ABSTRACT

MAY DAY AND MELANCHOLIA: A STUDY OF LOSS, MEMORIALIZATION AND COMMEMORATION BY OBSERVING THE AFTERMATH OF THE MAY 4 SHOOTINGS AT KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

by Adam Burkey

This paper explores the phenomenon of melancholia at KSU as expressed through its (incomplete) memorial and ongoing commemorations of the May 4 shootings. Using a cultural studies approach, it probes the historical wreckage in an attempt to understand why and how KSU is held in the grip of this tragic event. Various sources contribute to this study—from archival research to contemporary theorists including Judith Butler, Sigmund Freud, Avery Gordon, Dominic LaCapra and Juliana Schiesari. Due to copyright regulations, the many photos and graphics included in the original text cannot be reproduced in this copy. This contributes to a loss of clarity.
MAY DAY AND MELANCHOLIA:
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COMMEMORATION BY OBSERVING THE AFTERMATH
OF THE MAY 4 SHOOTINGS AT KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

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Prologue
May 4, 1970:
A Cultural Memory is a Homely Memory

What does it mean for a culture to remember? The collective remembering of a specific culture can often appear similar to the memory of an individual—it provides cultural identity and gives a sense of the importance of the past. Yet the process of cultural memory is bound up in complex political stakes and meanings. It both defines a culture and is the means by which its divisions and conflicting agendas are revealed.

MARITA STURKEN, Tangled Memories

Haunting is a constituent element of modern social life. It is neither premodern superstition nor individual psychosis; it is a generalizable social phenomenon of great import. To study social life one must confront the ghostly aspects of it.

avery F. Gordon, Ghostly Matters

As a way of seeing ghosts, this prologue envisions history as a house with at least four sides. Everything about it is homey, making it suitable for the habitation of living beings. In the name of the paranormal, it is helpful to understand our cultural memory of history as a comfortable habitation that imposes familiar narratives onto unfamiliar experiences. In his 1919 essay, “The ‘Uncanny,’” Freud translates ‘heimlich’ to mean something that is homely, native and familiar. Something that is ‘heimlich’ “arous[es] a sense of agreeable restfulness and security as in one within the four walls of his house” (932). ‘Unheimlich,’ the German word for uncanny, can therefore be understood as both a binary opposite of heimlich (being unfamiliar and out of place) and also a related phenomenon that takes place when a homely residence becomes strange and unfamiliar without any evident change (931). The heimlich is thus a precondition for anything unheimlich. Being similar to this phenomenon, history, in its attempt to make a comfortable dwelling out of a heap of experiential scraps, banishes any unusable material to the ghostly status of the unhomely. Every historical narrative is haunted by ghosts. In many cases, there are more ghosts than there are construction materials. This happens when history relies more on prefabricated materials than it does experiential materials. Some events do not make fashionable or stable houses by themselves.
If we want to see the ghosts that haunt the history of the Kent State shootings that occurred on May 4, 1970, we must first realize the event to have been constructed as a house we can intrude upon. Doing so, we can use the language of homeliness to reveal the employment of builders and contractors with different functions (founders, electricians, insulators), each of which subjectively accepts and rejects construction materials based on cost and desirability of future occupants. The history of the Kent State shootings is a ghostly mess disguised as something objective and homey. The uncanny will be accomplished if we can soon after reveal these homely attributes to have been suspended in unfamiliar ectoplasm this entire time. Let us first familiarize ourselves with a house having at least four sides. The sources contributing to this old house will be found in a works cited page at the end of the prologue. Many of these sources conflict factually, stylistically and politically. My own agenda, when it is not decorating the history with subjective insights and speculations, will often reveal these contradictions. However, the purpose of this prologue is not to tell a more objective and accurate history of the shootings. Rather, it is to underscore the subjective politics that go into every historical house (the outside sources) and to make audible the ghosts that will, inevitably, haunt our history.

May 1, 1970

Ignited by President Richard Nixon’s April 30th announcement to invade Cambodia, May 1 entered the history books with a reputation for student frustration and governmental protest. The day was warm; some have said it was the first glorious day of the year. A history graduate student entertained an audience of 500 other students with a burial of a copy of the U.S. Constitution in front of the Victory Bell in the grassy student commons. They were mourning the loss of something believed to be dead. Some claimed that Nixon was its murderer; others said it had been dead for some time and that its death enabled Nixon’s government to get away with its decisions. This symbolic act of burial seemed to be the only option left for the students. Many of their friends and family members had already been drafted into the war (some having already been killed) and, on top of this, they could not demonstrate their disapproval of the government using what the Constitution declared, many years ago, to be the appropriate language for doing so. The voting age, in 1970, was 21, and it would not be lowered (via the 26th amendment to the Constitution they were burying) until 1971.
That night, which was just as warm as the day was, students gathered in the downtown streets and bars to drink, socialize and watch the L.A. Lakers try to tie up the NBA playoff series with the New York Knicks in a ten o’clock game. The streets and bars were crowded and a group of local motorcyclists ignited a bonfire and performed bike tricks. Eventually the crowd became agitated and reports went out that someone had broken some local shop windows. Many accounts of this night claim that outside agitators were contributing to the unrest. Although it was common for students from nearby schools to spend their weekends at Kent State, city officials were convinced that members of Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) were behind the misbehavior. SDS, at this point, had already been blamed for April disturbances on the Ohio campuses of Miami University and Ohio State University—events that were settled only after the National Guard had been called in. Fearing a repeat incident, Kent city mayor, Leroy Satrom, declared a state of emergency and sought help from Ohio Governor James A. Rhodes. The National Guard was put on alert.

After midnight, the city instructed the police to close down the bars and clear the streets. The bar patrons, after being informed that their Friday night was canceled (some having already paid a nonrefundable cover fee), sulked out into the streets to add more agitation to the already restless street crowd. As the crowed marched back to campus, some took revenge on store windows—many of which were believed to be governmental property. Fifteen persons were arrested and conflicting sources state that $5,000 to $15,000 worth of damage was done to the local businesses.

May 2, 1970

Some students spent their Saturday morning helping the local business owners clean up after Friday’s vandalism. During the rest of the day, tension and rumors of some kind of revolt of an unknown flavor flushed around the campus. Kent State was not a liberally active campus and Friday night held the most excitement many had ever witnessed or gossiped about. While the students chattered and ruminated over what should and would be done (some were unsure which kind of passive or active rhetoric they were participating in), the city was trying to digest a rumor that caravans of SDS members were making their way into the city to terrorize the people and spike the water supply with LSD. This prompted the city to guard the water supply and issue a curfew of 8:00 PM for the city and 11:00 PM for the campus. The National Guard,
having been put on alert the night before, was officially summoned to Kent State at around 5:00 PM.

The campus rumors coagulated into one large rally consisting of 600-1000 participants outside the ROTC building. A smaller sub-group of demonstrators made frequent attempts to set the building on fire. It is possible that most of the demonstrators were there because they were curious what form or shape the day’s gossip would take. Firemen were called in and, unprotected by police, soon dispersed after demonstrators pelted them with stones and cut their hoses. Some say they were able to put the fire out before leaving. After the group of demonstrators departed (fluctuating from a size of 1000 to 2000 bodies), the old ROTC building somehow reignited and fire quickly consumed it. It is estimated that around thirty United States ROTC buildings were torched in the first two weeks of May. That night, around 10:00 PM, the National Guard arrived and cleared the Kent State commons of student activity. The entire student body, active and passive, was collectively ordered to retreat back to their dormitories.

May 3, 1970

As most people might feel after their home has been taken over by camouflaged men armed with M1 rifles, Kent State woke up on Sunday with a feeling of something out of place. Local and regional students that usually went home on the weekends returned to campus only to find that they had been pre-selected (so to speak) to participate in a game of United States National Guard VS. Kent State students. Their typical Sunday activities would be curtailed (if not canceled altogether) and they would most likely be placed under an early curfew. Most sources stress that Sunday marked the beginning of a swelling resentment towards the National Guard. It has also been suggested that most of the students, at this point, had temporarily shifted their concerns from the invasion of Cambodia to the reclaiming of their alma mater.

Tanks and army vehicles familiarized themselves with the campus, seeking out vantage points over their opponents and perhaps even, like the students, waxing philosophically at the implications of such an oddly matched war game. Meanwhile, Governor Rhodes traveled to Kent to hold a press conference that was equally associated with his campaign for the Republican primary that would, if victorious, lead to his promotion into the U.S. Senate. During the conference, Rhodes likened the “outside agitators” that were rousing the students to “Brown shirts,” “Night Riders” and “Communists,” calling them “the worst type of people we harbor in America,” and attempting to put the fearful citizens at ease by assuring them that “We’re going
to use every part of the law enforcement agency of Ohio to drive them out of Kent. We are going to eradicate the problem. We’re not going to treat the symptoms.”

