility that makes these two seemingly opposed practices align, transformed from oxymoron to business as usual.

Diametrically opposing “queer” to institution, structure, and conservative movements greatly limits our ability to unravel, understand, and ultimately critique and change institutional power dynamics. The institution of the US military relies upon queerness, but as a simultaneously upheld and disavowed structure. Queerness is not just the undoing of patriarchal power hierarchies, but is also the structures through which patriarchy itself operates – hypervisibly, invisibly, but especially (hyper/in)visibly. The conundrum of the (hyper/in)visible and grappling with its tendencies to be both the site of disparity as well as the location of resistance is an essential task, made evident through understanding the ways that kinship, care-taking, and the psychic life are “queered” in US military funerals.

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Chapter Four
“The Heartbeats of the Past with the Pulse of the Present”:
New York’s African Burial Ground

While digging a foundation for a brand new government building, a state appointed archaeological team unearthed 419 human remains. These were the bones of enslaved and free Africans from New York’s colonial days. The General Services Administration of the US Government (henceforth the GSA) found themselves excavating one of today’s most important archaeological sites: one corner of an historic seven acre necropolis formerly known as the Negro’s Burial Ground. Renamed upon its rediscovery in 1992, the African Burial Ground served as the final resting place for hundreds of enslaved and free Africans from 1690-1790. The mistreatment of these remains by the GSA served as a catalyst for the gathering of African-Americans and their allies both in New York and around the world, who fought tirelessly for over a decade to ensure that the remains of their cultural ancestors would be treated with dignity and respect. Through the work of this descendant community, a term to which I’ll examine in detail momentarily, a portion of the original African Burial Ground was secured as a national historic landmark.259 The African Burial Ground, is currently managed by the National Park Services, and is home to a memorial designed by competition winner Rodney Leon, which was completed in 2005. Fig 14 The lobby of the new government building, the Ted Weiss Federal Building, contains an exhibition of art works in honor of the site and also hosts a museum and interpretation center, which was completed at the end of February 2010. In October 2003, the remains, which had been sent to Washington DC for study by an all-black anthropological team at Howard University, were reinterred at the Burial Ground site. The remains took a symbolic, multi-sited, multi-day journey, culminating in a twenty-four hour vigil and funeral ceremony.260

As part of the plan to memorialize the newly re-discovered African Burial Ground, the GSA agreed to devote a portion of the lobby of the Ted Weiss Federal Building to the site. Additionally, the GSA commissioned artworks in honor of the burial ground and the remains discovered there, in the tradition of their Art-in-Architecture Program.261 In accordance to the Art-in-Architecture Program, one percent of the moneys devoted to the construction of a federal building are allocated for the creation and installation of art work by great American artists. The GSA maintains a database of


260 The exhumed remains were first brought to Howard in Washington DC as part of a multi-day, multi-stop ceremony, culminating in the welcoming of the remains on November 5, 1993. This welcoming, entitled “The Ties That Bind” featured both an academic symposium as well as a spiritual celebration. Frohne, 76-77

eligible artists, set apart by their credentials and output. For every federal office building, a committee is formed to select artists who are then commissioned to create art work for the specific building, in collaboration with the building’s architects. At the African Burial Ground, five artists and three works were commissioned: Clyde Lynds; Roger Brown; and Houston Conwill, Joseph DePace, and Estella Majozo Conwill. Later, Barbara Chase Riboud and Tomei Arai and Frank Bender were commissioned through a second search. Their contributions, ranging from sculpture and architecture to two-dimensional forms, now hang in the Ted Weiss Federal Building lobby or are installed in the immediate vicinity. While most of the works speak directly to issues of diaspora, kinship, and/or legacies of slavery, a mosaic by white, gay artist Roger Brown interpreted the themes of the African Burial Ground slightly differently: through the lens of HIV/AIDS.

Untitled, Brown’s mosaic features rows of geometric skulls, over which are rows of skeletal faces of many races – all victims of HIV/AIDS. Out of the top layer of heads, the skyline of New York City is discernable by three landmark buildings: the Brooklyn Bridge, the Empire State Building and the twin towers of the World Trade Center. Atop the bones of the past are the faces of the present that will soon join the dead. Brown’s piece is striking for its visual appeal – the geometric rows of skulls and faces are somehow beautiful. He describes the narrative of the piece as follows: “My theme uses the gaunt faces of AIDS victims interspersed by race and contrasted to the skulls of the slavery victims found in the Black cemetery. The city rises in the background as if growing out of the heap of human misery left behind.”

For Brown, both those who suffer from AIDS and those who suffered under slavery are part of the same legacy, one which reaches across race and across history. Yet his temporal and thematic jumps create a provocative tension that demands those who engage with this mosaic to consider the disjunctions his piece creates. Brown’s mosaic engages in questions of anonymity, as the rows of faces are largely undifferentiated – not given names or genders, but rather connected through the lattice of bones and flesh. He points to the ways that disparity and inequality in the past has led to mass death (enslaved colonial Africans) in ways that are related to the mass death caused by the ravishes of AIDS and the lack of resources to certain communities. Sutured together from broken fragments of tile, Brown’s mosaic imagines both the colonial

263 Katz, Pg. 94.
264 These art works are to be distinguished from the memorial itself, designed by contest-winner Rodney Leaon, selected by an entirely separate judicial committee.
265 The artworks commissioned by the GSA were created by artists from a wide variety of racial, ethnic, and cultural backgrounds; Brown is not alone in being a non-African-American artist whose work is featured at this site.
266 This connection may not be immediately apparent to the viewer, but is clearly intended by the artist as illustrated by his artist statement. Docents mention this meaning on their tours.
Africans (enslaved and free) buried in the African Burial Ground and AIDS victims as falling through the cracks – and represented through a productive re-organizing of these cracks to create a narrative about the nature of death, difference, and disparity.

Brown’s viewpoint is a controversial one. For some New Yorkers, Brown’s piece detracts from the purpose of the artwork commissioned for the African Burial Ground. While the other pieces stick close to African origins and historical narratives, Brown shifts the focus – calling for mourning and memorialization as a multi-sited process which engages intersections of identity. This is evident not only through his linking of slavery to the AIDS crisis, but also through the diversity of skin tones reflected in the mosaic. In her dissertation on the African Burial Ground, art historian Andrea Frohne notes that “there are disturbed New Yorkers who have complained about this piece because of its focus on AIDS sufferers in a space that ‘should’ only be honoring the African Burial Ground. Critics also suggest that Brown brought his own agenda into that of another.” Brown’s piece forces the multiple communities it intersects to examine what it means to honor the African Burial Ground. The tensions raised by Brown’s mosaic and the anxieties it invokes inspire the following questions: to what extent is the African Burial Ground a site “about race?” and does this “about race”ness automatically make it not about sexuality? Does Roger Brown’s position as a white gay artist mean that his invocation of the AIDS crisis is always already imposing a “gay” agenda, which is always already white?

Like Roger Brown’s mosaic, the 2003 reinternment ceremony negotiates both normative and queer practices of descendancy (or ancestry) and temporality (or time). While the African Burial Ground pays homage to normative temporal and ancestral modes, its investments and politics are largely queer ones. The rhetoric of descendancy, genealogy, ancestry, and home provide compelling urgency for the large-scale memorialization of the African Burial Ground. In doing so, the project of the African Burial Ground is not only to frame African-Americans as the descendant community of the African Burial Ground (although this is arguably their primary concern), but also all Americans. By framing the legacies of history as the concern of every US citizen, the African Burial Ground can ensure its perpetuation as a site of learning, healing, and reparation. Importantly, the African Burial Ground can perform an intervention onto categories of family and descendancy that have long been the sites of discrimination and inequity for African-Americans. However, in order to do this, the reinternment ceremonies also perpetuate the normative discourses of family, home, and belonging.

Queer analysis and theory enter the picture at a number of junctures. The tension of perpetuating norms in order to trouble them, or the unavoidable, undeniable relationship of the radical to the conservative, is a central tenet of queer theoretical project of the dissertation. Perhaps more importantly, however, are the meta-issues of intersectionality which the site and its relationship to queerness bring to the fore. First, an important reminder that making naturalized notions of descendancy and genealogy strange is not the sole purview of queer theory and LGBT studies. With this recognition comes an important recognition that black queer studies (or queer black studies) does not

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268 Frohne, 266.
only exist in the bodies of black queers, but in the critique of institutions and discourses that set the stage for the onset and perpetuation of social inequalities. Secondly, this site provides an opportunity for critical reflection on recent debates about the validity of intersectionality as a theoretical tool for feminism, queer, and queer of color inquiry. Eve Sedgwick signals the start of this move in *Touching Feeling*, when she articulates queer performativity as consolidating queer identity under the affect of shame, discussed in the first chapter. Jasbir Puar takes this notion a step further in the conclusion to *Terrorist Assemblages*, in which she deems intersectionality as structurally problematic for reifying the categories it seeks to undo (i.e. in listing out the different intersectional aspects of identity, one is claiming that the individual identity categories exist distinctly). She too turns to affect, through Deleuze’s notion of the assemblage, in order to avoid this conundrum. This move seems to me to perform an embarrassed and defensive denial of LGBT subjects who fit into what Puar and Duggan label as “homonormative,” side-stepping the issue of the interrelation between nationalist project and queer projects even while enumerating this relationship. Additionally, it assumes that affects are felt similarly and equally across all other identity categorizations, that “shame” has clear or obvious limits. Queering descendancy through the practice of descendant communities, which I read into the funeral practices of the African-Burial Ground, can provide another alternative to the question of the post-queer, or the idea that LGBT subjects are in fact less and less “queer” to normative America than ever. I begin by examining the theoretical potential of the concept of descendant communities, provide a brief history of segregated burial and the colonial African Burial Ground, and perform an extended reading of the 2003 reinternment ceremony, placing weight on articulations of home, ancestry, and belonging. Ultimately, the West African symbol of sankofa, in conjunction with the notion of a descendant community most fully articulates the type of queerness of ancestry and temporality needed to maintain the African Burial Ground site within our contemporary moment.

**Descendant Communities**

“Community” in this chapter, refers to one of a number of distinct groups operating on different scales. There’s the community of the United States, the imagined community that occupies the national imaginary as the “norm.” The actions of the General Services Administration (GSA) position them as a community which operates metonymically as the United States government. These groups (the US and the GSA) are positioned as the foil to the third broad community: the people invested in the preservation and memorialization of the African Burial Ground. The affiliations created by an interest in what happens to the site of the Burial Ground and the human remains unearthed there forge a diverse community connected through affective ties and ethical bonds invested in presenting history, truth, and memory within the context of (African-)American racial formations. Its members are primarily African-Americans and largely New York-based, but contain members whose racial background and/or geopolitical location varies from this majority. As mentioned previously, what draws this particular community together are shared affective ties and personal stakes in the ethics of historical representation and public memory, particularly surrounding people of the African
diaspora and the history of New York and the United States. Though we might most
easily call this a commemorative community, the communities engaged in
commemorating the African Burial Ground are transformed, through their
commemorative acts, into a descendant community.

The archeological term “descendant community,” refers to people whose
ancestors engaged with the site in question during their lifetime. For instance, the
descendant community of the historic home of Louisa May Alcott would be the
biological descendants of the Alcotts. Broadening this definition, archaeologists Chip
Colwell-Chanthaphonh, and T. J. Ferguson define a descendant community as “a self-
defined group of people in the present that link themselves – socially, politically,
economically – to a group of people in the past.” This definition troubles a privileging
of biological descendancy, instead highlighting the ways performance creates genealogy.
This is incredibly useful for the site of the African Burial Ground, given the uncertainty
that surrounds African American genealogical practices.

Very few records were kept regarding where slaves originated, and due to black
bodies operating as tradable commodities within American society. Biological family
units were not often kept together. As a result, African-Americans often are unable to
trace their family histories back to any specific country or even region of origin, other
than a mythologized “Africa.” This has operated as a source of anxiety in our
biologically-driven contemporary society. Spawning from this dearth of information on
specific bloodlines and points of origin, the emergence of Roots and the roots-seeking
craze that followed marks our current moment. Alex Haley’s epic novel (1976), and later
television mini-series Roots (1977), traces Haley’s own lineage through his grandparents
to his original African ancestors. Haley’s ability to know his biological roots was very
unusual and inspiring. Roots generated an obsession with genetics and DNA and the
desire on the part of African-Americans to trace their roots and family histories
biologically and enter into the discourse of family trees. The presence of a wide number
of popular and academic books, films, and projects attest to the centrality of this
movement in the contemporary American landscape, including Henry Louis Gates’
African American Lives, and numerous news accounts of the ancestry of President Barack
Obama and his wife Michelle, and a wide variety of businesses offering full genetic
services for using science to discover one’s ancestry. The ability to achieve a
completely comprehensive and accurate picture of the genetic past of many African-
Americans is, in actuality, impossible. The movements of Africans in colonial times
were not well tracked, if they were tracked at all. Tracing these movements is rather, in

269 Colwell-Chanthaphonh, C., and T. J. Ferguson. Eds. Collaboration in Archaeological Practice:
Swarns, Rachel L. and Jodi Kantor, “In First Lady’s Roots: A Complex Path From Slavery.” New York
fact, a performance of personal history and the building of a community linked by an imagined past (imagined not because it didn’t happen, but imagined to the extent to which any of these services could ever recreate a true rendering of historical “fact.”) This movement, because of its insistence on biological truth and genetics along heteronormative lines, maintains heterosexual reproduction and lineage as the true markers of family and of self-identification.

Tracing one’s origins through the miracles of science, especially when presented as/alongside an epic narrative (such as Haley’s), is seductive. Yet we must interrogate the ways these narratives idealize and uphold normative kinship values and biological/hetero structures. Relying upon and upholding bloodlines and biological kinship (and, obliquely, heterosexual reproduction) this type of roots-seeking narrative both privileges and upholds highly Western and normative understandings of what constitutes family and genealogy. While the African Burial Ground and the contemporary memorial and reinterment support roots-seeking narratives, they present not only an unconventional history, but also propose alternative understandings of kinship – towards affective community as kin, the discourse of ancestors based on shared historical experience rather than genetically proven biological relations, and a pan-African aesthetic and set of spiritual practices. Furthermore, de-centering biology from the question of ancestry opens the doors to widening a conception of descendency that can begin the process of rewriting the past, and raising the stakes for looking back at the past for the present/future.