Although Rhodes did not directly state this, university and National Guard officials also understood from his speech that all student rallies and gatherings would be prohibited. Due to poor communication, many students were not aware of this embargo and continued to hold a loosely planned rally near the Victory Bell at 8:00 PM. Before the crowd could get too large, the National Guard interrupted the rally with tear gas and announced an immediate curfew. Several students, especially those placed under a similar curfew on Friday and Saturday, attempted to protest the curfew by marching into town. National Guardsmen quickly halted the students at the university gates and refused to grant them entrance into the town. The students then attempted a sit-in protest at the gate, refusing to move until they could speak with Mayor Satrom and/or University President Robert White. Students were first told that the two officials would speak to them shortly, then they were told they would not and that the curfew would be enforced. Guardsmen then coerced the students back to their dorms with helicopter floodlights, more tear gas and bayonets.

May 4, 1970

On Monday morning, the university attempted to assume normal operations; the weekend’s events were not enough to warrant a canceling of classes. Furthermore, there was a concern that canceling classes would only give students more free time to mill around and further agitate the National Guard. In 1970, Kent State was on the quarter system, meaning that in the beginning of May, many students were taking (or preparing to take) midterm exams. Missing class, especially for the overachieving students, was not an option. However, the students had also not forgotten about the weekend discord, and it was nearly impossible to ignore the “slightly out-of-place” tanks and armed troops. Around noon, there was a scheduled rally in the Commons where students were to gather to protest the presence of the National Guard. Some sources say they also protested the war in Cambodia. Whatever they were protesting, noon was a good time for even class-goers to attend during their lunch break.

Meanwhile, officials had assumed that Governor Rhodes had declared a state of martial law on campus. This was later proven to be false, but their presumption was that the noon rally was prohibited. Some students knew of this ban, others did not. Nearly 200 students began to gather in the commons around 11:00 AM, and by noon their numbers grew to approximately
1,500. The Victory Bell was rung and General Canterbury of the National Guard ordered his men to break up the peaceful assembly. Tear gas was used to little effect, but they managed to finally get students to retreat up Blanket Hill, which is adjacent to the Commons. At this point some students began throwing the canisters of tear gas back to the National Guard; some also threw stones and verbal missiles that likened the Guardsmen to swine.

Once the Commons had been satisfactorily cleared out, the Guardsmen moved up Blanket Hill to force students further back into the nearby Prentice Hall parking lot. Students continued to return tear gas and throw stones. Some Guardsmen threw stones back, but the distance between both parties prevented any significant injuries. The soldiers retraced their steps to the crest of the hill and prepared to march back down while the more active demonstrators, still maintaining a distance, continued to follow behind the Guard. Other students, believing the protest to be over, started to leave and head off to their next classes. At some time during their retreat, between one and two dozen guardsmen stopped, turned 180 degrees, aimed their weapons and fired for thirteen seconds towards the Prentice Hall parking lot. Allison Krause, Jeffrey Miller, Sandra Scheuer and William Schroeder were fatally wounded. Alan Canfora, John Cleary, Thomas Grace, Dean Kahler, Joseph Lewis, Donald MacKenzie, James Russell, Robert Stamps and Douglas Wrentmore were all wounded. Dean Kahler was permanently paralyzed. Shortly afterwards, all university students and faculty were ordered off campus. The university did not reopen until the summer session.
Works Cited


**Introduction**  
**The Unhomely “Memorial Mess:”**  
**Melancholic Handprints in September 11 and May 4**

The grandmother, Baby Suggs, was dead, and the sons, Howard and Buglar, had run away by the time they were thirteen years old—as soon as merely looking in the mirror shattered it (that was the signal for Buglar); as soon as two tiny hand prints appeared in the cake (that was it for Howard).

TONI MORRISON, *Beloved*

*The Complicated Loss of September 11*

In a May 5, 2006 *Wall Street Journal* article entitled “Memorial Mess,” Alex Frangos discusses the most recent problems surrounding the forthcoming World Trade Center memorial that is to be installed in the previous location of the fallen towers. In recent debates, people have argued over what kind of memorial is suitable for such a large-scale loss, whether or not to make it below or above ground and whether other installments (such as a museum) will distract visitors from the memorial and its function. In a predictable act, as Frangos reports, the issue of money has finally threatened to make a mess of the memorial stage. On May 9, 2006, the memorial’s website (buildthemorial.org) published a statement from the World Trade Center Memorial Foundation declaring that it would temporarily “halt fundraising for construction” of the memorial because of unexpected cost escalations (Statement). Prior to this monetary conflict, the foundation had established the website to make more people aware of the proposed memorial which would then facilitate fundraising for the project. “The Memorial,” the site tells us, “can only be built with your help,” which is why, after we have perused the photo store/ gift shop, read through the list of 9/11 personal stories (while being encouraged to share our own) and taken the September 11 survey (which comes off as a “How patriotic are you?” survey), we are encouraged to “Learn more about [their] cobblestones.” The stones are being sold at $500 dollars apiece to raise money for the memorial. In Frangos’ article, the foundation says its “goal is to sell 5,000 by Sept. 11 this year” (B2). Should they settle the issue of the memorial’s cost, the foundation also added that they would begin a television and print advertising campaign in May 2006.
It is, of course, arguable that this expense barrier is just a natural step in all major construction projects. An initial estimate for the cost of the project was around $494 million; now a more realistic cost has surfaced, estimating the price to be somewhere between $672 million and $1 billion, with a yearly operating fee falling between $40 million and $60 million a year. This could all be a normal calibration of an original design and design cost with a more precise design cost that alters the original design to make it more affordable. On the other hand, this is not a typical large-scale construction purchase. When negotiating the cost of a skyscraper, for example, the dominant consideration is whether or not the proposed design changes will alter the way the building functions as a financial investment. The builders of the World Trade Center had a function in mind when agreeing to spend approximately $958 million on the project in 1970.\(^1\) Memorials, on the other hand, are thought to have different and more complicated functions. Unlike buildings with mostly physical functions, memorials operate mostly on a symbolic level and are thought to primarily aid in the mourning and remembrance of a lost object of desire or traumatic event. However, they do not do so in the orderly and clearly defined ways that a building aids its benefactors and clients. This is mostly because the benefactors and clients of a memorial for a public loss (which is almost always simultaneously private) such as the one that occurred on September 11 are not clearly defined and certainly not contractual or analogous to a business transaction. It can be argued, for example, that the loss of September 11 can be and has been mourned not only by the family and friends of those who died, but also by the city of New York, the United States and other countries. Such multiple claims to grief continue to complicate our understanding of mourning as one symbolic loss starts to take on several meanings. (A surviving partner of a 9/11 victim is undoubtedly mourning something different than a person who has no direct connection with the victims and is mostly concerned with the loss of human lives in general and the breach of national security.) The public memorial, therefore, while serving a symbolic and psychological function, may also be the solidified symbol and center of complicated mourning that occurs when several claims to grief (public and private) and several interpretations of loss intersect and become physical. Should we accept this psychological function of the memorial, the ongoing “mess” that encompasses the World Trade Center memorial may be better understood as a form of prolonged or even complicated mourning.

\(^1\) The price would probably be five times as much today, suggesting that the new memorial could cost up to one fifth the cost of a new World Trade Center. (All World Trade Center Statistics come from Kirvin 532-33).
with patterns and behaviors similar to what Freud has called melancholia in his 1917 essay, “Mourning and Melancholia.”

David Eng was perhaps the first to use this Freudian lens to shed light on the complicated mourning that surrounds September 11. According to Freud, when the subject completes a process of mourning (let us say it has mourned the loss of a loved one), its libido slowly withdraws itself from the object of desire (the object cathexis) by initiating a series of reality tests in which it constantly affirms this lost object in several different contexts. One might set a place at the dinner table for the dead and then disassociate him or her with the desired ritual of eating. Several tests may be carried out depending on how strong an attachment the ego had to this object. Each test, when completed, releases the ego from the object to a certain degree until it has mostly withdrawn itself from the object, usually reattaching the ego to one or more other objects. This is not to say that the subject completely forgets or abandons the previous object of desire. Judith Butler stresses this point when elaborating on Freud’s definition of mourning in Precarious Life. “One mourns,” Butler explains, “when one accepts that by the loss one undergoes one will be changed, possibly forever” (21). Thus, successful mourning (if I can use such a conclusive adjective for a phenomenon that may never be fully complete) is a submission to this transformation that we cannot predict (especially in the academic and psychoanalytic sense) beyond the fact that a transformation will take place and that we will not (cannot) be the same afterwards.

Unlike mourning, melancholia usually occurs when this process of decathexis and recathexis is complicated or interrupted and also when this transformation is not accepted. For example, if the mourner is uncertain what it is she has lost in the object cathexis (an unacknowledged concept or ideal within the person representing the loss), the libido will not know how to withdraw itself from it—will not know what kind of reality it is to be testing—and will instead revert its attachment inwards to the ego itself, treating the ego as the thing that is lost. Eng argues that this complicated mourning (which we are safe to diagnose as a form of melancholia) may also occur when the patient’s reality testing is interfered with or becomes entangled with alternative mourning practices and meanings others have placed on the same physical loss. In his 2002 essay, “The Value of Silence,” Eng argues that nearly two months after the 9/11 attacks, the subjects (those who lost someone or something) “turn[ed]…the object into the ego mark[ing] a turning away from the external world of the social to the internal world
of the psyche, the enclosure of the social in the psychic” (87). That is to say, the subjects, instead of privately mourning the loss of their loved ones, yielded to the mourning rituals of the public—a kind of mourning for an object that the public could not have desired in the same way the private did. Instead, much of the public used the murdered victims to mourn the loss of concepts like freedom, security, innocence and power. As Eng observes, “when the (state) politics of mourning circumscribe the individual’s ability to negotiate the symbolic dimensions of loss in the face of collective group imperatives and sanctioned public histories, melancholia cannot be far behind” (87). The public, as Eng reiterates, prevents the private mourner’s declaration of his or her object to be “dead and gone,” and instead forces the mourner to be “haunted by the continual return of the lost object” (88).

Eng made this observation only a month and a half after the fatal attack—a period that is usually not long enough for a traditional process of mourning to be completed, and certainly not long enough for the onset of melancholia. Nevertheless, after observing the latest memorial mess in New York City, his early prediction seems accurate. If what is occurring in New York is because of complicated mourning, and not because of an isolated and unique phenomenon, we should be able to observe other memorial messes to gain access to a more detailed melancholic explanation. Doing so, we can find that what is occurring in New York is the uncanny recurrence of what has already occurred (and still is occurring) at Kent State. The two melancholic phenomena form tiny handprints that, up until now, seem to have gone unnoticed. We will have to imagine how the private and public spheres will react when they discover the ghostly source of many of their messes.

The May 4 Memorial: New York’s Ghostly Predecessor

Unlike the World Trade Center memorial, which was conceived in 2003, leading the way to a design competition and a final selection by January 2004, the Kent State memorial was not officially proposed until 1985, nearly fifteen years after the shootings. In this year, the National Endowment for the Arts gave Kent State University $85,000 as partial payment for the memorialization. As many memorial designs are sought out, the university held a competition that attracted 698 contestants and awarded the first place prize of $20,000 and commission to build the memorial to Ian Taberner of the University of Michigan. Taberner’s design depicts a “sunken walkway with nine ‘gashes,’ four circular rooms (graduating at a depth of two-and-a-
half to four feet), a rectangular meeting room, and a large wall. Opposite the wall is a small niche for informational brochures” (Robinson 5). (See Figure 1)

Figure 1: Taberner’s memorial design as published in the *Daily Kent Stater*, Tuesday, April 8, 1986.

William Robinson, in the July/August 1986 *Inland Architect*, compared the design to Maya Lin’s Vietnam Veterans Memorial, as it is “antiheroic,” simulating the absence of the four dead and the process we undergo to mourn their loss, walking through the memorial, passing the four empty rooms, and walking up and out the other side (7). Another similarity is the memorial’s lack of direct political commentary. While the very act of creating a memorial in a public place is a political statement, this memorial, like Maya Lin’s, does not consciously endeavor to sway the viewer’s opinions on the politics surrounding the memorialized loss. Doing so, the designs focus only on the loss—the nearly 50,000 names of the dead as the focus of the VVM and the four empty spaces of the dead as the focus of Taberner’s May 4 memorial.

One of the guidelines for Kent State’s memorial competition stated that the designer must be American. Taberner, being Canadian (even though he was a full-time faculty member at the University of Michigan), did not realize this until after winning the competition; after bringing it to Kent State’s attention, they decided to keep the design and award the prize to Taberner’s University of Michigan students who aided him in its conception. This, however, did not sit well with Taberner because the design “could not be successfully realized without his participation” (Robinson 7). The memorial prize money was temporarily returned to the NEA and, after a brief legal scuffle, Taberner’s design was dismissed and the first place design went to Bruno Ast, the

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2 In her book, *Boundaries*, Lin explains that “the design [for the VVM] should focus on the individuals who died and not on the politics surrounding that war” (3:05). This approach, she explains, “would bring the viewer to an honest acceptance of the deaths of those individuals” (ibid.).
original second place winner. While many preferred Taberner’s design to Ast’s, the university claimed that it could not use Taberner’s design without violating the guidelines of the contest, which could in turn upset potential non-American designers that did not participate in the contest because of the guideline. Furthermore, although they considered doing so, the university could not legally use Taberner’s design without his consent. Many students and May 4 affiliates were angry at the university’s seemingly prejudiced decision. (See Figure 2) Unlike Taberner’s design, Bruno Ast’s followed the guidelines put forth by Kent State University’s May 4th Memorial Committee in 1984 (Dalton 10). In a rather tongue in cheek comment made in a July

Figure 2: Editorial cartoon depicting an ethnocentric Michael Schwartz (university president at the time) looking down upon Taberner’s Canadian memorial. Appears in the April 18, 1986 Daily Kent Stater

1986 Record Courier, M. Mitchell Murray assures us of Ast’s qualifications, being “a naturalized U.S. citizen [that] came to America from Yugoslavia in 1955” (10), a statement that challenges the merit of placing ethnic guidelines on the designer of a memorial that seemingly symbolizes loss and mourning and not politics. A similar ethnic debate emerged after the public became aware of Maya Lin’s Asian descent. As soon as the VVM design competition committee released the information about the contest winner, some people began to suggest that the design was “too Asian,” or that, as the Washington Post phrased it, we had selected “An Asian Memorial for an Asian War” (Lin 4:15). Such comments, in the end, could not escalate further
since Lin, being born and raised in Athens, Ohio, was not violating any of the contest rules. Taberner was not as fortunate.

Bruno Ast’s design is similar to Lin’s and Taberner’s in that it can also be walked through, representing the four dead and nine injured students with granite pylons, and containing within it a “promise [with its overall design] for an enlightened future. It suggests containment

![Figure 3: Model by Bruno Ast. Photo: Orlando Cabanban](image)

and escape” (Dalton 14). (See Figure 3) This function, shared by both memorials, may be better described as a “memorial text,” a term James E. Young gives to any memorial that tells a story to aid in the mourning process (viii). The memorial is supposed to be able to do this, as Gail Holst-Warhaft tells us in *The Cue for Passion: Grief and Its Political Uses*, by “concretizing grief and representing [the] memory” of the loss, presumably so that the individual mourner does not have to do it herself (17). Some memorial and monument makers, however, have contested the advantages of memorial texts because they essentially tell the viewer how to remember by de-privatizing the loss or event and limiting the array of object cathexis memories to one that is permanently concretized within the memorial. Jochen and Esther Gerz’s *Monument against Fascism* in Hamburg, for example, as Young points out, purposely avoids fascistically telling people what to think by slowly sinking into the ground until there is nothing left (28). Once the monument (which is called a countermonument) has completely disappeared, it “will have returned the burden of memory to visitors” (Young 30). The Gerz monument and other countermonuments seem to detect a psychological hazard that may arise when a memorial or
monument concretizes memory in a way that is inaccurate or unlike the way a person’s libido desired or remembered the object. If, for example, the libido is ready to detach itself from the object cathexis and the person is ready to accept the transformation (as Butler puts it) from the loss or trauma, such detachment and acceptance of change may never come about when the memory of the loss is narrated by someone else and concretized in a memorial that will not physically go away. The memory of a loss, according to the countermonument philosophy, must be evoked by the mourner him or herself, and a concrete memorial seems to critically interfere with this. Perhaps the counterargument for the countermonument would be that it too is imposing a narrative or textual story onto the viewer—dictating a time span for mourning to take place and persuading the viewer of a loss to take theoretical control over a mourning process and transformation that, as Butler tells us, may only succeed when being submitted to (Butler 21). “I do not think,” Butler ruminates,

…that one can invoke the Protestant ethic when it comes to loss. One cannot say, ‘Oh, I’ll go through loss this way, and that will be the result, and I’ll apply myself to the task, and I’ll endeavor to achieve the resolution of grief that is before me.’ I think one is hit by waves, and that one starts out the day with an aim, a project, a plan, and finds oneself foiled. (21)

The countermonument, in its attempt to avoid the textualization of memorials and monuments may, in actuality, be interfering with the mourning process in ways similar to the methods it is trying to evade.