The West African concept of *sankofa*, symbolized both by a heart as well as a backwards looking bird are the central symbols of the African Burial Ground. *Fig 15 and 16* Sankofa represents the concept of looking to the past in order to look to the present. The past, its losses and triumphs, is an inalienable part of contemporary experience. One doesn’t simply choose to look back, but rather is compelled – by stories (both in the form

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271 “Reassessing the ‘Sankofa Symbol’ in New York’s African Burial Ground,” written by Dr. Erik Seeman recently shook up the scholarship on Sankofa by suggesting that the heart-shaped symbol was most likely to not be a sankofa symbol, but rather adopted from Anglo-American culture. Seeman’s claims were influential enough to be remarked upon by the New York Times in its January 26 2010 article “Coffin’s Emblem Defies Certainty,” in which they solicited opinions on Seeman’s findings from a number of prominent scholars. The Times article elaborates on the great expense of engraving this particular symbol in the memorial and the adaptation of this symbol as the icon for the African Burial Ground itself, asking these scholars to comment upon the implications of Seeman’s claim. While no one dismisses Seeman’s claim – in fact National Park Services at the African Burial Ground has changed its literature on the sankofa in order to reflect the uncertainty of its origins – Dr. Michael Gomez is quoted as suggesting that Seeman’s controversial work is part of a movement to question ties between Africa and the Diaspora. Despite the uncertain origins, this symbol continues to hold symbolic import, and is useful in describing the operation of temporality in a manner that opposes normative constructions of time. Rather than get caught up in a debate over precision of origins (a fascinating theoretical struggle in light of the contentious nature of tracing African roots generally speaking!), I think it’s more interesting and important to focus on the hybrid nature of any African cultural formations within the United States as always already intimately compromised and negotiated by the conditions of forced migration and retribalization, as I discuss later on in this chapter. Reclaiming the heart-shaped symbol as sankofa in contemporary times holds equal weight to the manufacture/reappropriation of this symbol in colonial times. As the concept which sankofa represents would suggest, it is less about a static historical moment or truth but rather the ways the meaning of this particular icon has shifted throughout history and its contemporary valiances in that vein.
of the written word as well as embodied practice: storytelling, dance, music, and drama), through ritual, and, much less romantically through the reiteration of experience: racism and discrimination played out across generations. Sankofa in many ways compels this sort of reading of a descendant community, in which all people are compelled to look back, whether one’s identity position one as a maker or victim of history.

A brief history

Historical accounts differ on the precise origins and circumstances of the African Burial Ground. It’s possible that blacks and whites were originally buried in proximity at the Trinity Church graveyard until 1697, when Trinity Church made the following proclamation:

Ordered, that after the expiration of four weeks from the date hereof no Negroes be buried within the founds and limits of the church yard of Trinity Church, that is to say, in the rear of the present burying place and that any person or negro whatsoever do presume after the term above limited to break up any ground for the burying of his negro, as they will answer it at their peril.272

This pronouncement demonstrates the development of a system of slavery that relies upon racialization, wherein the category of “negro” is distinct from the category of person. Furthermore, that person is understood to have ownership of the “negro” as “his” to bury as he pleases.273 The space of the church yard becomes thus preserved for “people” in a manner unprecedented for Trinity Church. Although Trinity’s racial politics during the colonial period illustrate growing racism and xenophobia, nearly 300 years later it is at Trinity Church that a multicultural group of activists fighting for the preservation of the African Burial Ground first gathered to launch their defensive actions – marking the genesis of this contemporary descendant community.274

The pronouncements of Trinity Church limiting who could be buried in its graveyard performed a speech act that defined citizenship and humanity for the growing British colony. This distinction between “negroes” and “people” creates a “need” for segregated burial space distinct from that of the colonial Christians. In 1697, New York had been a British colony for just over thirty years and was beginning to establish an identity as a growing commercial port and economic center for the American arm of the triangle trade that dominated transatlantic colonization and slavery. Burial rituals, and the delimiting of who is buried where and how, are crucial performances of status, belonging, and personhood. By establishing traditions that mirrored European cultural and religious traditions, the budding colony performed its cultural affiliations and alignment with European power. An essential aspect of this performance involved the creation of its European population in binary opposition to its non-European population. Segregation, as well as distinguishing African bodies and practices as the site of

273 The gendering of “person” is also relevant, illustrating gender divisions in colonial New Amsterdam, where white women were also without the full rights of citizenship, and outside the scope of national normativity, to a degree.
274 Frohne, 189.
inalienable foreignness and difference, transformed this ideological foundation into embodied practices and behaviors.

In 1739, David Humphreys, while conducting a review of the New York branch of the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), a missionary organization from the Church of England, reported:

[T]he Negroes...were buried by those of their owne country or Complexion in the common field, without any Christian office; perhaps some ridiculous Heathen rites were performed at the Grave by some of their owne people. No notice was given of their being sick, that they might be visited, on the contrary, frequent discourses were made in Conversation that they had no souls and perished as the Beasts.275

Humphreys’s report details the link between race, nationality (place of origin), religion, and burial practices. He performs a comparison between Christianity as juxtaposed with African rites and rituals, described as “ridiculous” and “Heathen.” While the first adjective devalues the significance of the ceremonies, the second sets up African religious cosmology as in direct opposition to Western values. Furthermore, Humphreys reports ethnographic data that further pushes the classification of “Negroes” as not only distinct in nationality but also in terms of humanity. Believed to be without souls, the death of enslaved Africans was understood to be equivalent to the death of “Beasts.” Humphreys appears to be open to the possibility that the black population could desire to be “visited” (presumably by the Church for some version of last rites), but is persuaded by the public (the white colonists – it appears Humphreys did not engage in Conversations with the black population!) otherwise. Thus in his report, Humphreys effectively dismisses the burial practices of enslaved Africans as outside of the concern of the British and the Church, ultimately corroborating and constructing the beliefs made evident through his Conversations.

Similarly, the authors of the manual for the Corporation of New York City (dated 1841-1870) describe the burial practices of the black population as “retaining their native superstitions and burial customs, among which was that of burying by night, with various mummeries and outcries.”276 The dismissive terms and tone with which African burial practices are discussed carries throughout the time the African Burial Ground was an active cemetery, from as early as the 1620s to 1794. These descriptions remove the African population from conceptions of “normal” ethics, morals, and ideologies of the fledgling US nation.

Though dismissed as simply “superstition” or incomprehensibly foreign, little or no effort was expended on understanding the moral and ideological code expressed


through African(-American) burial practices. In fact, looking closely at the burial practices of the African Burial Ground reveals a distinct cosmology with roots in Africa that describes deep-seated beliefs about the nature of life and death. This network of belief attempted to make sense of the conditions in which people of African descent found themselves as part of this new national context.\textsuperscript{277} Although this cosmology and attendant practices were initially ignored by the authorities (both slave masters as well as government officials), or looked upon simply as bizarre and incomprehensible, it became quickly clear, especially as power shifted from the Dutch to the British, that distinctive burial rights were also a question of power and control and could thus be manipulated to reinforce hierarchy and status.

By segregating the dead, white European colonists established their cemeteries as primary sites for race-specific gathering and the creation of culture and values. Inadvertently, they granted the colony’s African inhabitants the same type of space in the African Burial Ground. Though Trinity Church’s regulations seem to suggest that slaveholders took charge of the corpses of deceased slaves, the presence of the African Burial Ground and evidence of burial practices there suggests otherwise. The Burial Ground operated as a hub of the colonial African-American community, and the practice of burial allowed for this community to share, preserve, and adapt African customs and rituals. In the eyes of the white colonial population, the land of the African Burial Ground, “though within convenient distance from the city, […] was unattractive and desolate.”\textsuperscript{278} Though such so-called wasteland was considered good only for “the disposal of toxic waste and the burial of outsiders, such as paupers, criminals, and slaves,”\textsuperscript{279} for the African population (both free and enslaved), the African Burial Ground was not only a sacred site but also a hotbed of cultural exchange and conservation. Frohne suggests that the approximately seven acres of the cemetery were specifically \textit{chosen} by the black population, valued for its proximity to water (of key importance for a variety of African spiritual practices) and distance from European surveillance.\textsuperscript{280} It was this distance from European scrutiny that allowed for the African Burial Ground to become a place of cultural importance and innovation.

The existence of the African Burial Ground itself and the practice and exchange of African customs and rituals there catalyzed the formation of a distinct African cultural presence in New York City. As Foote writes,

\begin{quote}
The city’s black population performed their own communal burial rituals and in doing so forged a distinct moral community set apart from the city’s Christian settler community. Importantly, the racially segregated cemetery became an incubator for the retribalization of diverse African peoples who were brought together by the externally imposed and shared experience of forced migration and enslavement in a foreign land.\textsuperscript{281}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{277} Frohne’s dissertation performs a detailed accounting of specific funeral traditions and their West African origins, which I won’t repeat here.
\textsuperscript{278} Valentine, et al., 567.
\textsuperscript{279} Foote, 141
\textsuperscript{280} Frohne, 154.
\textsuperscript{281} Foote, 141.
Burial practices were created out of a wide range of African funereal traditions (as diverse as the many geographies and tribal affiliations of the Africans who were brought to New York) and practiced communally. The segregation of the dead ultimately created the conditions under which a distinct African-American culture was able to germinate. Under British rule, there was a constant influx of newly imported slaves from Africa, whose added presence re-Africanized the developing African-American burial traditions. It is for this reason that Foote calls colonial New York “closer to African cultures than the U.S. black populations that existed after 1807.”

Many colonial African funeral rituals participated in a network of symbolism that spelled out the widely held belief among enslaved Africans that death brought about a return to Africa. The heart shaped “sankofa” symbol was found on a coffin uncovered at the Burial Ground, linking the customs practiced there directly to Ghana and the Ivory Coast. Additionally, the dead were adorned with a string of “blue, green, and white glass beads,” representative of water, to assist them in their long journey home. Furthermore there is evidence of the presence of oyster and clam shells adorning the corpses. The shells are thought to have served as tokens, either for admittance to the afterlife or to aid in the soul’s travel across the water back to Africa. Other aspects of burial which signified this belief included the orientation of the corpse – east/west direction with the head in the west so that the dead would be oriented east-ward towards Africa. Funeral rites were held at night. This practice is both a vestige from African traditions as well as a necessity given the demands placed on enslaved Africans to work during daylight hours. Furthermore, holding funerals at night contributed to the escape from surveillance that characterized the African Burial Ground. Lastly, records indicate that dancing and music were a central part of the colonial African funeral practices: “some settlers complained that feverish drumming and chanting emanated from the Negro Burial Ground late into the night.”

The creation of these distinct burial practices forged a new community among the African who were forcibly brought to the colonies, bound by the merging of a number of distinct African cultural ideologies. This was a community based not only on looking

282 Foote, 142.
286 Frohne, 218
287 Frohne, 205. Also “The African Burial Ground: Return to the Past to Build the Future.”
288 Foote, 142. Dr. Robert Swan, in his book New Amsterdam Gehenna: Segregated Death in New York City 1680-1801. (Brooklyn, NY: Noir Verite Press, 2006) believes that the African burial practices also contained evidence of Christian influences, both from the American colonial presence/influence as well as colonial influences found in Africa, where part of the colonizing mission was the “civilizing” and conversion of “heathens.” This kind of exchange often brought about indigenized interpretations of doctrine and practice that were their own thing altogether.
back towards one’s roots or homeland, but also on creating new systems which could honor that past and guarantee a post-mortem return. Though contemporary scholars of race and the African Diaspora now struggle to remind Americans that African traditions are diverse and not homogenous, the performances carried out in the funeral practices at the African Burial Ground forged a new people linked by ethnic commonalities, forged into a new set of practices. The creating of new traditions within a new context wove together complete strangers, linking them through shared conditions, relative cultural context, and a desire to preserve familiar customs. These colonial African funeral practices constitute a performative making of family. In the face of chattel slavery, which made slavery inheritable by blood but denied the sanctity of these biological links by separating parents and children, this type of family runs counter to the heteronormative structures that guide modern day roots seeking based on the idea of a discernable biological “Truth” that would trump cultural practice. These are family practices which were born outside of contemporary notions of heteronuclear definitions and demands that dominate cultural discourse today.

The 2003 Reinternment: Performing Community, Family, and Homecoming

The General Service Administration (GSA)’s contract archaeologists, the Metropolitan Forensic Anthropology Team (MFAT, based out of New York’s Lehman College) began to pull bones from the earth below the federal construction site at Foley Square in the summer of 1991. Eager to continue to the process of building, these findings were kept quiet until October 1991, when the first official press conference and announcement about the nature of the discovery was announced. Pressure from the descendant communities, which formed in light of this discovery, led to over a decade of struggle between these advocates for the African Burial Ground and the GSA. There was a great deal of distrust of the GSA, as each concession the GSA made to the African Burial Ground was won only after great struggle. Lead by Dr. Michael Blakeley, descendant communities fought for an archiological team composed primarily of African American anthropologists and archaeologists. The remains were transferred from the custody of MFAT in New York to the Howard University lab in Washington DC, where Blakeley’s archaeological team conducted and led anthropologic investigations. Due to budget concerns, it was nearly ten years before the remains had been fully researched and analyzed. Under the leadership of Howard Dodson of the Schomberg Center for Research in Black Culture, and funded by the GSA, a multi-sited reinternment ceremony was planned. In 2003, the remains were brought back to New York City in a five-day ceremony.

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289 By employing the term family, I am in no way implying a harmonious, loving idealized/utopic unity. Families are complicated, seldom simple and, for my purposes, defined by acts of care, be it emotional, physical, or material.