Kent State’s memorial complications had just begun. Even if Bruno Ast’s memorial text succeeded in assisting mourners with their loss on May 4, a second problem occurred from the fifteen-year delay of such an aid. Should any of the mourners have already mourned the loss of May 4 by the time they decided to build a memorial, as Kim Sorvig suggests in To Heal Kent State, construction of a new and concrete memory of the loss (which may or may not resemble the way everyone remembered or signified the loss) risked “re-opening…bitter emotions,” much like slicing open a fifteen-year old scar. Despite this risk, however, the university, which was under significant pressure from the victims’ parents and organizations like the May 4 Task Force, persevered in having the memorial designed and built. Perhaps one of the fundamental predicaments with public losses is that, should the wound from a shared loss be healed only for
some and not others, any attempt to publicly heal the others with something like a memorial risks tearing open the wound for someone else, who must then heal once more in another way.

Unfortunately, after the wound was torn open, the university ran out of funds to completely suture it. The cost of the memorial, which was originally estimated at $500,000, soon escalated to $1.3 million, a cost that, due to “lack of interest and insufficient donations” had to be lowered to $100,000 (Stoffel A20). As a result, about seven percent of the memorial was actually constructed. Instead of thirteen pylons and a geometric shape that symbolized containment and escape, the university, for it to remain with the original contracted design (and it is unlikely that they could have released themselves from this contract short of further legal battles), erected three oddly placed slabs of granite and four pylons (presumably signifying the four dead) and placed three rectangular bricks engraved with “Inquire,” “Learn” and “Reflect” in the ground. (See Figures 4 and 5) In a recent response posted to the History News Network webpage, William A. Gordon attacks the fragmented memorial, calling it an intangible “unmemorial” that gives future Kent State students and visitors nothing to inquire, learn and reflect about. This “memorial text,” instead of telling its viewers a story about containment and escape from their loss (whatever that may be), may actually be telling a story about incompletion and fragmentation—a story that represents the ambiguity and ambivalence of melancholia more than it does the working through of mourning. Interestingly, if a memorial text, such as Maya Lin’s, Ian Taberner’s or Bruno Ast’s (the completed form), has the ability to physically represent the mourning process, then a fragmented or incomplete memorial text may also represent incomplete, complicated or prolonged mourning, also known as melancholia.

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3 Gordon suggests that the university change the inscriptions to read “unnecessary, unwarranted and inexcusable,” because these words actually make some kind of direct commentary on May 4.
When one loses a desired object, as Holst-Warhaft observes, there seems to be “a necessary and unreconcilable tension between the desire to remember and the desire to forget” (17). We have observed already how the memorial animates this tension by allowing the mourner to have both desires—always remembering with a memorial that is always there, and being free to forget after knowing that the memorial is there to keep remembering for them. However, the memorial, whether it is in the form of a monument or a tombstone, has been seen in several instances to represent a publicized and political usurpation of private grief. Holst-Warhaft remarks that it is difficult to find a memorial that is not politically charged:

The monument to the fallen in wars, the battle site, the melted building left in ruins…all these are officially designated sites of collective mourning. Such public memorials are always politically charged. They are expensive, large, visited by crowds. The crowds see themselves reflected in the monument (literally in the case of the Vietnam memorial) just as the makers of monuments do, although both claim to be seeing an image of the desire of the dead for a place in the memory of the living. (Holst-Warhaft 158-159)

This inspired memorial reflection tells the viewer what it is he or she has lost. In most cases, as I mentioned previously, everyone has lost something different in their objects; they may have lost a different concept or ideal. The lost object is a signifier that, dead or alive, can have numerous signifieds, but the memorial, should it attempt to dictate what the signified is, has the ability to limit the signifieds (sometimes even a single meaning) that may or may not contain what the
viewer actually lost in the object. Furthermore, as I will discuss more fully in chapter two, the influence the memorial has over the meaning of the dead is a kind of power memorial makers can acquire over the living. Holst-Warhaft adds that today, “in addition to military, civic, and religious authorities, the modern funeral industry, the media, and the pharmaceutical companies have combined to manipulate grief in new and subtle ways” (9). Once an object of desire is declared lost, there is a period of time where the desire must reattach itself to something else. This desire may be understood as a kind of concentrated approval—a valuable commodity to those seeking out power. Not only can “the energy of extreme grief…offer a unique opportunity for social mobilization and political action” (Holst-Warhaft 9), but, should this grief become harnessed by an organization, the grief can become enslaved to work towards another’s political agenda. Because of this, memorials may be used to quiet social mobilization by serving as a convincing cure to one’s private loss. At the same time, they may influence the mourner in ways that will determine what their next object of desire will be.

For a process of mourning to be successful, the grievers of May 4 should detach their libidos from the objects of desire and then, over a variable time span, defer to reality as “the ego becomes free and uninhibited again” (Freud 154). It is arguable that this psychological success is not evident at Kent State, as the tragedy of May 4 seems to twitch more than ever in the forms of the May 4 Memorial (and numerous campus road signs pointing to the memorial), the May 4 resource room in the library, the May 4 Task Force and website and the four-day-long commemoration ceremony that, in 2006, included a burial of the U.S. Constitution, a candlelight drum circle around the memorial, the annual candlelight march, the annual silent candlelight vigil, several speeches on the university commons and a march for peace. The university as a whole is still, as Michael Schwartz (university president at the time of the memorial’s construction) commented in 1988, recognized for this one sad event more than it is “recognized for more recent, happier events, such as research at the Liquid Crystals Institute…” (Stoffel A20). As long as the university and university affiliates keep looking back to the dead, the mourning process may never be completed. There is, as Robert O’Neil et al. writes in a 1972 account, “far more…written about the six students who lost their lives at Kent and Jackson in May 1970 than about the roughly twenty-five thousand who survived” (xi).

*Ambiguous Loss*
As we started to observe with the memorial, mourners of May 4 in part fail to successfully mourn the loss of their “objects of desire” because their “objects of desire” are ambiguously defined. Serving as one of the major symptoms of Freudian melancholia, a typical May 4 mourner or commemorator “knows whom he has lost [the four dead] but not what it is he has lost in them” (Freud 155). The object cathexis has been identified at different times as the four slain, the four slain and the wounded, the tragic event as a whole, the loss and preservation of democracy (as the current university president has put it), reflection, inquiry, learning, application and freedom. In a 1971 New York Times article, May 4 coalition leader Ken Hammond contributed to this list by complaining that “people would like to forget [the political conditions that caused the students to get killed]…That’s why this memorial service is only about a tragedy of the American dream” (Salpukas 33). Being similar to the uncertainty surrounding the “ownership” of the loss of 9/11, several parties have stepped up to perform the mourning and memory work of May 4 in their own ways. Political activists like Ken Hammond wanted the loss to belong to the New Left and the philosophy that went into the protests that culminated in the four deaths. The university administration (both then and now) has expressed a desire for the loss to belong only to Kent State University and not outside political groups. The parents and friends of the slain lost their children and acquaintances. Some conservatives (at the time) actually expressed gratification from the loss, wishing that more students had been shot so as to put an end to student unrest. Students in 1970 treated the loss as a lost classmate, lost liberty or lost friend. And the majority of students now believe the memorialized loss is the four slain students, although most cannot recall the names; they are not written directly on the memorial but on a nearby placard that reminds us of those that were killed and injured on May 4. All of this seems to represent an entanglement of private and public loss and ideas about what and how we should remember.

In the introduction to “May 4 Site and Memorial,” a pamphlet dispensed at the memorial site, Carol A. Cartwright (current university president) begins to emphasize the memorial’s purpose by reflecting on the ensuing years [in which] Kent State’s learning community has honored the memories of Allison Krause, Jeffrey Miller, Sandra Scheuer and William Schroeder [her emphasis] with an enduring dedication to scholarship that seeks
to prevent violence and promote democratic values from public service to civil discourse.

The names of the four dead are strongly emphasized in the introduction to this pamphlet, just as they are similarly emphasized in most other May 4 literature. However, a simple survey will show that most of the student body (even those that have visited the memorial and have observed one or more of the commemorations) do not remember all four names. I am writing this introduction after nearly two years of research and having attended Kent State for five years; still I find myself forgetting one or two of the four names. This emphasizes the complications memorialization brings to the conceptualization of loss in the public as well as the private spheres. I, like most Kent State students, did not know the four students, nor was I ever alive the same time they were. I would only be lying to my readers and myself if I claimed to be mourning the loss of these students. My libido has never attached itself to the four students while they were alive, and it seems slightly absurd and perhaps even necrophilous to claim a desire for them now. I do not believe that these or any other protesting students deserved to die; however, in the presence of May 4 memorial makers and commemorators (and we may include most other memorialized losses and events with this consideration), it is considered poor taste for me to suggest that I do not care for the dead.