291 The question of who would plan this high-stakes, high-profile event was a complicated one; this position changed hangs many times, see Frohne. Ultimately Howard Dodson led the event planning.
From the moment bones were first pulled from the earth, numerous memorial ceremonies took place at the African Burial Ground, some scripted and official, other impromptu and unofficial. Once the news got out to the public at large, tributes, in the form of messages, fruit, and flowers, to name a few, were left just outside of the chain-link fence that surrounded the excavation site. These tributes were often cleared away, most likely by the GSA or their team, within twenty-four hours, which Frohne attributes to misunderstandings of, as well as resistance to, African-based practices of remembering the dead. The practice of leaving offerings and tributes as an act of belonging – I belong to this history and it belongs to me - re-inaugurated a process of community building. In response to the uncovering of the African Burial Ground, a number of groups were formed of people, primarily from New York but also throughout the US and Africa, who were invested in the fate of both the site and the remains discovered there. As discussed earlier, I understand these groups as descendant communities. A few of these groups were official organizations, such as the Office of Public Education and Interpretation of the African Burial Ground (OPEI), headed by Dr. Sherrill Wilson. Others, like The Committee of Descendants of the Afrikan Burial Ground, were grassroots organizations who used their influence to highlight injustices and to garner fair treatment. Although there were many, many different opinions about what the finding of these remains meant and how they should be handled, all involved in the struggle shared the belief that the remains should be, in some way, honored, and that their presence demanded engagement. The construction site became symbolic both of an historical community (the Africans, enslaved and free, of colonial days) and these new communities, who understood themselves in relation to the historical community. These communities concentrated on the issue of not only preserving the space and the remains uncovered there, but also for recovering the site in the name of the past, and its implications for the present and future. Thus the African Burial Ground was once more operating as a place of cultural exchange and dialogue, a conversation that stretches over 300 years across time and culture, leading to grassroots activism and the beginnings of a movement to protect and honor the Burial Ground and those interred there.

This descendant community brings the concept of sankofa into play in the contemporary politics of the African Burial Ground. Before the uncovering of the African Burial Ground in 1991, distinguishing between the enslaved and free colonial Africans and today’s African-Americans in New York City is clear cut. However, the rediscovery facilitates temporal dialogue between the past and the present, historical communities and contemporary ones. The contentions conversation between the past and the present (in the ways that the past disrupts the tidy notions developed contemporaneously to explain away and contain the past) provide new pathways for exchange and conversation. Similar to the ways that newly arrived Africans in the colonial era re-Africanized the burgeoning African-American funeral practices at the African Burial Ground, the uncovering of the African Burial Ground and its eruption of the past into the present sparked new flows of information, spiritual practices, and

292 Frohne, 284.
293 Frohne, 284.
294 See Frohne.
emotional/familial bonds. The icon of sankofa operates as the symbolic container for these types of trans-temporal dialogues.

As the remains began to be removed and excavated, there were many questions and disagreements from different factions throughout the community as to whether or not the remains should be studied and, if so, how. Throughout, however, there was unified agreement on one thing: that the remains should be honored in an effort to right and re-write the past. When the remains were uncovered, the prevalent narrative regarding slavery in the US located this practice in the South, understanding the presence of African-Americans in other spaces in the US as the result of Reconstruction and the Great Migration. Slavery and racial inequality were thus kept as a distance from Northern and so-called liberal regions of the US. These geographies were understood as being on the “good” side of history; this left room for avoiding a critical eye on racial inequalities and a skewed view of history. At stake was not only recognizing and integrating a previously unwritten history, but also the task of creating a fitting tribute to the ancestors of an entire people used, mistreated, dehumanized, and rendered invisible/insignificant by mainstream society. These questions were heightened during the reinterment. The remains found at the African Burial Ground were considered ancestors by many members of the African-American community in New York, and also the African Diaspora at large. This genealogical connection illustrates a mode of family making that interacts with, but extends beyond, biology. The journey of the remains during the reinterment allowed for a more diasporic mode of mourning, in which people living along the eastern seaboard could honor the remains of/as ancestors. Rather than relying upon strict lines of inheritance, this conception of family and kinship is based on a common historical legacy and sharing in a present in which genetic lines are not a limiting factor. Ancestry has a diasporic reach, one that demands engagement across multiple sites, times, and cultures. These ceremonies lay bare heteronormative gender and kinship structures which are both reaffirmed and troubled by the ceremonies.

The events began on Tuesday, September 30, 2003, with a tribute ceremony held at the Andrew Rankin Memorial Chapel at Howard University. That evening, the chapel was packed with people who had come to witness the historic send off at the same site they had witnessed the arrival of the remains ten years earlier. Though 419 remains had been uncovered, four were chosen as representatives for this ceremony and the voyages and ceremonies which followed: two children, a boy and a girl, and two adults, a man and a woman. These four remains were interred in individual hand-carved mahogany caskets. The rest of the remains were sent via boat to New York City, to be interred in one of the seven hand-carved Ghanaian crypts, which could hold multiple remains. The four representative remains would later be placed into one of the crypts with the rest of the remains for reburial.

The use of representative bodies and the specifics of the chosen representatives illustrate the complex citations of kinship networks involved in the 2003 reburial. At the most basic level, the four chosen bodies stand in for all possible age and gender combinations: two males and two females, an adult and youth from each sex. In theory, all attending mourners can then identify with at least one of the representative bodies on the level of sharing a gender and age identification. Yet this particular configuration of
two opposite sex adults and two opposite sex children fosters a pointed resemblance to
the nuclear family of the American dream: a husband, wife, and two children. It’s a
curiously anachronistic representation, given the reality of familial kinship experienced
by enslaved Africans, and it effectively renarratizes the past in these terms—imagining a
past with discrete and knowable family units. This plays directly into the narratives
devised as part of the roots-seeking moment. Yet simultaneously these structures are
queered as the bodies being used to create this normative family unit are in fact most
likely unrelated biologically. The piecing together of family from unknowable remains
becomes symbolic of the way kinship networks were constructed during slavery.

The crypts, made of a bright mahogany, were carved with West African symbols
and scenes from villages. Fig 17 Participants in the events of the week were allowed to
actively engage with the caskets by leaving offerings and tracing the designs with their
fingers. Many of these West African designs were incorporated into the permanent
memorial, which now stands at the African Burial Ground site. Fig 18 In order to honor
the roots of those inhabiting the crypts, the coffins came from Ghana, where village
artisans created the receptacles and carved the elaborate designs. Once they arrived at the
African Burial Ground, tropical flowers adorned the crypts, referencing the climate and
atmosphere of an (imagined) African homelandFig 17 Commissioning Ghanaian
artisans to create the crypts and caskets fashions a tangible, traceable diasporic link
between African-Americans and West Africa, but in a way that claims a community
kinship, wherein an entire nation/community at large is involved in the care-labor of
recognizing and honoring the dead.

The first Rites of Return ceremony at Howard University began with the arrival of
the four symbolic caskets, welcomed by a corps of five African drummers in formal
dashikis. Fig 17 The ceremony that followed was designed to pay tribute, honor, and respect
to the remains themselves, a respect which both enslaved and free African in colonial
times was never granted. “‘Even though we can’t call their names, we know them,’ said
Bernard L. Richardson, the dean of the chapel ‘We give thanks for the opportunity to
connect with our past and our future. Oh God,’ he exclaimed, ‘you have made these
bones live again.’”297 The caskets were each blessed with holy water and sacred oils as

295 I say “imagined” not because I wish to imply that enslaved African were not actually from Africa, but
because the idea of what constitutes Africa expressed via the flowers is not representative of an African
reality. (I am, of course, drawing upon Benedict Anderson’s formulation of “imagined communities” in
making this claim). While Africa contains lush tropical jungles and flora, this type of floral display is not
typical of what one might find in any number of West African countries. Nevertheless, this type of floral
offering more readily invokes Africa than more “traditional” (ie Anglo)American flowers (roses, lilies). I
use Benedict Anderson’s formulation of imagined communities: Imagined Communities: Reflections on
stories that had emerged from the research of the Howard anthropologists and archaeologists were recounted, reminding those present of the hardships faced by the inhabitants of the burial ground.

What does it mean to conceive of the bones living again? They live through the stories they tell vis-à-vis forensic anthropology. They live through the efforts of the people who insisted that these studies be done, and memorialization that creates meaning for the survivors. The act of memorialization is an act of raising the dead rather than a concealing of the dead. A traditional funeral attempts to send the dead on their way to the next world, but this set of ceremonies instead attempts a resurrection through its multiple performances of history and the links between the past and present. The theme of bringing the bones back to life is repeated multiple times throughout the ceremonies. Many of the offerings and libations are made for “living” bones, bones that need resources, food, tributes, etc. not bones that are too far gone to “appreciate” or somehow make use of the tributes left.

Dean Richardson’s invocation of living bones makes reference to a theme which not only permeated the 2003 reinterment but also the process of designing the ceremony. In 1993 a special federal steering committee was gathered to advise Congress on how to handle the rediscovery of the African Burial Ground. In their recommendations report, they begin with the spiritual “Dry Bones,” which narrates the prophet Ezekiel’s act of breathing life back into bones, which have arisen. The spiritual states:

Oh the bones were living men.
Some of those bones are my mother’s bones
Come together to rise and shine.
Some of those bones are my father’s bones
And some of those bones are mine.
Some of those bones are my sister’s bones
Come together to rise and shine.
Some of those bones are my brother’s bones
And some of those bones are mine.
Some of those bones going to make me laugh
When they gather together to rise and shine.
Some of those bones going to make me weep
Because some of those bones are mine.298

As in the spiritual, the bones which were uncovered at the African Burial Ground can and indeed do tell stories. Through the forensic work conducted by the team at Howard, the bones have a lot to say about the conditions under which they lived and labored. Blakeley’s team gathered data and evidence about working and health conditions by examining bones and DNA; and these stories are now incorporated into the museum that

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accompanies and interprets the African Burial Ground site. These stories were also recounted throughout the funerals held on route to the Burial Ground.

In the spiritual, the bones are conceived of as intimate members of one’s family. It lists members of a nuclear family: mother, father, brother, sister. This particular kind of family is honored throughout the ceremony; representative remains might well be thought of as analogous to this structure. The spiritual frames the memorialization process. So as the concept of family is expanded via the concept of the ancestors and the retribalization that historically occurred at the site of the burial ground, it is set “straight” again through the invocation of individual kinship units which are modeled to maintain normative American and Christian structures.

From Howard, the four representative caskets traveled up the northern Atlantic coast, stopping along the way in Baltimore (October 1), Wilmington (October 1), Philadelphia (October 2), Newark (October 2), and Jersey City (October 3). From Jersey City, the remains took a quick journey across the water before being reunited with the rest of the remains. There, after an overnight vigil, they would be returned to the earth in a Manhattan ceremony at the African Burial Ground. As mentioned in chapter two, this type of multi-stop funeral is not without precedent, most notably Abraham Lincoln’s 1865 funeral train. However, when used in the past, it was primarily for incredibly famous, wealthy, or notable individuals and was very costly. Additionally, this type of funeral was an attempt to bring together a nation of mourners, to make statements about national belonging as much as to allow multitudes of people to collectively mourn a national icon. Holding this type of funeral event places the colonial enslaved Africans at this level of prominence, and is therefore a political move in claiming social and cultural equality.

From Jersey City, the remains were sent across the waters to New York Harbor. An anonymous author describes:

Early Friday morning a solemn procession began in the shadow of the Statue of Liberty at Liberty State Park in Jersey City, New Jersey. After prayers had been recited, children carried the small wooden box containing the remains of a 4-year-old boy onto a waiting State Police boat bound for New York, the final stop in the century’s long journey for the remains. The other three coffins were loaded onto another boat and both left for New York where another ceremony marked their arrival.  

The journey across the water ended at the Wall Street Pier (Pier 11), where the remains were welcomed via ceremony into the same port where the colonial New York slave market had been located. Approximately 400 people were in attendance, as actors Phylicia Rashad and Delroy Lindo co-hosted an arrival ceremony.  

In addition to the


300 The “casting” of Phylicia Rashad in the role of MC further strengthens ties to the heteronormative nuclear family. Cast as the matriarch, Claire Huxtable, of The Cosby Show, Phylicia represented “the TV mom closest to your own mom in spirit” according to a 2004 Opinion Research Corporation Poll.
pouring of libation, drumming, and prayers, musical tributes from the Boys Choir of Harlem, the Girls Choir of Harlem, the Eli Fountain and International Percussion and the Ebony Brass Ensemble celebrated the return of the remains.

Besides a collection of spiritual leaders and community activists, Michael Bloomberg, mayor of New York City, spoke. His words were reported by *Los Angeles Times*: “‘Once African-Americans of our city were bought and sold on this very spot,’ Bloomberg said. ‘It’s fitting that this is where we are receiving them. As mayor of New York, I welcome them home. May they rest in peace, the peace that they so richly deserve.’”

To be welcomed by the Mayor is an act of respect and honor, affording those welcomed status as premiere citizens. Through his official presence at this moment of homecoming and by delivering a speech of welcome, honor, and respect, Bloomberg positions New York as a bastion of liberal ideals and multicultural values. When Bloomberg makes it clear that the welcome is also a homecoming, he reframes the history of slavery and its contemporary valences. If New York is home, rather than or in addition to Africa, Bloomberg also welcomes home contemporary African-Americans, who have historically not been welcomed into American urban environments.

From the Wall Street Pier, “[h]orse-drawn hearses carr[jed] the four wooden coffins and more than 300 other coffins up Broadway’s famous Canyon of Heroes in Lower Manhattan to their original burial place north of City Hall.” Though carriages are no longer a traditional part of contemporary funeral ceremonies, this gesture not only alludes to the funerals of dignitaries from the past (such as Lincoln himself!) but also represents a significant expense, illustrating that the lives of those buried there are considered respectable and valuable in ways they never were during their lifetimes. Furthermore, the traffic of horse-drawn hearses operates in a much slower, deliberate pace, one which runs directly contrary to the hustle and bustle of contemporary urban life. The remains become the focal point of the spaces and communities they pass through, disrupting the ordinariness of a typical day in the city. This mirrors the function of the African Burial Ground itself. Community activists fought to preserve the land from becoming a federal office building so that it could stand as a memorial to New York’s slave population. Non-“functional” space within the heart of Wall Street performs an ever-present disruption of business as usual drawing attention to the bodies of enslaved African buried below. This attention makes abundantly clear the way contemporary US capital was born from the forced labor of African slaves, refusing the “covering up” of both this history and site.

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A commemorative twenty-hour vigil was held at the African Burial Ground, from 1pm Friday, October 2 through 9am Saturday, October 3.\textsuperscript{304} The remains were to remain “on view” at the site of the African Burial Ground for no less than twenty hours. At that time, the public was invited to see the commemorative artwork which had been commissioned and installed in the lobby of the Foley Office building, while rituals and performances occurred outdoors. Individuals and groups, both religious and secular, were allowed to offer their own tributes. Visitors were encouraged to fill out “Ancestor Cards,” which provided space for personal greetings and messages that would be buried alongside the remains the next morning.\textsuperscript{305} The vigil was open to the general public. Allowing all community members to communicate with the ancestors through participation in the vigil as performers or observers, or by offering communications through Ancestor cards, the New York community was effectively invited to join and become part of the descendant community. Once again the African Burial Ground serves as a site for broadening the category of ancestors and familial history to anyone who might claim it through performative acts, shared experience, and affective ties. Understanding history and kinship beyond biological restrictions allows cross-cultural investment so that anyone might forge a relationship with the site and its history. These performances of mourning, commemoration, and memory are generative, creative, and productive acts, and are the building blocks for rewriting history and ensuring continual community investment and engagement.

In the early afternoon of Saturday October 3, the remains were interred, the culmination of the five days of ceremony. The event, which ran for three hours, was led by Maya Angelou. She began with an invocation: “You may bury me in the bottom of Manhattan. I will rise. My people will get me. I will rise out of the huts of history’s shame.”\textsuperscript{306} Angelou once again invokes the imagery of raising the dead, but she performs an act surrogation, blending the subject position of herself with the ancestors. The ceremony, which contained a wide variety of tributes, ranging from music and dance presentations to readings and speeches, completed the act of placing the disinterred remains back in the ground. Libations were poured by priests who journeyed from Africa alongside local clergy.\textsuperscript{307} Angelou’s present, living self, at the helm of this endeavor, slowly comes to both speak and stand in for the representative remains as they are lowered into the ground. The ceremony itself, however, opens up in order to honor each


of the subject positions represented by the four representative remains. First children are invited to “speak for the children” as the Girl’s Choir of Harlem and the Boy’s Choir of Harlem each sing. A young African-American girl and a young African-American boy were then invited to perform readings in honor of deceased children. The same structure was followed for honoring men and women, providing a direct line of inheritance between the remains and their modern-day descendants. This is another moment within the five day reinterment where heteronormative tropes are both upheld and contested; ultimately, however, this act of surrogation, which as Joseph Roach writes can never quite contain the thing being replaced, is a queer act – in the ways in which it fails, it also opens up connections and emotional flows.

“Red, black, and green flags symbolic of mother Africa dotted the crowd of several thousand people,” Dr. Sherrill Wilson reported in the African Burial Ground’s Update newsletter. “A sea of color brightened overcast skies and an early autumn drizzle as drummers dressed in kente cloth mingled the heartbeats of the past with the pulse of the present. The vibrant ceremony stood in stark contrast to the harsh, short and often brutal lives led by the first African-Americans.”

The beat of drums accompanied the final descent of the crypts into the ground, echoing the colonial African ceremonies performed there over 300 years before.

An estimated 10,000 people came together over the five days of ceremony.

Through rituals from the past infused with colonial and contemporary African customs (evening ceremonies, drums, and libations) and elements of pomp and circumstance associated with contemporary mourning for dignitaries (multiple day, multiple stops, horse-drawn hearses), the funeral ceremonies performatively constructed a descendant community. Not only was there a return to the past, but there was a slow reinvestment in understanding and honoring erased trauma. Of the many slave cemeteries that have been uncovered over the last century, none has received this kind of comprehensive treatment, and certainly the memorial and ceremonial fanfare that has occurred at the African Burial Ground is unique.

The ceremonies were important in the ways that they called upon New Yorkers to become part of the descendant community in a manner that honored African-Americans and their history while calling for a large scale investment in re-writing history and preserving memory.

As a site of continual community engagement, the African Burial Ground and the ceremonies practiced there provide one such radical space of mourning and memory

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Probasco, Mat. “Caribbean burial ground may shed light on slaves; Experts want to unearth skeletons to learn about life in Danish colony” Los Angeles Times Los Angeles, CA. November 19, 2006. Pg. A.30.
granting stature and significance to lives and memories considered expendable. Just as the African Burial Ground operated as a crucial community hub, it once more contains the potential to operate as a center for inventing and resurrecting cultural practices. In doing so, it retains a commitment to continually fighting against the notion that African American lives are expendable, a condition that has, unfortunately, not disappeared with the ending of legalized slavery. Activities and practices which can link intersecting communities and instill a sense of investment in those who participate can function against the notion of expendability by encouraging investment from the greater US and New York as members of a descendant community. Each October, the African Burial Ground hosts memorial events to recognize the anniversary of the interment, which generally feature events oriented towards children and families. Additionally, the African Burial Ground is an education center, offering tours not only to local schools, but also to tourists and other interested parties, augmented with the completion of the interpretation center (February 2010). The African Burial Ground is once more a community space, and the reinterment has created an annual event through which community can gather and renew its connections, to mourn and celebrate collective history. Furthermore, the space continually redefines the community: which organizations host events at the site? Who shows up to the open houses held to discuss the future of the site? The African Burial Ground both forms and leaves room for the reinterpretation of a descendant community made up of New Yorkers with an investment in the ancestors interred there and the history they represent. This community is not homogenous but rather comprised of competing viewpoints and opinions as to how the community is best represented and served. This sense of debate is crucial to the community’s operations, and keeps it vibrant.

**Concluding Thoughts**

The remains found at the African Burial Ground were considered ancestors by many members of the African-American community in New York, and also the African Diaspora at large. This genealogical connection illustrates a mode of family making that interacts with, but extends beyond, biology. The journey of the remains during the reinterment allowed for a more diasporic mode of mourning, in which people living along the eastern seaboard could honor the remains of ancestors. Rather than relying upon strict lines of inheritance, this conception of family and kinship is based on a common historical legacy and sharing in a present in which genetic lines are not a limiting factor. Ancestry has a diasporic reach, one that demands engagement across multiple sites, times, and cultures. By configuring those whose bodies were uncovered as the ancestors of all African-Americans, on one level, and as crucial contributors to our country’s inheritance at large, a new legacy and a new genealogy is formed. Connecting to or understanding one’s roots no longer has to mean leaving one’s home (metaphorically speaking) looking for a larger biological Truth. Roots-seeking can look more like an engagement with one’s surroundings and a model of family generated out of a shared past.

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On the other hand, calling all members of the community that worked to save the African Burial Ground “descendants” runs the risk of being problematic. One could argue that allowing anyone to access those buried at the African Burial Ground as ancestors takes away from the long-sought for claiming of biological heritage for African-Americans, that this is a way of rendering something unimportant now that African-Americans can finally lay claim to it. However, invoking the term descendancy beyond biological structures can not only destabilize biological family structures that are steeped in white heteronormative American privilege in the first place, but also demand a crucial level of investment and engagement from people who might otherwise feel that the history of the African Burial Ground is not theirs. We are all descendants of a history of racialization and racial inequality that allowed and in fact demanded the creation of an African Burial Ground in the first place. This history of enforced segregated burial determined citizenship, rights, and privilege that structures our lives today. What possibilities might emerge if all of New York, or even all of the United States could truly conceive of itself as being a descendant of this history? Not as taking it over, but being invested in no longer allowing the perpetuation of historical wrongs (which are also contemporary wrongs) through silencing historical trauma. This, again, is not to deny grief and mourning where it is felt but to extend this affect to where it is absent.

Experiences of death and mourning in America are not homogenous phenomena. It is not simply the ethnic and class inflections present in funeral and memorial rituals that create these differences, but also an interconnected web of lived experience as an “other” within the rule of the “normative” that dictates distinct ways of relating to life and death as a hyphenated American. In her comprehensive book about African-American burial and mourning practices, Karla FC Holloway writes:

Black culture’s stories of death and dying were inextricably linked to the ways in which the nation experienced, perceived, and represented African America. Sometimes it was a subtext, but even then the ghostly presence of those narratives reminded us that something about America was, for black folk, disjointed. Instead of death and dying being unusual, untoward events, or despite being inevitable end-of-lifespan events, the cycles of our daily lives were so persistently interrupted by specters of death that we worked this experience into the culture’s iconography and included it as an aspect of black cultural sensibility… death was an untimely accompaniment to the life of black folk – a sensibility that was, unfortunately, based on hard facts.\footnote{Holloway, Karla FC. \textit{Passed On: African American Mourning Stories}. Durham, NC and London: Duke University Press, 2002. Pg. 6.}

For Holloway, temporality is a crucial site of disjuncture for African Americans. The ghostly presence of death and dying operates in persistent attendance throughout life. The average life expectancy for African Americans in the United States is 73.1 years, as
opposed to 78.7 years for white Americans.\textsuperscript{314} While African Americans do experience death as an inevitable but none-the-less unexpected end to an individual’s life cycle, historical and contemporary inequalities have led to a distinct African-American understanding of and experience with death and dying. Both Dorothy Roberts and Sharon Patricia Holland have described the condition of being black in the US as occupying a position of social death; Ralph Ellison’s fictionalized experience of being an \textit{Invisible Man} is ghostly in nature; W.E.B. DuBois’s groundbreaking \textit{Souls of Black Folk} was born out of the premature death of his son.\textsuperscript{315} The pervasiveness of death in life has created a divergent black cultural sensibility. America’s turbulent history with issues of race and inequality is littered with a disproportionate number of non-white corpses, from forced internment, native genocide, lynching, medical experimentation and neglect, police brutality, and exponentially increasing rates of incarceration.\textsuperscript{316} The sensibility born out of this constant proximity with death is present throughout black culture: from song and cultural production to the customs of black mourning and funeral rituals. Holloway calls the prevalence of black death a “macabre revision of CPT (colored people’s time),” a concept which already posits temporal difference for communities of color.\textsuperscript{317} Furthermore, understandings of time and proximity to death creates racial memory, through which the sorrows and losses of the past are passed on generationally; this is what Toni Morrison eloquently dubs “re-memory” in her novel \textit{Beloved}, in which “not a house in the country ain’t packed to the rafters with some dead Negro’s grief.”\textsuperscript{318} Historical experiences of loss, mourning and trauma persist for African-American subjects: “even though it’s all over—over and done with—it’s going to always be there waiting for you.”\textsuperscript{319} Historical and contemporary times are enmeshed, persistently cycling in the face of an American temporal ethos that posits an optimistic, unwavering gaze towards a brighter future.

In other words, queer theory and queer/LGBT subjects are not the only ones who have a claim to the space and temporality of death, even though much has been written


\textsuperscript{316} This list only just begins to notate the ways discrimination and racism have led to disproportionate death rates for people of color.

\textsuperscript{317} Holloway, 6.

\textsuperscript{318} Holloway, 3.

on this alignment. In her influential book *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*, Judith Halberstam inadvertently describes this privileged Anglo-American view of death as she elaborates the concept of heterosexual time. According to Halberstam, time is most normatively understood as the hetero-reproductive life-cycle: one passes through childhood to adulthood by finding an opposite sex partner with which to build a home and have children. One then raises these children, who themselves will go on to have more children in the same manner, thus beginning the cycle again. Although death is the inevitable end of this cycle, the future is guaranteed through the production of offspring and the everlasting repetition of this life cycle: the cyclical nature of time is thus ultimately linear (a “straight” line) that leads to perpetual futurity. Everything is understood as fitting into this model of heterosexual time, and those who live outside of this timeframe (for Halberstam, primarily sexual minorities who are uninterested and/or unable to include the bearing and rearing of biological children as a life goal) are out of time, and therefore operating in queer time. She exposes how temporal “norms” are simultaneously heterosexual, white, and middle to upper class, depending upon the exclusion of the queer, the poor, and the racially other, thus illustrating the interconnectedness of these strategies of exclusion.

In the moments of connection between Halberstam and Holloway is a productive conversation about the ways that race, sexuality, gender, and normativity are interlocking and interconnected concerns, particularly when it comes to articulating the particular disjunctive temporality experienced multiply by African-Americans who are constantly told to stop dwelling on the wrongs of the past (slavery, segregation) and get over it. The challenge of the African Burial Ground now, as its buildings and structures near completion, is to continually revive this ghostly invocation, to make certain that the space remains a queer one. This means bringing unquestionably forth the ways that the spirit of *sankofa*, turning towards the past to understand the present, is key to moving towards equality and justice. The past can meaningfully impact the present and the future through continued engagement with the legacy of the emergence of race, hierarchy, and difference as a process that occurred (and occurs!) through death and practices of mourning. This means understanding ancestry and kinship queerly: through shared history and through affective linkages. Doing so, as I have argued, not only honors the complex and creative ways family and kinship were “made” in the past, but also reimagines kinship so that community links and exchanges can be formed through acts of

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321 Though the race of heterosexuality goes largely unremarked for Halberstam, it’s clear that her concept of straight time highlights the simultaneous racial inflictions, making non-normative experiences of time crucially intersectional experiences.

322 Halberstam, Judith, *In a Queer Time and Space: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives*. New York: New York University Press, 2005. Of course, queer time is not always clear cut and straightforward; a white, child-rearing gay or lesbian person may be able to access non-queer time or have a more normative queer temporal experience than single white queers or queers of color, for instance.
commemoration and investment in rewriting the past – which is also an act of rewriting the future.
Chapter Five
“The Inbetweenness of Earthly Existence”: Anzaldua, Altars, and the Funerary

On Friday, May 14, 2009, just before the first *El Mundo Zurdo: An International Conference on the Life and Work of Gloria E. Anzaldua*, conference participants gathered at the University of Texas-Pan America for a special pre-conference event, which culminated in a visit to the Rio Grande valley community of Hargill. In the Valle de la Paz cemetery is Gloria Anzaldua’s grave site, adjacent to the graves of her parents, Urbano and Amalia Anzaldua.323 Fig 19 Pre-conference participants gathered there to honor the five year anniversary of her death. “They read her poetry and witnessed a ritual dance in honor of Anzaldua,” reported UTPA Public Affairs Representative Melissa Rodriguez.324 Though conferences honoring the life and works of academics are not unheard of, the combination of formal academic event and spiritual homage/rite of mourning is highly unusual, if not downright unprecedented. But Gloria Anzaldua (1942-2004) was no ordinary academic.