Poor taste is easier to attack than ambiguity, which is one of the reasons I think the names are not directly on the memorial and why commemorators and administrators like Cartwright keep the memorial and commemorations as ambiguous as possible—always following the names of the slain with elaborations of a memorial that has several other functions. Nobody ever questions why these other functions cannot exist on their own, why it takes a death to warrant a commemoration of democratic values or, more crucially, why it takes a death to captivate an audience to the point of being interested in democratic discourse. Michael Schwartz made a comment similar to Cartwright’s when he was president, saying that the memorial would not only commemorate the four students killed in the shootings and nine others who were wounded, but also would “create a site in memory of those events and those students that is one of reflection and learning and peace on our campus” (Times, “Memorial…” A10). Memorials are a sensitive subject for officials and decision makers like Schwartz and Cartwright who seem to avoid making statements that are completely for or against a memorial. Should they make a strong statement for or against the four dead they may put themselves at risk of being
misinterpreted as saying these four are more important than thousands of living students or saying that they do not care if students are killed on campus. Ambiguity, besides being a leading cause of melancholia, is also a staple to the rhetoric of memorialization which may imply that the May 4 memorial and memorialization has an inherited function of ambiguity (being created out of ambiguity) and would otherwise cease to exist (the memorial as a memorial) should it take on one meaning or another.

Let us imagine, for example, that the memorial, as Cartwright says, is used as a “prevent[ion of] violence and promot[ion of] democratic values from public service to civil discourse.” If we omitted her inclusion of the four dead in this statement, the memorial would be a reaction to student unrest and maybe even the time when the National Guard came to campus. This is arguably not something people care to remember in the form of memorials and commemorations. If it were, we might expect 1970 memorials and commemorations to appear at Miami University (of Ohio) and Ohio State University. Both universities, as O’Neil points out, had protests just prior to May 4 that were broken up by the National Guard. At Miami, students and “outside agitators” occupied the ROTC building—170 were arrested. Similarly, and more violently, the National Guard suppressed protestors at Ohio State, resulting in more injuries and tear gas—a scene that uncannily resembled Kent State before the shootings (O’Neil 24-25)⁴. It seems that the main reason these events are not memorialized and rarely discussed is that nobody died, and without this physical loss of life, the university, if it lost anything, easily detached its libido from the object cathexis (which may be seen as civil disobedience amongst students and loss of power, freedom and control to the National Guard) and reinvested the desire in other areas. Without the loss of life—without the manipulation of dead bodies—these universities do not have enough to interest people in the remembrance of the April 1970 student unrest, nor is there anything that can be used against the universities for not commemorating such events.

Now let us imagine the memorial stands only for the loss of the four individuals. Such a memorial would be more like a gravestone and would probably not be placed in the university commons. That is to say, if we only observed the deaths of the four slain, we would probably only memorialize them and our personal loss of them (and not necessarily the political manner in which they died) for a brief period of time (just as the university would the death of a student in a car accident) and then, as the libido detaches itself from the loved one and moves on to

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⁴ Both of these protests were also documented in the April 1970 issues of the Daily Kent Stater.
something else, we would recover and work through the loss. It is not likely that a memorial would have been built in this case, as the mourning process would have been complete and the ego would have been released onto other living students.

A strange melancholic incantation seems to be chanted whenever the mourning of a private death is mixed with the mourning of a collective and more political group. What seems to be occurring today at Kent State (and also New York City) is the amalgamation of two separate desires (one for the private lost body, another for public and political power) in the form of a memorial. The memorial—built in the ritual of a gravestone and insisted upon as it feeds off the public’s fears and superstitions about unmarked burial grounds—preaches democracy in the name of (even if we do not remember the literal names) the four dead. At this point the mourning process is disturbed and prohibited (via confusion and ambiguity) from being completed. The memorial is built not for one purpose or the other, but a combination of the two (each seemingly reaping the benefits of the other), and so a proper or complete process of mourning with an identified object cathexis never occurs. Since the two purposes cannot be separated, the memorial and observance of the shootings start to resemble the ambiguous binary of the living dead. Simple grief mutates into melancholy and refuses definition or resolution. Instead of grieving the loss and moving away from it, the university continues to revisit and relive the tragic event.

*The May 4 Task Force, the May 4 Coalition and the Gym Controversy*

It seems that much of the ambiguity that complicates the memorial and the commemoration today is due to the conflict between the university and the May 4 Task Force, a registered independent student organization that has “dedicated [itself] to teaching new generations about the legacy of the shootings” (World). Doing so, they have placed cards for circulation in the May 4 Resource Room emblazoned with a red peace sign that seems to resurrect the New Left movement believed by many to have been prominent on Kent’s campus in 1970. (see Fig. 6).

Near to where these cards are located, one can also pick up the “Guide to May 4, 1970 Sites, Memorials and Observances…” that describes, among other May 4 related events, the annual Candlelight Walk and Vigil held every May 3rd and 4th by the May 4 Task Force. This
walk “begins at the Victory Bell on the Commons, proceeds around the campus and ends at the Prentice Hall parking lot… One person, holding a memorial candle, stands at each spot where a student died” (“Guide”). The vigil is reminiscent of a séance—an effort to conjure spirits or raise the dead. Carole A. Barbato, author of “‘Embracing Their Memories’: Accounts of Loss and May 4, 1970,” explains that the vigil is followed by a commemoration of the 13 dead or wounded at Kent State and 2 dead at Jackson State University on May 14, 1970, which begins with the tolling of the Victory Bell on the Commons 15 times (95). For Barbato, …an important part of the memorial commemoration has always been the stories or accounts of the lives of Sandy, Bill, Jeff, and Allison as told by their friends and family members. The stories are an attempt to embrace their memories and tell the story of May 4 to future generations…. (95)

This may also resemble an uncanny death knell followed by ghost stories.

The May 4 Task Force has been retelling such stories since 1975, when students and victims of the May 4 shootings perceived that the university was not doing enough to keep the memory of May 4 alive. Their website states that they organized because they “felt that the truth about what happened in May of 1970 had yet to be told and that the lessons to be learned from the tragedy should be part of a continuous and living history” (May 4 Task Force.). Guided by charter members Alan Canfora, Robbie Stamps and Dean Kahler (all shooting victims), the group promptly took control over the coordination of annual commemoration in 1976. Although many of the members were either directly involved with the event in 1970, it is evident that the Task Force was and still is politically driven and leans heavily to the Left. Scott Bills writes in
his introduction to *Kent State/ May 4: Echoes Through A Decade* that the establishment of the Task Force represented the official beginning of “a kind of left-liberal control over the commemorative activities on May 4” (ibid.). This control, however, was only awarded after a five-year struggle with the university that involved the creation of a plethora of Leftist and university organizations, each trying to outmaneuver the other.

According to Bills, “the political left, among its various factions, has generally seen the four deaths [on May 4] as an integral part of a long and continuing struggle against militarism, imperialism, and the suppression of dissident rights at home” (31). Because of this, it attempted to identify itself with May 4 early on to prevent larger territorial battles in the future. Doing so, many liberals argued that the first memorial ceremony in 1971, organized by the university, was inappropriate. The university at its most liberal moments was in the middle, and its control of the commemorations would run counter to much of what the Left had been working towards. The university, however, was not ignorant to this assertion over the loss, and countered the Left with a direct claim to May 4 in 1971. Prior to the first commemoration, university President White addressed the question of May 4 ownership by declaring “emotionally and philosophically the occasion is ours” (Bills 32). A summary of a report by the official May 4th Recognition Committee advised that the May 4 commemoration be “limited to the University community” (Bills 32). The Mayday Coalition, a group of student activists, and the May 4 United Front soon attacked this university-limited recognition and then sponsored and planned “alternative” programs (Bills 32-33). In an April 23, 1971 Daily Kent Stater, as Bills points out, shooting victims Alan Canfora, Tom Grace, Robert Stamps and Dean Kahler criticized the university-run Recognition Committee for being “‘totally unrepresentative of the people and ideas…whom it was designed to commemorate” (Bills 33). Shortly after, the university responded by creating another commemoration committee to coordinate later commemorations. The Center for Peaceful Change was established as a “living memorial” to the victims of May 4.\(^5\) The organization was created to better meet the needs of May 4 observers; however, because little distinction was made between this committee and the last university-run committee, liberal observers continued to resist while making alternative plans for commemorations. One of these

\(^5\) This organization has later been changed to the Center for Applied Conflict Management (CACM) in 1994, which contains the conflict studies program and is connected to Kent’s political science department. While it does maintain its origin as a living memorial to the four slain, it is much less associated with the commemoration program than it was in the seventies.
opponents, as Bills adds, wrote that it was insulting to suggest that we need “peaceful change:” “What happened in May 1970 was ‘no mistake’ but rather a deliberate action, and that radicals must use the annual occasion to show a ‘connection to all struggles of liberation’” (Bills 33). The CPC was therefore perceived as a silencing device installed by the university to quiet the liberal commemorators.