I bring this dissertation to a close through the life and death of Gloria Anzaldua. In contrast to the introduction, which offered a genealogy of anthropological ideas about the function and purpose of funerary ritual as an authority on the functioning of such practices, the fictional, auto-biographical, and semi-autobiographical work of Gloria Anzaldua provides a powerful and necessary alternative perspective to the workings of the funerary, without which my work here would be incomplete. Anzaldua was not an anthropologist, or performance studies scholar. She never positioned herself as an expert on mortuary ritual or on death. However, the themes of funerals and death run throughout her work, an aspect of her scholarship which has not been deeply explored. For Anzaldua, queering funerals is a spiritual and decolonial act. Through her work, I give the national framework of the dissertation a broader scope and slightly different lens. While theorizing the funerary rituals of the African Burial Ground meant turning to larger colonial structures in order to understand the workings of the national in the 2003 reinterment, this consideration was necessarily bounded to state institutions, which structure the kinds of interventions possible. Anzaldua’s writings allow for an investigation of the everyday influence of the colonial within funeral experiences framed as personal and private practice. Additionally, this turn foregrounds necessary connections between the colonial and the national, the former deeply enmeshed with the latter. Lastly, I turn to the virtual altar created on the occasion of Anzaldua’s death in order to analyze an effort at creating the kind of spiritual, queer, and decolonial approach to death and mourning that she advocated throughout her life and scholarly works. I begin with her writings, which challenge conventional genre delineations, before turning to the virtual mode of mourning created in her honor. Before jumping into these writings, it’s necessary to position Anzaldua’s scholarship in a broader context.

323 While Urbano died during Anzaldua’s lifetime, as I will discuss in this chapter, Amalia Anzaldua was living at the time of the first El Mundo Zurdo conference. Amalia passed away in November 2010.
In her life and in her scholarship, Gloria Anzaldúa pushed conventions to their limits. Her writing unabashedly blended Spanish and English, poetry and prose, autobiography and theory, the spiritual and the intellectual. Her words and actions challenged the ever-elusive boundaries of “queer,” demanding that anyone who recognized her queerness also recognize queer as a framework with its own borders. Anzaldúa was unwilling to accept the boundaries of the academy, of a racist, sexist, and homophobic society, or of identity, refusing to live a life easily contained even by the most porous of borders. She identified as a dyke whose intimate relationships spanned genders, sexes, and even the human. Her interviews, stories, and scholarship contain references to experiences with extra-terrestrials, drug use, a close connection with the earth and nature, sexual feelings towards her father, and other startling revelations which not only engage societal taboos but also are not usually part of scholarly works.

For Anzaldúa, these aspects of self were central to her work and her ability to theorize selfhood and identity:

As a Mestiza I have no country, my homeland cast me out; yet all countries are mine because I am every woman’s sister or potential lover.
(As a lesbian I have no race, my own people disclaim me; but I am all races because there is the queer of me in all races.) I am cultureless because, as a feminist, I challenge the collective culture because I am participating in the creation of yet another culture, a new story to explain the world and our participation in it, a new value system with images and symbols that connect us to each other and to the planet.

Anzaldúa’s life and scholarly practice were constantly denaturalizing their fixity of the limits imposed on them by society. She drew connections between the borders placed at multiple realms of difference, arguing that intersectional identities were constructed out of borders along borders.

Because of the provocations her ideas and style brought to the structured disciplines of academia, Anzaldúa occupied a marginal role as a scholar. Deeply concerned with the racism, classism, sexism, and homophobia she experienced both in her daily life and in the academy, she wrote deeply personal and critical analyses of the fragmentation that constitutes daily life for women of color. She insisted that her lived experiences were at the heart of her theorizing, and cultivated a practice of auto-historitación.

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325 My use of the word dyke comes from Anzaldúa’s writings, in which she expresses that the word dyke has more resonance with her than “lesbian,” due to the class and race connotations of the later. It is in the spirit of using the terms that she herself used that I employ it here.

326 In her introduction to the volume of collected interviews of Anzaldúa, Keating recounts expressing her concerns about some of this “startling” subject matter to Anzaldúa, whose response was “If I’ve exposed it to myself, I can expose it in the writing. Self-exposure is the hard part.” Keating continues by addressing the reader: “Will you revise your conception of Gloria Anzaldúa, the Chicana dyke, or will you skip over the conversations which challenge your views of Anzaldúa and her words?” Gloria E. Anzaldúa: Interviews/Entrevistas. Edited by AnaLouise Keating. (Routledge: New York, NY. Advance Uncorrected Proof. 2000) pg. 7.

teoría, or “self-history-theorizing,” exemplified by Borderlands/La Frontera. As a teacher and editor, she encouraged other to draw on their experiences, to combine their life stories with their intellectual pursuits, a strategy AnaLouise Keating calls “risking the personal.” As a queer woman of color, this was a revolutionary act. For women of color and queer people inside and outside the academy, her work was groundbreaking, paving the way for “non-traditional” scholars and writers, creating community and coalition amongst marginalized intellectuals who shared similar experiences. Among these communities, she is revered. However, her stylistic and political interventions were not widely appreciated or cited, even while her ideas became central in a number of prominent fields. But as AnaLouise Keating points out:

But perhaps not surprisingly – given the multifaceted nature of Borderlands and the diversity of Anzaldúa’s other writings – readers overlook additional, equally important dimensions of her work, leaving what Anzaldúa might call “blank spots” that prevent us from grasping the radical nature of her vision for social change and the crucial ways her theories have developed since the 1987 publication of Borderlands.

Because Anzaldúa’s vast philosophical and theoretical archive is based on indigenous knowledge rather than the continental European thinkers and philosophers that make up the Western canon, her work is often categorized is pertinent only to those who study Chicana feminism. Additionally, few look past Borderlands to grapple with any of Anzaldúa’s later writings, which significantly developed the ideas of this first book. Anzaldúa’s work is perhaps made even more distinctive because of her unabashed invocation of the spiritual. She was known to consider writing as a spiritual act, to engage with altars and spiritual invocations as part of her writing practice, even for those writings that are part of a scholarly cannon. In Borderlands, she writes:

I sit here before my computer, Amiguita, my altar on top of the monitor with the Virgen de Coatlalopeuh candle and copal incense burning. My companion, a wooden serpent staff with feathers, is to my right while I ponder the ways metaphor and symbol concretize the spirit and etherealize the body.

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328 My rough translation.
330 One will find Anzaldúa on introductory syllabi for a number of different disciplines, include women and gender studies, border studies, Chicana/o studies, postcolonial studies, English literature, etc.
332 Since her death, many of Anzaldúa’s colleagues and contemporaries have
333 The materials from her private altars are currently housed in the Anzaldúa collection at the University of Texas, San Antonio. She has also described them in her interviews, which can be found in Gloria E. Anzaldá: Interviews/Entrevistas. Ed. AnaLouise Keating. (Routledge: New York, NY. Advance Uncorrected Proof. 2000).
For Anzaldúa, writing, even, and perhaps especially theoretical writing, is always an embodied, bodily practice, one that draws upon and recalls the body’s experiences, sense memories, and cultural memories. Remembering her participation in one of Anzaldúa’s writing seminars at Florida Atlantic University, Caren S. Niele recalls the practices of meditation and spiritual invocation that began each class session:

And that’s when it begins, when the outsiders are safely out, the insiders tucked within. You light a sacred candle and incense. Chats curl from the boom box at your feet. According to your instruction, we relax our muscles, imagine that we are fastened to the planet’s core with roots that emerge from deep within us and extend down, down through one floor, two floors, and thousands of miles of earth. You tell us that through these roots we derive energy from the earth’s central fire.335

Anzaldúa began her public readings in a similar manner, blending her mestiza spirituality with her scholarship. This performative practice of writing translates into Anzaldúa’s work of blending personal narrative with scholarly pursuit. Biography, poetry, fiction, and theory are insistently woven together. The thought of one without the others is impossible in considering Anzaldúa’s work.

Her commitment to queer Chicana feminism, spirituality, and politics are a large aspect of what makes her writing so important; it is also one of the reasons why she was devalued by academia during her lifetime. Her unorthodox scholarly approach made her illegible as a student. Due to her insistence that she be able to respond creatively to theoretical seminars and ideas, she was viewed as an unwanted student in most graduate programs.336 At the time of her death, she was ABD at the University of Texas, San Antonio, as well as in literature at the University of California, Santa Cruz, where she was scheduled to finish her degree within the year.337 Because she did not hold a PhD, she was primarily legible to universities as a creative writer, despite her facility with highly complex theoretical ideas and the centrality of her theories to a number of academic discourses. Ultimately, Santa Cruz posthumously awarded Anzaldúa her PhD, and it is testament to the struggle and love of that labor that the three letters grace Anzaldúa’s headstone.

Anzaldúa died unexpectedly in her home of complications due to diabetes at the age of sixty-two. Her passing prompted memorials and altars nation-wide, both public and private, as well as eulogies and obituaries in multiple newspapers, websites, and

Additionally, her death inspired a virtual altar, created by Cherríe Moraga and Susana Gallardo, to which friends, family, and admirers of Anzaldúa could contribute to pay homage to her memory. This virtual altar connected mourners from around the world, linking individual acts of mourning, and creating a publicly accessible archive of mourning, a site of testimony to the enormity of her loss. The virtual altar enables a porous, borderland mourning, a funerary model which thrives in the magic of the in-between. Death is conceived as a passing, a process, rather than a defined moment—a model which eschews the economics of mourning in which state and other official funerals operate. The model of the virtual altar and its ability to invoke a profound sense of spirituality run contrary to the non-human notions of the mechanical and technological.

Before turning to the virtual altar, however, an examination of Anzaldúa’s writings illustrates a decolonial perspective on queering funerals.

**Fiction, Theoretically – Funerals in Anzaldúa’s short fiction**

Given the centrality of autobiography and narrative within Anzaldúa’s oeuvre, I approach her writing chronologically, analyzing two short stories, “People Should Not Die In June in South Texas,” (published in 1985) and the unpublished “The After Death of Sabas Q” (the Anzaldúa archive in San Antonio dates this story to 1983).

*“People Should Not Die in June in South Texas”*

Ostensibly a simple, straightforward story recounting a young girl’s experience of the death of her father, “People Should Not Die in June in South Texas” instead offers a queer critique of Western, Judeo-Christian funeral ritual as a deeply colonial practice. The heat of a South Texas June finds the protagonist, Prieta, grieving the death of her father while trying to support her mother as they plan and carry out his funeral. The narrative is Anzaldúa’s own experience of her father’s death and funeral, told through the persona of Prieta. Prieta appears throughout much of Anzaldúa’s fictional works. She is Anzaldúa’s child-self, a thinly veiled self-representation, as Anzaldúa articulates in her interviews. Prieta navigates the highly mediated and colonial process of a Catholic funeral service in search of the borderlands of death, the liminal space left open between the world of the living and the world of the dead, in which she might have some sort of contact with her father. At the story’s climax, Prieta’s recognizes that she will never

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340 I resist the term “creative non-fiction” here because I feel that it takes away from what was unique about Anzaldúa’s writing style and purpose. The Prieta narratives were not intended to instruct or provide a fable with a tidy lesson, nor a standard autobiography. Rather, these stories opened theoretical doors through the sharing of life experience, an extension of *auto-historia-teoría*. The author as “author” is not present, other than the self the educated reader knows is behind the character. For Anzaldúa on Prieta, see *This Bridge Called My Back*, and *Interviews/Entrevistas*. For scholarship on Prieta, see *EntreMundos*. 
again see her father. Rather than considering this moment, and the events leading up to it, as a child’s first encounter with death, Prieta’s ultimate realization is that the loss of her father is due to the ritual’s colonial and Western logic. Threaded throughout the story is an alternative, queer worldview, one that privileges intuition, emotion, and the natural world.

The colonialist structure of the death care industry and the Western funeral tradition is first revealed through Prieta’s interactions with the white undertaker to whom her family turns to organize the funeral.

The white undertaker put his palm of the small of her mother’s back and propelled her toward the more expensive coffins. Her mother couldn’t stop crying. She held a handkerchief to her eyes like a blindfold, knotting and unraveling it, knotting and unraveling it. Prieta, forced to be the more practical of the two, said, “Let’s take that one or this one,” pointing at the coffins midrange in price. Though they would be in debt for three years, they chose un cajón de quinientos dólares...  

The world of South Texas in the aftermath of the death of Prieta’s father is made topsy-turvy by the crippling effects of grief on Prieta’s mother. Unable to contain her emotion, Prieta’s mother takes on the position of the passionate, unruly child, “forc[ing Prieta] to be the more practical of the two,” to step into the parental position of logic and reason. This rationality is coupled with the prerogative to stifle emotion: “Her mother was either hysterical or very quiet and withdrawn, so Prieta had to swallow her own tears.” The inversion of the parent-child relationship becomes necessary because of the imperative to compartmentalize grief in order to take care of the “business” of the funeral. The emergence of the death care industry, which Philippe Airés dates to the middle of the 19th century, is responsible for the shift from death care and mortuary preparation as knowledge of the home, and of women, to specialized knowledge of educated experts, of men. The removal of death care from the home and to the funeral home (the word home disguising the economic imperatives of for-profit business) creates a dynamic which privileges rationality and reason over emotion and intuition. As Jessica Mitford offered in The American Way of Death, her famous and biting critique of the funeral industry, this often leaves mourners, unable to separate themselves from the crippling emotions of grief, vulnerable to profit-hungry mortuaries.

The racial and class dynamics of the process of choosing a coffin and making final arrangements draw attention to the uneasy pairing of death care with colonial economics. While there is a house full of Chicano friends and relatives to participate in mourning and to take care of the family at no cost, the details of the actual burial itself

342 Ibid
are handled by an Anglo undertaker, for monetary gain. In his role as undertaker, he treats Prieta’s mother familiarly, with “his palm on the small of her mother’s back,” while simultaneously “propel[ing] her toward the more expensive coffins,” in order to reap the most economic gain from the situation. Practical and withdrawn, Prieta is able to make the rational choice, steering her mother towards mid-range coffins. Ironically, even this is not logical at all; the purchase is beyond the family’s means, one which will mean “they would be in debt for three years.” The undertaker’s performance sharpens the unavoidably colonial dynamics of death. The debt of the Prieta’s family to the white undertaker crystallizes the economic power relations as also racially stratified.

In addition to the economic and racial dynamics of final preparations, the mourning rituals of Judeo-Christian tradition follow a script which constantly pushes away the fact of death, a practice in direct contrast with Prieta’s intuitive understanding of the natural course of death and decay. Prieta observes the funeral ceremony as an attempt to pretty-up or deny the ugliness of the death that has taken place:

The undertaker had shown them backless suits whose prices ranged from seventy to several hundred dollars. *Compraron un traje negro y una camisa blanca con encaje color de rosa.* They bought a black suit and a white shirt with pink. “Why are we buying such an expensive suit? It doesn’t even have a back. And besides, it’s going to rot soon,’ she told her mother softly.”

Prieta’s confusion about the backless suit rests on the contradictions of Western burial traditions. This article of clothing costs more than a regular suit, and it can’t be worn anywhere but in a casket, viewed once before being buried in the ground. Simultaneously she recognizes the inevitability of her father’s decay into the earth that is denied through the rituals of dressing and embalming the body, and burying it in a casket. The expenses incurred for the funerary ritual are all aimed towards willfully forgetting the natural processes of death and decay. These rites go against her intuition. Anzaldúa thus draws attention to the contradictions inherent in the Western funeral rituals, in which money is exchanged for the small comfort of disguising the most natural elements of burial – the decay and dissolution of the body.

Anzaldúa aligns Prieta with the natural world, giving the character an internal wisdom against which the symbols and rituals of the funeral service are constantly narrated. This knowledge is positioned in contrast to the rituals of the church, which fight against decay’s progression, once again a reflection upon Western, colonial culture as opposed to the forces of nature. Prieta’s knowledge is manifested in descriptions of the natural world as well as the supernatural world of omens. The finality of death is discernable as the corpse’s process of decay in contrast to the busy live world. In the first paragraph of the story, Prieta describes: “… after two and a half days, her father has begun to smell like a cow whose carcass has been gutted by vultures.”

Despite the efforts taken to embalm, dress, and cosmetically repair the corpse, the summer heat and

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346 Ibid, 280
the passage of time take their inevitable toll. This contradiction is made stronger by the South Texas June heat, which continuously quickens the natural pace of decay, even as those who work at the funeral parlor labor against this tendency: “Someone was inserting a tube in his jugular vein. In some hidden room una envenenada abuja filled his venas with embalming fluid.”347 People shouldn’t die in June in South Texas, one of the first lines of the story, as well as its title, speaks to this underlying irony: in death, we expect that the bodies, spirits, and memories of the people we loved will be preserved, but death, as Prieta comes to realize throughout the course of the story, is anything but stasis: rather it is an active, on-going process. At the funeral itself, Prieta takes the specter of bodily decay a step further. Reflecting upon her father’s burial, she imagines herself as the corpse in the ground: “Maggots will find her hands, will seek out her heart. Worms will crawl in and out of her vagina and the world will continue as usual.”348 This passage highlights the ways in which death is a part and process of nature. The imagery of worms and maggots contrasts starkly with the clean images of the funeral service and the pristine setting of the church. Just as the odor of decay seeps from the sanitized and embalmed body, the presence of death haunts the rituals which claim to keep death at bay. The injunction that people should not die in June points to the funeral’s lies, the naïve attempt to preserve a body destined to decay, as rapidly undone by the natural world.

The formal funeral ceremony at the church relies upon theatrical elements. For Prieta, setting and costume are the most jarring: “At last the pall bearers return to the coffin. Sporting mustaches and wearing black ties, con bigote y corbata negra, they stand stiffly in their somber suits. She had never seen these ranchers, farmers, and farm workers in suits before.”349 The customary ceremonial dress required for participation in the Catholic funeral ritual is startling to Prieta, and Anzaldúa’s story is filled with such moments of disjuncture. As Prieta sits in church, she remembers that her father was “a man who had never entered church except for the funeral mass of a friend or relative.”350 The church functions as a performative setting, the place in which the official rituals of saying goodbye to the deceased can be carried out successfully, yet this location is opposed to the places in which her father spent the majority of his life – in the fields in work clothes. As the daughter of a deceased father, Prieta herself must dress in specific ways: for a year she is required to wear only black. While at first these garments make her stand out, “At first her classmates stare at her. Prieta sees the curiosity and fascination in their eyes slowly turn to pity and distain” they eventually allow her a heightened invisibility, because “soon they get used to seeing her in black and drab-colored clothes and she feels invisible once more, and invincible.”351 Death and its ceremonies, at first the things which separated her from her peers, eventually becomes the thing which renders her invisible to her peers. The child whose parent has died is a

347 Ibid, 280
348 Ibid, 285
349 Ibid, 282
350 Ibid, 286
351 Ibid, 286
(hyper/in)visible and ever-present figure on the borderland where parents “work
themselves to death.”

Prieta’s emotional life and process of mourning constantly resists the work of the
funeral. She literally escapes the wake, an event as stifling as the south Texas heat, by
running away to her mamagrande Ramona’s house “en donde estaba su hermanito,
Carito, el más chiquito.” Additionally, her emotions thwart the funeral’s purpose.
“Prieta does not cry, she is the only one at the velorio who is dry-eyed. Why can’t she
cry? Le dan ganas, no de llorar, pero de reir a carcajadas. Instead of crying she feels
like laughing. It isn’t natural.” The funeral ceremony induces the desire to be
“natural,” to conform to a mode of mourning that befits not only the ceremony itself but
the behavior of the other attendees. But while this mode of mourning seemingly works
for the majority of attendees, it does not work for Prieta. Indeed, a successful funeral,
according to the anthropological definitions discussed in the introduction, provides the
closure of the liminality induced by the presence of death. The dead are sent on to the
world of the dead, which is distinguished finally from the world of the living. But for
Prieta, the costumes, the ritual, the denial of decay accomplish the opposite of their
intended effect.

Prieta’s emotional life, in conjunction with her knowledge of the natural world
pierces the sanitized ritual, rendering the funeral, and her experience of it, queer. The
rules and regulations of the funeral and of mourning don’t fit Prieta: the strategies
invoked to disguise nature’s process of decay and return to the earth; the ritual setting of
the church, far away from the realities of the daily life of the deceased; the economics
which require a newly single mother to spend beyond her means. Her intuitive sense of
the works of the earth and her emotional knowledge operate in contrast to the colonial
logic which attempts to soften death in order to reestablish the world of the living.
However, this type of distinction does not occur for Prieta: “For years she waits. Four
years she waits for him to thrust open the sagging door, to return from the land of the
dead…. But one day, four years after his death, she knows that neither the One God nor
her father will ever walk through her door again.” Prieta’s mourning does not fit
within the prescribed notions of funerals and mourning. The funeral has not convinced
Prieta that her father has entered a new and irrevocable realm. Ultimately, the effects of
this queer mourning, mourning which is outside and excessive of the prescribed
performances, is to recognize that under the terms which dictated the funeral, her father
will never come back. This moment does not mark an acceptance of her father as dead,
but rather an acceptance of the death of her father as something which has occurred
within a certain world view – a Catholic and Western world view. Though “People
Should Not Die In June in South Texas” ends with Prieta’s denouncement of Judeo-
Christianity’s “One God,” there is an unstated notion that escaping the confines of Judeo-
Christian/Western normativity might allow for a kind of previously unfathomable

352 Ibid, 286
353 Ibid, 281 (great-grandmother Ramona’s house where her little brother Carito was)
354 Ibid, 281 (velorio is a wake)
355 Ibid, 287
communion with the dead. In other words, giving into the contradictions and embracing
the queerness Prieta feels when she is emotionally at odds with the ceremony might offer
the potential to keep open a connection to the world of the dead, even in the face of
ceremonies which are actively working to cut off this relationship, in order to invoke it
within prescribed bounds, such as the day of the dead. Throughout the story is a
pervasive wish for an alternative to the colonial structures of the funeral ritual, the ability
to embrace a more porous relationship with the dead, and a recognition of the violence
that funerals can do to the mourning subjects who fear the normativizing and colonial
work the ritual strives to enact. In “The After Burial of Sabas Q,” Anzaldúa portrays an
unorthodox funeral, in which some of these desire are enacted.

“The After Death of Sabas Q”

In 1983, Anzaldúa was hard at work on another piece of short fiction through
which she was working out her own theories about the afterlife and the relationship
between the living and the dead. This story, “The Burial of Sabas Q,” was never
published. According to her interview with Linda Smuckler in 1982, the story had been
written in a creative writing course Anzaldúa took in Austin, and “was based on
autobiographical stuff from my father’s funeral.” Anzaldúa’s draft of “The After Death
of Sabas Q” provides a queering of a funeral ceremony through the unconventional
wishes of the deceased, and the story’s protagonist mourner. 356

In “The After Death of Sabas Q,” Blas Q has traveled far to attend the funeral of
his cousin Sabas Q, who killed himself. Blas holds onto Sabas’ ritual knife, unwilling to
let go of the relationship he had with his cousin, reluctant to attend the funeral. From the
outset, we learn that Blas Q. knows a secret about his cousin Sabas Q. and his burial –
one that is to be revealed through Sabas’ unconventional request to have a tape played, a
tape he, Sabas, had made himself, as his epitaph. Although Blas has already heard the
tape, there is something about playing it for its intended audience that will give Blas more
answers than simply listening to the tape itself can: “He would not have come to the
funeral if it hadn’t been for the tape. … But he had listened to Sabas’ voice on the tape.
The tape was Sabas’ own epitaph and it was to be run during the funeral service. Only
after listening to it would he know… for sure.” 357 Propelled by the answers the tape
promises to provide, Blas goes to the funeral, where he encounters an assortment of
family members and friends, namely an older, fleshy woman whom he calls Fat Hannah,
and a beautiful young woman, Isabel, whom Blas is surprised to learn, is in love with the
now dead Sabas. The primary action of the story takes place at Sabas’ funeral.

Stylistically, “The After Death of Sabas Q” is quite different from “People
Shouldn’t Die in June in South Texas.” While “People Should Not Die in June in South
Texas” is a straightforward narrative, “The After Death of Sabas Q” is a mystery, slowly

356 Interview/Entrevistas Ed. AnaLouise Keating. Pg. 50. Although the actual story “The Burial of Sabas
Q” does not contain the Prieta character, this interview suggests an autobiographical connection between
Anzaldúa and the story.
American Collection, University of Texas at Austin. Box 67, Folder 2, Pg. 2.
dropping clues for the reader to follow in order to understand the complex life and death of the deceased and the social dynamic left in his wake. “The After Death of Sabas Q” is written in the third person, from the perspective of Blas Q. As Mary Loving Blanchard argues in her essay “Reclaiming Pleasure: Reading the Body in ‘People Should Not Die in June in South Texas,’” the voice of Prieta is silenced through the omniscient narrator. Ultimately, however, Blanchard claims that “the protagonist’s lack of voice distances her from the reader and gives her an uncluttered space in which to re/discover her voice.”

In “The After Death of Sabas Q,” Blas Q.’s slightly sardonic tone is conveyed both in the narration and his inner monologue as well as through dialogue. The reader hears Blas speaking to multiple people throughout the course of the story, leading to a blend of first and third person narration. The duality of the inner and outer voices of Blas allows the reader insight into the competing dynamics of public and private, both regarding the life of the deceased, as well as Sabas’ mourners at his funeral. Yet there is also a space left between these narrations. While the reader might expect that all questions will be revealed between these two voices, the dialogue remains inscrutable, and the omniscient narrator ultimately does not reveal any secrets.

Like Prieta, Blas Q. recognizes that the stifling of his unconventional emotional responses to the funeral is more unnatural than the emotions themselves. He is constantly struck by the instinct to act in a manner counter to the expectations of a funeral. The story opens, “He tried to stop the smile that had already formed in him mind from forming on his mouth. They wouldn’t understand. At best, he only succeeded in grimacing, an expression more fitting for a funeral.” As an adult, Blas Q has a keen understanding of the rituals of funerals and how he is expected to perform within them. Although he mourns his cousin, he is not grappling with a first encounter with death. However, his awareness of the purpose of the funeral gives him greater insight as to what to expect, and these expectations make him wary of full participation in the ceremonies for fear they will be successful. Blas Q. is reluctant to attend his cousin’s funeral, afraid that the link he felt to Sabas will be severed by the lowering of the coffin into the ground: “…an inexplicable empathy he had had with Sabas Q. Had had? He still felt the tie; it had not been severed by death. And by this he was perplexed. … He was afraid that seeing the coffin lowered and buried under the ground with Sabas in it would break the tie.”

Anzaldúa’s stance on the funeral ceremony as a means to sever the connection between the world of the living and the world of the dead becomes clear as the story unfolds, particularly through its narrative structure.

Blas takes steps to maintain the link between the world of the living and the world of the dead before he attends to funeral. As we learn from the omniscient narration, Blas

carries with him his cousins’ knife; the narrator suggests that this may have been the instrument to carry out Sabas’ suicide. Through his possession of the knife, Blas reaffirms the link between himself and his cousin. Additionally, the tape promises to reconnect Blas with Sabas, the sound of the voice of the deceased reaching across the world of the dead to the world of the living. In addition to carrying out a funeral for a suicide, which goes against the teachings of the Catholic Church, the priest is disgruntled by the unorthodox request to play the tape. Perhaps the ways in which this request operates against the funeral’s attempts at severing the ties between the living and the dead that makes this request so unnerving for the priest.