The May 4 Task Force was thus assembled from scraps of these earlier groups that lacked enough organization to survive. For their first two years they concentrated on issues that involved taking control of the May 4 commemorations, having classes canceled each May 4 and officially dedicating and naming four campus buildings after the four casualties of May 4 (Bills 40-41). These issues, however, were set-aside in 1977 when, as Paul Spreiregen notes, “the memories and passions associated with May 4 were rekindled into new controversy” (10). At this time, seven years after the shootings, the Task Force learned that the university planned to build an addition to its gym annex (a structure for health and recreation) that would protrude onto part of the site where the National Guard marched just prior to firing their weapons into the crowd of students. News of the gym addition immediately incited anxiety and alarm in the Task Force. Many of its members (such as the ones who had been shot) were still in the midst of a legal battle over the May 4 shootings; no one, it is important to note, had been held responsible for the shootings (nor would they ever). Because of this, many viewed the construction of the Gym Annex addition as an attempt to cover up any evidence that would persuade a jury to rule in the favor of the parents and victims of May 4. For fear of having the events of May 4 completely exterminated from public consideration (thus leaving family members and victims to remember and bring closure to the event with nothing more than bullet wounds and corpses) the Task Force pleaded with all those that attended the 1977 May 4 commemoration to take up the “Stop the Gym” cause (Hensley 127). Thomas R. Hensley, co-author of *Kent State and May 4th: A Social Science Perspective* explains that the key speakers of the event “ignited the crowd” by telling them the builders would have to cover 1000 students in cement in order to build the gym and that they could stop the bulldozers if they lay down in front of them (127). 1500 of the participants marched around the campus and 150 of these demonstrators, after occupying the second floor of Rockwell Hall where the University Trustees were holding a meeting, gave birth to the May 4 Coalition, a group designed with the specific function of protesting the gym (ibid). This group made several requests presented in the form of a list, and the University Trustees denied almost
all of them. The Coalition then gathered together camping gear, tents and portable pavilions and assembled what they are mostly known for at Kent State: Tent City. Much like a sit-in that follows the rules of the peaceful protest, the Coalition wanted Tent City to put pressure on the university by amassing as much media attention as possible. Such pressure would force the university into submission so as not to become permanently stigmatized with the negative connotations of May 4 and a perceived national image of insensitivity towards the victims. This small canvas town lasted 62 days before law enforcement finally arrested 193 protestors and confiscated all their lodgings (Hensley 130). The site continued to function as the culmination of several future coalition marches and protests—the chain link fence that surrounded it either being cut or climbed over which resulted in further arrests.

The unique quality of the May 4 Coalition, one that made it more suitable (or at least safer) to handle the gym controversy than the May 4 Task force, was its lack of a vital head or center that could be easily dismantled by opponents. “The May 4 Coalition,” as Hensley describes,

is difficult to characterize…in an easy manner. Meetings…were open, and anyone in attendance was allowed to participate in discussions and to vote. No “officers” or “leaders” were ever selected; when conditions required that committees be formed or representatives selected for particular tasks, persons were selected on an ad hoc basis for that function only. Thus the coalition was a group without membership requirements and without permanently elected leaders or representatives. It was unlike anything that had ever been seen on Kent’s campus. (122-123)

The logic of the Coalition, as Hensley describes, revolved around two premises: “(1) it would be ineffective to attempt to convince the administration and trustees to change the site through logical arguments relating to moral, historical, and ecological concerns and (2) therefore, it was necessary to work to create such enormous pressures on the trustees that there would be no choice but to build the facility on another site” (131).

One of the major problems with the Coalition, however, was that most of its members were not actually students. Many of them experienced the protest and shootings of 1970 and others hailed from neighboring schools. This caused them to be identified (centered) by the university and potential outside sympathizers as “radical hippies” which may have contributed to
the failure of Tent City. Of the 193 people arrested at Tent City, Bills remarks, 63.2 percent of
them had not been students during either the spring quarter or the first term of summer school”
(45). In addition to a lack of current student interest, the group’s lack of a center left it
vulnerable to internal conflict. After being adopted by the RSB, YSA, CYO and Spartacus
Youth League, the Coalition began to fall apart (Bills 47). In an ironic turn, outside agitators had
corrupted the Coalition’s dispute with the university and, similar to the way the Coalition is
accused of using May 4 as political leverage, these groups, Bills points out, “sought to use the
‘Kent State struggle’ as a means to build up its national organization.” (47). Doing so, several
RSB chapters at eastern universities “organized support for ‘move the gym’ rallies in Kent,”
causing the reputation of the Coalition to be further stigmatized by an association with
communism. Many of the other Coalition members, however, were opposed to the RSB’s
radical ways, which is perhaps the key reason the organization eventually broke apart.
Meanwhile, construction of the Gym began in September of 1977 and was put into use July
1979.

The May 4 Task Force, the May 4 Coalition and Tent City were all created nearly six
years after the shootings, a time span that, despite the unfinished business of legal battles and
unclaimed responsibility over the shootings, seems reasonable for the completion of mourning
and the acceptance of the addition to the gym annex. This rejection of an object of growth, in
favor of a six-year-old object of loss, resembles the melancholiac’s “refusal of
nourishment…and… overthrow…of that instinct which constrains every living thing to cling to
life” (Freud 156). It is ironic that the structure they did not want to be built (even if their desire
was only for it to be relocated) was a structure intended to help the living grow. (See Figures 7
and 8)
We may take some advice from James A. Young and consider the participants of Tent City to have been suffering from “the missing gravestone syndrome”—a condition of unrest when a mourner is “in need of cathartic ceremony” (7). If, as I suggested earlier, the process of mourning the loss of a loved one has been mixed up with the process of losing and gaining political power, we may imagine the final product to be a conceptual loss disguised as the corpse of a loved one, requiring the same sort of tombstone or memorial marker to cathartically aid in the mourning process.

Because there was no official memorial marker in 1977, the site of the shootings could have automatically served this function, which would have caused the ground breaking for the gym to represent the unearthing of a body. On the other hand, should the others on the campus have successfully mourned or adjusted to the loss by 1977, the insistence of the Tent City occupants to preserve the site may have also unleashed a cloud of superstition on the campus, causing people to believe that mourning had not been completed (even if it really was) because there was no official memorial marker and the one site that may have heretofore stood as a marker was being disturbed.
George Segal’s Rejected Sculpture

There was an attempt to allay some of this confusion or “missing gravestone syndrome” a year later when the Mildred Andrews Fund out of Cleveland donated $100,000 to have a memorial built on the Kent Campus in memory of the May 4 shootings. Having been given this financial aid, the university soon commissioned famous sculptor George Segal (known at the time for his public artworks made of plaster) to make a sculpture. The design and theme of the memorial was left mostly up to him, the only stipulation being that “no likenesses of the four students killed here be used in the sculpture” (Lang 1). When Segal later presented a model of what would soon be a bronze statue of the biblical Abraham preparing to slay Isaac, the university was put in a less ambiguous and most uncomfortable situation. (See Figure 9) Abraham and Isaac was, to the university, too controversial, and they argued that “a violent event should not be commemorated by an apparent act of violence” (“Princeton”). Unlike the abstract and ambiguous 1985 memorial, this “memorial text” seems to have a more direct and politically engaged narrative. Segal stated in a 1979 New York Times article that the statue “deals with mercy and compassion and has a happy ending. There are reasons for that on which we should reflect” (“Princeton”). This may arguably say more than a few unmarked pylons.

Figure 9: Segal’s Abraham and Isaac: In Memory of May 4, 1970, Kent State University 1978, Princeton University. Photo appears in Harriet F. Senie’s Contemporary Public Sculpture, pp. 40.
On the other hand, to help to explain why the university rejected the memorial gift, this statue is politically charged, and one cannot accept the statue without positioning oneself as the author of a political message that the dead bodies will inevitably be forced to murmur. Biblical viewers may be offended to see National Guardsmen and “rabble rousers” likened to the holy text. Some could argue that the biblical scene is inappropriate because students were actually killed and Isaac was not. In a Kent State University masters thesis that focuses entirely on the George Segal controversy, Sterling Victor Fleisher points to one graduate student at the time who thought the story of Cain and Abel would have better represented the event of May 4 (117). If the story of Abraham and Isaac is a parable of one’s faith being tested by God, how might May 4 be read as a test of faith? Who is doing the testing? Is it a test to see if our country is strong enough to stay together in a time of political turmoil? Could that make the country the God-like tester of its students and servicemen? Is that a positive or negative comparison? And finally, conservatives and liberals together would argue over which biblical figure represents the students and which the National Guardsmen. Fleisher talks about one student who thought the memorial was tacky, wondering how long it would be before someone painted “Nixon” or “Jim Rhodes” on the back of the figure of Abraham (117). This kind of vandalism, people could then argue, would certainly give either of the two men too much credit, since Nixon has been held the most responsible for deaths in Vietnam and Rhodes is single handedly responsible for sending the national guard to Kent. Abraham has historically been given much more credit, probably because Isaac never dies in the story.