However, the narration does not include the contents of the tape. Instead, after noting that the tape played for over an hour, a footnote informs the reader: “For the contents of the tape, see the short story: ‘The Private Gesture (A Recorded Epitaph to be Played Upon the Death of My Old Enemy’ written by the same author.” 361 In a daze, the mourners digest the tape while Blas reads a poem. John Q., the father of Sabas, then shares a philosophy of dying, one that restores the questioned sanity of the now dead Sabas. The story ends when Fat Hannah expresses to Blas that she does not understand, and Blas promises to explain everything to her, while also agreeing to meet with Isabel in two months time, a result of listening to the tape.

Anzaldúa denies her reader the climax to the story, leaving the reader with more questions than answers. What was on the tape? Does he have the answers he sought? Why must he wait two months time to explain to Isabel and Fat Hannah? Although the notes from an editor on Anzaldúa’s manuscript suggest that the editor was critical of this omission, in denying the reader their tidy, resolved conclusion, Anzaldúa creates a telling tension in her story, one that is similar to the experiences that both Blas in “The After Death of Sabas Q” and Prieta in “People Should Not Die in June in South Texas” express: the inability of the funeral to provide closure and certainty. While the aim of the funeral is an affirmation of the world of the living through the act of ceremonially disposing of the body of the deceased, Blas expresses that death is not quite that clear cut. Although Blas fears that the funeral ceremony may be successful and render Sabas permanently absent, he simultaneously acknowledges that there is something beyond the physical being of a person that exists and persists – literally the tape, but metaphysically something unnamed that the tape induces – that the boundaries between life and death are permeable, and that connections between the living and the dead are real and possible.

By denying the reader access to the tape that thwarts the funeral’s purpose, Anzaldúa has created for the reader a tether to these characters, in which the reader’s ties to the characters are not satisfied by the conclusion of the story. Rather, the story interconnects to another story (and indeed more than one story – Anzaldúa references a story about John Q as well). 362 The structure is not only a response to the expected

362 John Q, Sabas’s brother delivers a eulogy, but before he does, Blas reflects upon John’s tenuous relationship with the family due to John’s unorthodox relationship with a portrait, circumstances which
narrative form, in which short stories are complete worlds in and of themselves, but also the recreation of an affective state induced by funeral practice. The story of Sabas and the mysteries of his life are in no way complete, but rather exceed the limits of the story, the story-teller(s), the funerals, and even his death. Through the words Sabas has left behind, the mysteries he spun both through his life and death, Sabas somehow lives on – and will continue to live on through the promised encounters the characters make to one another. Somehow because of Sabas, they will meet again, and discuss Sabas again, a future built on circumstances emerging from a death.

In this way, it seems fitting that this unpublished story now lies in the archives, the collection of papers of an author who is no longer of this world. For Anzaldúa’s own death continues this denial of the end of the liminality between life and death. Instead, I the researcher, am left with more questions, similar to those experienced by the reader of “Sabas Q” – would Anzaldúa have ultimately included the contents of the tape? Did/would this particular bit of editorial advice and Anzaldúa’s wish to keep the tape out of the story keep it from being published? The unvoiced answers to these questions perform similarly to Sabas’ tape, through which Anzaldúa performatively produces ripples in the world of the reader from beyond the grave.

**Borderlands**

Theoretical threads run throughout Anzaldúa’s fiction. This fictional accounting of and working out the circumstances and ceremonies of her father’s death is central to the theorizing she does in *Borderlands* and *This Bridge we Call Home*, particularly when she invokes death, crossing, passing, and/or the afterlife. This is perhaps one of the most enduring and important interventions of Anzaldúa’s work, and particularly in *Borderlands* - the privileging of the life experiences of women of color, particular women whose lives are lived on the borders of multiple fronts of normativity (i.e. lesbians and queer women of color). *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza*, first published in 1987, was groundbreaking on multiple fronts. Not only did Anzaldúa’s book provide one of the first full-length texts on queer Chicana subjectivity, but it also made new theoretical claims based on autobiography, combining poetry, prose, and history in groundbreaking, revolutionary ways. While *This Bridge Called My Back* (co-edited with Cherrie Moraga in 1984) provided a platform for the experiences of women of color, which had not before been voiced in such coalition, Borderlands stands on its own as both a monograph as well as heralding the arrival of a distinct and important voice for the emerging disciplines of Chicana/o studies, women’s studies, queer theory, and border

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Anzaldúa footnotes as follows: “See short story, “The Change,” by the same author. It deals with the ????? of the portrait.” ???. denotes an unintelligible word written in Anzaldúa’s handwriting.

studies. Anzaldúa weaves her own childhood and educational experiences into a larger narrative which writes, questions, and re-writes the history of the Chicana people from a queer and feminist of color perspective. Anzaldúa’s auto-historia is central to the theorizing of *Borderlands*, and is in fact the central method to her writing.

From this standpoint the death of Anzaldúa’s father, Urbano, and her experiences of his passing and funeral, are central to understanding Anzaldúa’s oeuvre. The denial of queer, feminine, earthly, and spiritual knowledge throughout funeral practice illuminates a chasm of difference between colonial and decolonial worldviews. Along with her experiences of early maturation, the death of Urbano was a formative life experience for Anzaldúa, one which challenged her spiritual, intellectually, and emotionally. These insights, along with her quest for an alternative, indigenous spirituality, were crucial to the development of her theoretical work, especially, but not exclusively, *Borderlands*.

In *Borderlands*, narratives of the deaths of fathers and their ramifications illuminate multiple levels of colonialism. “The Homeland, Aztlán/El Otro Mexico,” traces the history of the Mexican-American border, weaving historical fact through with threads from her own life story. She focuses her historical research especially on her own particular homeland region, South Texas. As she discusses the murder of Chicanos by a white vigilante group called the Texas Rangers in 1815, using this large-scale homicide as an example of how the border crossed the Mexicans and Indigenous people of South Texas, she shifts our attention to her own personal stakes in this race-war:

“Drought hit South Texas,” my mother tells me. […] “papá se murió de un heart attack dejando a mamá pregnant y con ocho huercos, with eight kids and one on the way. […] Mi pobre madre viuda perdió two-thirds of her ganado. A smart gabacho lawyer took the land away mama hadn’t paid taxes. _No hablaba inglés_, she didn’t know how to ask for time to raise the money.” My father’s mother, Mama Locha, also lost her _terreno_. For a while we got $12.50 a year for the “mineral rights” of six acres of cemetery, all that was left of the ancestral lands. Mama Locha had asked that we bury her there beside her husband. _El cementerio estaba cercado_. But there was a fence around the cemetery, chained and padlocked by the ranch owners of the surrounding land. We couldn’t even get in to visit the graves, much less bury here there. Today, it is still padlocked. The sign reads: “Keep out. Trespassers will be shot.”

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364 I utilize the term decolonial rather than postcolonial for the feminist implications inherent in the former. While there certainly is postcolonial scholarship which attends to gender and sexuality, transnational feminism and the Chicana feminist movement has largely gravitated towards the decolonial as a mode of critique. See Emma Pérez, *The Decolonial Imaginary: Writing Chicanas into History*. (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999) and Laura Pérez *Chicana Art: the Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007).

In this passage, Anzaldúa introduces the reader to her family history. On both sides of the family, the death of a loved one and the economics of death have both shaped and made evident the conditions of colonialism. In the story of Anzaldúa’s mother, the language has become the tool through which the colonial imperative comes to pass. Additionally, however, the patriarchal system that has denied the matriarch of the ability to learn the linguistic and economic rules, also prevents the preservation of family property.

On the other side of the family, Mama Locha’s desire to be buried next to her husband is thwarted by colonial governance and shifting rights to ancestral lands. By invoking the space of the cemetery and of death, Anzaldúa highlights the unfairness of the Anglo’s claim to the graveyard, showing that the meager economic gain Mama Locha receives can in no way make up for the emotional, spiritual, and physical ties to the land which she and her family have, even though the governmental and the economic forces do, in practice, trump these ties. By drawing attention to this dramatic juxtaposition, which Anzaldúa stages through her narration, the rituals of death draw out the stakes of colonialism as both an unfair economic and physical condition but especially as a spiritual crime that would keep an old woman from being buried beside her husband. Lastly, this framework of the deceased father-figure foreshadows the conditions of Anzaldúa’s own upbringing and the loss of her own father at a young age. The history of colonization is threaded symbolically through with not only the presence of death, but the loss of fathers. This is not to say that Anzaldúa is arguing that the presence of fathers would reverse the situation, but instead that she recognizes the strength of women as a crucial part of maintaining cultural and emotional ties. This revelation is essential for the book’s larger project of locating and recentering the Chicana within her own national and spiritual history. Queering the practices of death and burial makes possible these insights.

In “La Herencia de Coatlicue,” the fourth chapter of Borderlands, Anzaldúa writes: “When my father died, my mother put blankets over the mirrors. Consciously, she had no idea why. Perhaps part of her knew that a mirror is a door through which the soul may ‘pass’ to the other side and she didn’t want us to ‘accidently’ follow our father to the place where the souls of the dead live.” Anzaldúa then uses this anecdote to launch into the development of the Coatlicue state, the notion of a consciousness that emerges from an indigenous mythology, an archetype long considered monstrous. Coatlicue, a multivalent Aztec goddess who gave birth to the moon, is characterized by contradiction. She stands in for the Earth, both a figure of motherhood as well as an insatiable figure of destruction. Anzaldúa recognizes her links to the dead, while at the same time her links to nature and the earth, thus recognizing that Coatlicue ultimately “depicts the contradictory... the fusion of opposites: the eagle and the serpent, heaven and the underworld, life and death, mobility and immobility, beauty and horror.”

Keen observers will note that Mama Locha was a character in “People Should Not Die in June in South Texas,” mourning the death of her son.

Anzaldúa, Borderlands, 64.

Anzaldúa, Borderlands, 69.
describes a profound and spiritual journey in which she is consumed by the *Coatlícu* state, moving through despair and self-hatred, sinking into “*mictlán*, the underworld. In the “place of the dead”[^369] until she feels herself reborn, in a rush of sexual feeling, with the presence of a woman-snake (*Coatlícu*): “Something pulsates in my body, a luminous thin thing that grows thicker every day. Its presence never leaves me. I am never alone. That which abides, my vigilance, my thousand sleepless serpent eyes blinking in the night, forever open. And I am not afraid.”[^370]

Anzaldúa narrates a journey through the underworld, a place of despair and death, through sexual and spiritual awakening, into a deeper understanding of the contradictions which create the unified whole of the self. The relationship of death and sex are complicated and complicit. The contradiction that accompanies human dealings with death (and particularly when those dealings and spiritual strivings are crossed with the conditions of colonialism) seeps into the everyday, and into the conditions of subjective experience. The subjectivity of the *mestiza* is a state of the contradictory. Death, metaphorical or actual, is the condition of rebirth and reawakening, the precipice of a crossing. It is this particular theorization that was taken up by mourners on the event of Anzaldúa’s physical death in May 2004, and which structured the multivalent mourning that arose for Anzaldúa through virtual networks.

**Virtual(ly) Altar(ed): Resisting Foreclosure**

“As I sat at my altar, I thought of all my girls, from SF to Brooklyn to the Carolinas to Lanka, this web of black, brown, red, gold and white women, men and others, who I know are all sitting at our altars finding ways to honor and send blessings to your spirit. Look at what a web we make, of what you taught continuing.”[^371]

Altars are commemorative practices, both in service of the dead as well as to the preservation of culture. In her book *Chicana Art: The Politics of Spiritual and Aesthetic Altarities*, Laura E. Pérez writes, “As a form of domestic religious practice outside the domain of dominant religiosities, the altar has been a site for the socially and culturally “alter,” or other, to express, preserve, and transmit cultural and gender-based religious and political differences.”[^372] Given the focus on difference and alterity within Pérez’s definition of altars as well as Anzaldúa’s reliance upon altars as part of her spiritual practices, it is clear that a practice of altar making in response to Gloria Anzaldúa’s death is fitting on many levels. The image of the grave stone I opened this chapter with illustrates the ways in which even Anzaldúa’s headstone has operated in an altar-like fashion, as the repository for offerings of flowers as well as a site of pilgrimage for those who wish to connect with Anzaldúa. The altar also offers a spiritual and religious

[^370]: Anzaldúa, *Borderlands*, 73.
standpoint removed from the “One God” with which Prieta disidentifies at the end of “People Should Not Die in June in South Texas.” The altar offers an alternate mode of communion with the dead, one which rests upon a feminine form rather than butting up against masculinist religiosity.

The virtual altar that was created by Cherríe Moraga and Susana Gallardo offers the making of a collective altar through the gathering of words, Anzaldúa’s artistic medium. The virtual offers a mode of transmission through which connections across borders can be made through the exchange of words and memories. The combination of the form of the altar with the realm of the virtual might initially seem to vacate the practice of altar making of its materiality – the putting together of meaningful objects in a way that creates new meaning. However, Pérez’s definition of altar-like structures offers insights as to why the virtual might in fact be an ideal mode for altar making: “a structure marking the meeting of the embodied and the disembodied, the visible and the invisible, the formal and the conceptual.” The virtual altar to Anzaldúa creates a confluence of such seeming contradictions, and in doing so creates an opening, a space where conversation and collaboration across the world of the living and the world of the dead might come into being. Fig 20

There are two sections to the virtual altar. http://gloria.chicanas.com/keatingobit.html, the first page offers visitors information on the life of Gloria Anzaldúa. An obituary written by AnaLouise Keating and Randy Conner, long-time friends and collaborators of Anzaldúa, lines the page on both sides, the left-hand side in English, the right-hand side in Spanish. The obituary follows the genre conventions of the obituary, listing the deceased’s accomplishments and most cherished character traits. The most significant aspect of the obituary, however, is the final paragraph, listing the survivors of the deceased: “Gloria is survived by her mother, Amalia, her sister, Hilda, and two brothers: Urbano Anzaldúa, Jr. and Oscar Anzaldúa; five nieces, three nephews, eighteen grandnieces and grandnephews, a multitude of aunts and uncles, and many close friends.” While this listing does privilege the traditional next of kin, the biological family, close friends are also counted among the privileged mourners, even though they are not mentioned by name. This renders Anzaldúa’s family as one that goes beyond the scope of the biological and into a mode of queer kinship, if only subtly. The use of the virtual altar itself extends this function. Cherrie Moraga, in her letter to mourners and altar participants, found at the head of the altar page, writes “To some of you Gloria was a dear friend; to others, a teacher on the page. To all of us, she was a source of profound inspiración in the way she made writing her life’s warrior work.” Friends and admirers are all linked together, rendered mourners on an equal plateau through the inspiration garnered from Anzaldúa’s life’s work. Like the work of a state funeral, in which the nation’s citizens are all recognized as proper mourners, Moraga invokes community through mourning. In the middle column between the obituaries are links to other obituaries and announcements about memorials. Interfacing

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373 Pérez, Chicana Art, 14.
with the altar in early 2011, many of the links to these sites are no longer functioning, yet they stand as ephemeral traces of the performances that honored this life, and their record provides a sense of the enormity of Anzaldúa’s absence. At the top of this list of memorials is a link to “web altar for Gloria,” and it is there that the heart of the altar lies: http://gloria.chicanas.com/index.html

The page’s visuals are nearly identical to the information page. There is a simple black background. In the top center is the image of a burning candle. There are four flames burning, and it is impossible to distinguish the individual candles burning. The brightness of the image of the flame pops against the stark, dark background, illuminating a virtual night. In simple white Times New Roman are the words: “IN MEMORY Gloria Evangelina Anzaldúa 1942-2004” Fig 20 A thin white line divides the candle image from the words which begin below – a letter from Cherríe Moraga to the virtual community, an imagined gathering of mourners. The simple austerity of the altar at first seems contradictory to the busy, image-filled altars that one sees during día de los muertos, or which artists such as Amalia Mesa Baines create, teeming with signifiers. What makes this aesthetic work, however, is the fullness of the words, which make their own worlds; the invocation of private altars, interconnected with the public one; and the terms of address used to signal an on-going conversation amongst mourners and in the spaces between Anzaldúa’s works.

The written ofrendas or offerings on the virtual altar follow a general format. They are all in the same white type-face on the same black background. Some are short, some are long, some are prose, while others are poetry, letters to either Gloria or other mourners, or a combination of multiple genres. All entries are signed by the mourners with their name (or pseudonym) and their location.

Reading through the written ofrendas or offerings of the virtual altar, one can see the mourners taking up Anzaldúa’s call to write their life stories. They often start out as “how we met” stories, whether these meetings led to sustained friendship and interaction or existed in the realm of ideas. Many recount moments in which Anzaldúa’s words, whether in person on or the page, inspired them to make life-altering decisions, or moved them to find a sense of inner peace and/or belonging:

...she is just crossing borderlands
hiccupping on her way to heaven
like she did the day I met her
at the Santa Cruz Bookshop,
logos it was, in the basement
hiccupping in front of Adrianne Rich,
and I looked
and she shyly, smiled,
the only person I know who could shyly be proud
so big376

376 Ibid, Gabriella Gutiérrez y Muhs Seattle, Washington
I only met Gloria over email, to receive her comments in the process of writing and editing a piece for this bridge we call home. I received her personal self only over cyberspace. Yet I have been touched persistently, at different moments, at crucial moments when I longer to live free, to hold vision for how to live queerly, to affirm desire, place, culture, revolution, community, solitude, through Gloria’s writings.  

By writing their stories, mourners take up the mantel of auto-historia. Across racial, class, cultural, or sexual difference, these mourners connect through Anzaldúa, birthing a new community tethered through the virtual altar. As Bethany De Herrera-Schnering writes “It's nice to have someplace to go to mourn the passing of Gloria Anzaldúa and know there are others doing the same.” For Chicanas spread across the country, or unable to attend a larger live memorial ceremony, the virtual provides a space both metaphorical and very real. Overwhelmingly, it’s an affective space, where tears are possible for mourners who have not yet been able to cry. Many entries contain similar statements to Irene Reti: “Thank you so much for making this electronic altar. Reading this it’s the first time I’ve been able to cry,” or Lori Klein: “I write this with tears in my eyes – thank you all for helping me to cry about Gloria.”

In her letter to mourners, Moraga makes a request: “What I ask, in Gloria's name, is that where ever you are... In your home, on campus, in your organizations that you build an altar for Gloria, as well. With flores, her writings, photos, velas, the ways you wish to honor her and help her make this passage.” Mourners at the virtual altar often describe the altars and altar-like practices they are, have, or will be engaging:

- We burned candles and brought out her work and sent support and strength and love and revolution to her and for her.
- Le haré su altar tonight with my 2 year old daughter...
- I want to let your sisters know that there was a beautiful memorial in your honor this past weekend in San Francisco, and a living altar for you will remain awhile in the Women’s Building.

Despite the difference in scale, materials, and location, the collective mourning engaged here provides a picture of multiple private altars coming together as one, or as a network of mourning, a current running throughout the country in which the majority of citizens are ignorant or indifferent to the loss within this particular community.

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377 Ibid, Indigo Violet, Northampton, MA
378 Ibid, Irene Reti Santa Cruz, CA
379 Ibid, Lori Klein Santa Cruz, CA
380 Ibid, Cherríe Moraga
381 Ibid, Nayiree Rain and Thunder Collective, Oakland
382 Ibid, Mari New Haven, Connecticut
383 Ibid, Jamie Lee Evans
Lastly, and perhaps most importantly, mourners utilize Anzaldúa’s theorizing of crossing to articulate a vision of the afterlife.

Nepantleras walk the bridge between flesh and spirit, life and death, the inbetweeness of earthly existence. Earth, a temporary space in an ever expansive, ever multiplying universe in which souls learn lessons, to teach, to do and undo, to create and destroy. We live here on this space, trapped and free, simultaneously.

Gloria lived among us, and now she had left, hovering over us, working the source of our healing, our confusion, our clarity. Working with radical people grasping for spirit, she is. Out of body, out of flesh, yet in the world, with us, for as long as we need her…

Through Anzaldúa’s theories of life on the borderlands, a theoretical articulation of life and death beyond the confines of normative ideologies emerges. This world-view allows for the liminal space between life and death to stay open. In doing so, there is recognition of the closeness of these two worlds, and of the possibility that there are worlds and dimensions beyond what is perceptible through the lens of the rational. The virtual altar operates as a bridge, connecting and traversing the unknown, the otherworldly, nepantla. Through the altar, Gloria’s life as a napantlera, a person who facilitates passages between worlds, is clear, celebrated, and honored. By recognizing and striving for mourning practices which embrace nepantla, perhaps a space can be opened in which contradiction and simultaneity can be recognized, celebrated and embraced, or at the very least, seen in all dimensions.

Conclusion

The languages of the queerly referenced and the (hyper/in)visible are apparent in Gloria Anzaldúa’s unorthodox headstone. “PhD,” the image of the serpents, the absence of Spanish-language accent markers, an epitaph drawing from the deceased’s own contested writing practice… they represent the coming together of the institutional with the queer, the imagined with the realities of systems of power, the taming of the wild tongue, the limitless possibilities of signifying outside of reified knowledge systems. The images of the snakes, atypical symbols for gravestones, particularly within a Catholic tradition, provide coded markers of Anzaldúa’s identification with indigenous spiritual and religious practices and her commitment to women’s issues, particularly women of color. As anyone who has read Borderlands will recognize, the snakes invoke the serpent goddess Coatlalopeuh, the earth, and decolonial knowledge. If we can read these between-spaces for the (hyper/in)visible, the specter of the power dynamics of colonialism, academia, and institutionalized religion become tangible.

This is particularly striking in the consideration of the appearance of “PhD” on the headstone. The font of these three letters on Anzaldúa’s headstone indicates that

384 Ibid, Indigo Violet, Northampton, MA
385 Borderlands; “The Best Loved Bones: Spirit and History in Anzaldúa’s ‘Entering into the Serpent.’”
perhaps the letters were added after the erection of the stone. Yet the alignment of her name implies that room was purposefully left for this addition. The epitaph on the headstone reads “May we seize the arrogance to create outrageously, sonar wildly – for the world becomes as we make it.” These words are Anzaldúa’s own, and together with the statement of her degree on the gravestone, illustrate the outrageous dream of a poor Chicana to earn a PhD. The permanent etching of PhD on her headstone is both affirming and damning. While the PhD was eventually awarded, the fact that the degree was granted posthumously condemns the institutions which could not recognize her unconventional scholarship within her life time, despite the efforts of queer scholars, feminist scholars, and scholars of color. The colonial dynamics of the academy becomes visible through her headstone.

Throughout the short stories, Anzaldúa articulates a queer subject position that both of her protagonists occupy. In this instance, queer entails privileging knowledge based on intuition, emotion, and the natural world over the kinds of Western and colonial logics that structure funeral rituals. Additionally, both narrators queerly embrace a world view that sees the relationship between the world of the living and the world of the dead as porous and permeable. This ideology is in contrast to the work the funeral attempts. By differentiating the world of the living and the world of the dead as oppositional, the funeral ritual marks death as a bounded phenomenon. In her theoretical work, Anzaldúa marks death as a constant presence throughout life. Her conception of nepantla, as an in-between state of continual death and re-birth, is the path of the artist, a category which is not distinct from the path of the intellectual. Death and life are not juxtaposed, but rather part of a continuous narrative.
Epilogue

If memory is, as Walter Benjamin put it, the ‘theater’ of the past, its stage is frequently the funeral.386

What does it mean to consider national mourning practice and funerals as queer? It means reckoning with what remains, what is queer and haunted about history and memory. One of the key elements of funeral practice is the disposition of remains, returning a body to earth, be it through burial or cremation. Like the performance of the funeral, the deceased as an embodied presence disappears. Yet for all of the work of closure, burial, putting away and starting over that funerals are understood to perform, I argue that it is what remains, though rendered (hyper/in)visible, is where meaning is queerly made. It is the excess, the things that extend beyond the practice of the funeral, that make time, interpersonal relationship, memory and community queer. Even when those remains are denied or disappeared, as is the case with the body of Osama bin Laden, the dead constitute a narrative of the nation. Seven years after his death and twenty-two years after his Presidency, Ronald Reagan’s gravesite, at the Ronald Reagan presidential library in Simi Valley, has become something of a shrine. Reagan supporters make pilgrimages to his gravesite and find kindred spirits with whom to relive the era he has come to represent.387 It is uncertain whether the ashes hurled onto the White House lawn were the entirety of the remains of those scattered there. But this particular lawn and site will always be haunted by the presence of these cremains, an indelible part of the history of this heterotopia. The White House lawn is forever altered as the final resting place of at least part of fifteen individuals who died from AIDS, and those who utilize the site for other purposes (state funerals, inaugurations, etc) butt up against this (hyper/in)visible presence. The remains of the queer kinship of military personnel are not contained by objects, as the relic of the flag is the property of the next of kin. However it is in the genealogy of performance, from the labors of care-love that go into funeral performance to the counter-protests of the Patriot Guard Riders that recreate these queer remains with every funeral honor rendered. At the African Burial Ground, the remains of enslaved and free Africans stretch below the city, far beyond the borders of the particular memorial site that defines it. The interpersonal connections sustained by activists fighting for proper memorialization remain, and this descendant community continues to revitalize and rearticulate the site’s saliency to a national community which has not yet embraced its own descendant relationship to that site and history. While Gloria Anzaldúa perhaps has the most remains of all, her books, the archive of her writings and personal effects, the pilgrimage site of her headstone, and a beautiful virtual altar, her world view refuses the distinction that positions her as absent. For those unable to access her funeral,

it exists in these practices in, through, and between these remains, in the act of studying, of writing, of connecting to others.

The funeral ceremony, which is supposed to take a world turned inside-out by death and make it ordinary again, is unable to contain the presence of death itself, no matter how sanitized, cleaned-up, or regulated. The excess, that which remains after the human remains have been buried or scattered, that which doesn’t quite fit, inevitably haunts funeral practice. This excess is queer precisely because it troubles the notion of the completely contained subject, disrupting the certainty of identity and being that funerals strive to present. Queer readings of funerals can facilitate deeply necessary reworkings of history, the recognition of unequal dynamics which render some lives always already inconsequential. This means neither a complete embracing of a position of life or of death, but rather understanding and opening up the relationship between the two worlds, even as the funeral rituals render it closed and complete. Queering funeral rituals means recognizing that this closure is always incomplete; while there are inequalities in the world of the living, members of that world which are more aligned with the world of the dead, the world of the dead cannot be a resolved, closed space. The ostensible completion of performance, the drawing of the curtain, the final burial of coffin safely beneath the earth, doesn’t absolve the present of the past. The queered funeral is a collaboration with ghosts, a mode of memory making that challenges the finality of history, and of rituals of conclusion never truly complete.
Illustrations:

Figure 1 – *Time* magazine covers

Figure 2 – Mourners lined up to visit Reagan’s coffin
Figure 3: AIDS Quilt Displayed on the Washington Mall, 1992.
Figure 4: Block from the AIDS Quilt
Figure 5 – ACT UP’s Ashes Action Flier

Figure 6 – 1970s Navy recruitment campaign

Figure 7 – Uncle Sam army recruitment campaign
Figure 12 – *Final Salute*

Figure 13 – *Untitled, Roger Brown*

Figure 14 – African Burial Ground Memorial
Photograph by Richard E. Miller, November 1, 2008. From
http://www.hmdb.org/Photos/42/Photo42539.jpg

Figure 15 – Sankofa, backwards looking bird

Figure 16 – Sankofa, heart
Figure 17 – African Burial Ground crypts

Figure 18 – African Burial Ground Memorial
Figure 19 – Headstone of Gloria E. Anzaldúa

Figure 20 – Gloria Anzaldúa virtual altar
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