Segal’s controversial statue found a home at Princeton University in 1979, and Kent State University, being in a lose-lose situation, was criticized for relinquishing it. Leading May 4 activist Alan Canfora, who was shot in the wrist on May 4, complained that “It’s an insult to the families and memories of the students that Kent State refused to accept the sculpture. Kent State is being insensitive by not recognizing the significance of the events” (“Princeton”). Perhaps the worst rebuttal, as Fleisher points out, came from the student body’s reaction to the university’s suggestion to Segal just after rejecting the design. University Presidential Assistant Dr. Robert McCoy asked Segal “to relinquish the completed sculpture and create another of a nude or semi-nude young girl using her feminine charms to deflect a young soldier from using his gun by sticking a flower down the barrel of his rifle” (108). When the students got word of this request,
many attacked the university for misrepresenting women (109). It would be interesting to see how the students’ reactions would change should George Segal have been the author of this theme.

It seems almost inevitable that institutions like Kent State will find themselves in a gloomy predicament whenever pressured to build a memorial that, as we have been observing, is a combination of the physical loss of life and the political struggle over power. Memorials never exclusively commemorate the dead while excluding politics, or politics while excluding the dead. As soon as a memorial commemorates one or the other, it is no longer a memorial. It can be said that Princeton, for example, is using Segal’s rejected memorial as a political art piece; while it has “in memory” in its title, it is not the Kent State memorial and will not emit the same double function it would on Kent’s campus. The political art piece encourages us to reevaluate the limited ways in which we have previously understood a topic. It begs to be engaged with and challenged, using a critical lens to promote the use of critical lenses over and above the monolithic promotion of that particular lens. However, when the same art piece is used as a memorial, the conclusive theme of the memorial as gravestone or final resting place gets tangled up with the espoused theoretical theme, so that the theme of Abraham and Isaac, for example, becomes anchored in place as the only lens suitable for reading May 4. When it comes to the loss of a desired object (let us say one has lost her father), it is contestably argued that tombstones can cathartically help the person detach her libido from the lost object. Ideologies and ideological objects, however, invite passersby to participate in a conversation, absorbing them, if anything, instead of sending them on their way. The memorial is a combination of the two—firmly grasping the libidos of its viewers that see only the grave signifier of their loss. We may sometimes understand memorial viewers to frequently gaze upon powdery corpse-faces that are animated by unknown or unacknowledged desires.

The following two chapters and conclusion will exhume and flesh out three phenomena at work in the previous memorial discussion and in Kent State’s present condition of melancholic memorialization. Chapter one discusses ghostly matters—a phrase Avery Gordon coins in her book by the same name—and the effect historical narratives have on individual human and individual group loss. Hayden White has called these narratives “historical emplotments,” and there seems to be an underlying resistance caused by historical materials that were relegated by more privileged emplotments. Gordon defines such a resistance as a haunting, while Marita
Sturken classifies it as a “tangled memory”—the entanglement of prefabricated cultural and fantasized narratives with a more real and harder to understand reality. This chapter will combine the languages of Gordon, Sturken and White to reveal Kent State’s ghostly, historical entanglements that have complicated the mourning process. Chapter two uses the combined theories of Juliana Schiesari and Judith Butler to reevaluate the function of melancholia at Kent State. According to Butler, melancholia is often misunderstood as a negative consequence of complicated mourning. However, it may actually be a precondition to mourning that ushers in a kind of psychic life or enlightenment that finally enables the libido to detach itself from the object cathexis. Schiesari has observed a similar kind of enlightenment and has also uncovered a way in which this kind of beneficial melancholia has been historically manipulated by certain cultural forces so as to control the distribution of power amongst males and females. This reading will complement the introduction and help us to understand memorialization and commemoration as a mechanisms used to control the distributions of power. The conclusion will reflect on the story of John Begala whose complex personhood (a term used by Gordon in chapter one) impelled him to wrestle with furniture without memory during the 1970’s gym controversy. It will then underline the importance of hauntings and also stress the danger hauntings pose to those unwilling to break away from the linguistic structures in which they live.
Works Cited


May 4 Site And Memorial. Brochure produced by University Communications and Marketing. Kent State University.


Chapter One

The Ghosts of B.J. Thomas and Mary Ann Vecchio:
Tangled Hauntings in May 4, 1970

Young girl, get out of my mind. My love for you is way out of line. Better run girl. You’re much too young girl… Beneath your perfume and make-up you’re just a baby in disguise. And though you know that it is wrong to be alone with me, that come-on look is in your eyes…

GARY PUCKETT AND THE UNION GAP, “Young Girl”

Raindrops keep fallin’ on my head. But that doesn’t mean my eyes will soon be turnin’ red; cryin’ not for me. ‘Cause I’m never gonna stop the rain by complainin.’ Because I’m free. Nothing’s worryin’ me.

B.J. THOMAS, “Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head”

Figure 1: Page 1 of the May 5, 1970 New York Times
Shortly after the Ohio National Guard fired into a crowd of students, photographer John Paul Filo of the *Valley Daily News* [Tarentum, PA] photographed the image of a girl screaming over the lifeless body of Jeffrey Miller. Most major and local newspapers used the photo, which seemingly captured the experience of Kent State that afternoon, to accompany the breaking news story. *Newsweek* magazine exhibited the picture on the cover of its May 18th issue (which was garnished with the title “NIXON’S HOME FRONT”), and in 1971, this image along with Filo’s other Kent State photos helped the photographer to win a Pulitzer Prize in the category of Spot News Photography. Like the memorial text, however, this picture can be said to participate in and perhaps even interfere with the mourning process as it helps to “emplot” (a term used by Hayden White) the historical experience with a prefabricated and more culturally familiar narrative. By combining White’s theory of emplotment with the theories of entanglement (Marita Sturken), haunting (Avery Gordon) and absence and loss (Dominick LaCapra), this chapter will examine how the private experience of loss becomes entangled with absent cultural narratives in ways that can complicate and prolong mourning and reveal the importance of acknowledging multiple emplotments in the processes of studying, rehearsing and writing history.

By now, despite the general assumption that the girl in the picture was a “fellow student” mourning the loss of her friend, Jeff, many students and commemorators know that she was really a 14-year-old runaway from Florida who had ventured north to Kent’s campus and had participated in the protest. It is not a secret; in a 1995 interview she tells us that she “hitchhiked her way into history” (Marcus), and at the 36th Annual May 4 Commemoration, in which she was invited to give a short speech, she introduced herself by saying “as you know I was fourteen years old when I came here to Kent State University” (Vecchio). Nevertheless, people still consider this image as the signifier of May 4, 1970 in ways implicative of a cultural investment in certain images of loss that, for some reason, are more suitable than others. We must now question what exactly this cultural investment comprises.

In her 1997 book, *Tangled Memories*, Marita Sturken discusses the function the photographic image (both still and moving) has in the making of cultural memory. Camera images, Sturken explains, as they seemingly freeze an event at a certain moment, are often considered a substitution for memory (19). However, this frozen quality, Sturken argues, is the very reason photos should be viewed separately from memory because “memories do not remain
static through time—they are reshaped and reconfigured, they fade and are rescripted. Though an image may fix an event temporally, the meaning of that image is constantly subject to contextual shifts” (Sturken 20-21). In this sense, the moment Mary Ann Vecchio became frozen into this image, her signifier, which should have taken flight and surrendered itself to succeeding signifiers (subsequent frames), stopped signifying an upset 14-year-old girl who tried to resolve her family problems by hitchhiking from Florida to Kent, Ohio. Instead, this moment, now a physical image that can be handled and passed around, started signifying in ways complimentary to the context (and assumed meaning of that context) in which it was used.

Representative images, such as the Vecchio photo, Sturken argues, have been known to fabricate memories within viewers’ minds that can make them believe they actually remember an event or person, even though all they remember is the photographic image. Sturken categorizes such photograph-dependent memories as “flashbulb memories.” “Increasingly,” Sturken explains,

Americans participate in the witnessing of history through camera images; ‘where we were’ when it happened was in front of the television screen. Indeed, recent psychological research shows that people often misremember the moment when they first heard of a national catastrophe by reimagining themselves in front of a television set. This particular mechanism of remembering, whereby we imagine our bodies in a spatial location, is also a means by which we situate our bodies in the nation. (25)

We not only remember history through the dictatorial camera lens, but we remember our bodies as one edits a film, selecting images and shots of ourselves complimentary and consistent with the production narrative initiated by the photograph. What we are left with is a film production that blurs the boundaries between stage and audience, nearly eliminating the function of interpretation and interpreter. A prime example of this phenomenon, Sturken suggests, is the famous 1963 Zapruder film of the assassination of John F. Kennedy. The film was first released as a series of photos in an issue of Life magazine. After much scrutiny and attempts to read between the selected frames, the film was later made available to the public for animated screening. Sturken argues that the film, in both its static and animate forms, painted the event with a color of romance by “symbolizing Kennedy’s life and what is scripted in retrospect as America’s loss of national innocence” (28-29). We may recall the Kent State shootings to have
also signified the loss of National Innocence. Sturken calls this characterization a “well-worn”
trope that has been “reiterated with Pearl Harbor, the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal [and]
the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing…” (29). We certainly will add the World Trade Center attack
to this list.

Just as the Zapruder film uses the “well worn” mold of losing innocence to cast the
memory of Kennedy’s assassination, so does the Filo photo force May 4, 1970 to take a shape it
most likely did not have in the more raw moments of its occurrence. Hayden White, in his
theoretical explorations of historiography, has more fully accounted for this phenomenon,
determining it to be a kind of historical “emplotment,” which is “the encodation of the facts
contained in the [historical] chronicle as components of specific kinds of plot structures…”
(1714). Such emplotments, White explains, are dependent on the “the historian’s subtlety in
matching up a specific plot structure with the set of historical events that he wishes to endow
with a meaning of a particular kind” (1716). Once he does this, the reader of the history,
in the process of following the historian’s account of those events, gradually
comes to realize that the story he is reading is of one kind rather than another:
romance tragedy, comedy, satire, epic, or what have you. And when he has
perceived the class or type to which the story that he is reading belongs, he
experiences the effect of having the events in the story explained to him. (1717)
We may say the Vecchio and Miller photo is an example of a tragic or romantic emplotment
selected consciously or unconsciously by Filo and/or the media as a way of communicating to
the audience and reader of history just what kind of event took place and how one is to feel about
such an event. This is not to say that there is necessarily a “true” story or image of May 4 that is
not being conveyed. In fact, as White and other historiographers have argued, there is no way of
depicting a historical event without utilizing some form of emplotment and therefore it would be
futile to try and prove that this image of May 4 is not as good as another. What this does
suggest, however, is that other emplotted images and narratives can be used for the same
historical event (and many have, although none to the same privileged extent as this one) and
that, should we learn something different about May 4 from each emplotment, it may be
beneficial to our understanding of the event’s history if we do not allow only one or two images
or stories to dominate the entire event.
For us to consider the image of Vecchio and Miller as part of an historical emplotment, we should be able to suspect that the image is not as unique as it originally appeared. For example, we may consider the image to follow the literature and film motif of a female lover mourning over a recently fallen male lover and/or defender. Such a scene has been frequently written into our culture’s tragedies and romances and usually occurs at the end of a story. Historical images, such as the Filo photo, used to invoke this kind of narrative must also appear to contain certain variables such as heternormativity, patriarchy and female weakness. As a way of detecting this emplotted narrative we may simply imagine a change in some of these variables, asking questions such as: Would this image be as popular and how would it be received if a male were kneeling over Jeffrey Miller’s body with the same expression on his face? OR What if the male were kneeling hysterically over a female? Interestingly, the cover of Life magazine depicted two serious looking males appearing to work with doctor-like determination on a wounded student. This emplotment, complementing the Vecchio story, appeals to the same cultural audience by showing them how a male should react to the same situation. (See Figures 2 and 3)

Figure 2: Tragedy At Kent Figure 3: Nixon’s Home Front

In the 2000 documentary, 20th Century With Mike Wallace: The Legacy of Kent State, May 4 expert Professor Jerry Lewis refers to the dream-shattering image of Vecchio and Miller as the Vietnam Pietá, an emplotted image that not only recalls the art motif of Mary cradling a
dead or dying Christ in her arms while reducing the event to a good versus evil binary, but one
that also likens the photographed scene to the fulfillment of an already written (prophesized)
script. (see figures 4 and 5)

![Figure 3: Michelangelo's Pietà, St. Peter's Basilica, Rome.](image1)

![Figure 4: John Filo’s Pietà](image2)

Emplotments like this, White suggests, direct the viewer in two different directions at the same
time: “toward the events described in the narrative and toward the story type or mythos which
the historian has chosen to serve as the icon of the structure of the events…” (1719). In this
sense, we may look upon the Vecchio photo not as the image of May 4 but as a kind of catalyst
between May 4 and an instruction to feel as we would in other tragic situations. “The narrative
itself,” White explains,
is not the icon; what it does is describe events in the historical record in such a
way as to inform the reader what to take as an icon of the events so as to render
them “familiar” to him. The historical narrative thus mediates between the events
reported in it on the one side and pregeneric plot structures conventionally used in
our culture to endow unfamiliar events and situation with meanings on the other.
(1719)

We must be careful how we receive such a critical perspective on an event that, while
perhaps no longer inherently tragic in the exact same way its emplotment suggests, is still serious
enough to demand that we learn as much as necessary from it to prevent similar events from
happening in the present and future. Several important questions should be asked in ways that do not counterproductively de-emphasize the lives lost on May 4 in the same way they may have been overemphasized. Why, for example, does the cultural public need to be instructed how to feel about something like a shooting at Kent State? Indeed, many people at the time were actually in favor of the shootings; however, is telling them how to feel (even if they agreed to follow the sensory instruction) the best way to teach someone that there is something wrong with our government shooting college students? While it may be temporarily productive, this kind of rhetoric seems to make the culture equally vulnerable to a more negative use of emplotment that can result in further violence. For example, on many occasions our country’s war against terrorism, Afghanistan and Iraq has been justified solely on its position within the religious emplotment of good vs. evil. This dependence on historical emplotment (and I consider contemporary journalism a kind of immediate historicism) to know how to feel creates a culture that, as Judith Butler has discussed in Precarious Life, values life and grieves the loss of life only on the basis of whether or not the life it values or grieves calculates as a valuable or grievable life within the emplotted narrative. This kind of precarious life will be discussed further in the next chapter.

In terms of true loss and trauma, such as those lost at Kent State in 1970, we should also consider how the emplotment of a loss within a popular narrative might interfere with mourning, as the patient’s memory of what has been lost becomes entangled with the memory of the emplotted narrative. To begin answering this question, we might consider John Filo’s famous photograph as the signifier of the May 4 to be a tangled memory and a haunting, the former term being utilized by Sturken to describe the simultaneous presence of both the historical event and the pregeneric plot structures in which they are told in the mind of a person or persons within a culture. While Sturken does not critique White, she does imagine what White describes as emplotment to be messier and more unstable than his description entails. For if an historical event is emplotted so that a viewer in California, for example, can understand what happened at Kent State, those who were actually at Kent State or those who experienced a more personal loss (such as the parents of the four slain students) are forced to handle at least two different versions of memories of the event or person that they lost. These memories are frequently contradictory. For example, in a 1990 New York Times article entitled, “And Still No Honest Apology,” the mother of Jeffrey Miller, Elaine Miller Holstein, describes the Vecchio photo as something that
“assaulted” her wherever she went in the summer of 1970 following the shootings. She continues to describe the image, which was printed over and over in newspapers and magazines, as a haunting; what she remembered in her son had been redistributed in the form of something she was unfamiliar with. It seems that when this happens to one’s memory, the popular circulated image (the Filo photo) has the ability to overpower the previous memory and relegate it to a secondary status, visible only to the person in much the same way a ghost would that only she can see. To the rest of us it would appear as if the person were talking to walls.

Avery F. Gordon more theoretically describes this haunting in *Ghostly Matters: Haunting in the Sociological Imagination*. The cultural strands that make up an entanglement for Sturken are, for Gordon, the evident relationships of power that complicate life. “We can,” Gordon elucidates, “and must call [power] by recognizable names, but so too we need to remember that power arrives in forms that can range from blatant white supremacy and state terror to ‘furniture without memories’” (3). “Furniture without memories,” a phrase Gordon borrows from Toni Morrison, is the first complication of life. It is “that place where an unrememberable past and an unimaginable future force us to sit day after day and the conceptual abstractions because everything of significance happens there among the inert furniture and the monumental social architecture” (4). The famous photograph of Mary Ann Vecchio crying over her fellow student’s body may be viewed as a piece of furniture without memories. We use this emplotted image in our daily conceptions of May 4, 1970 as one would a sofa in her living room. We lounge upon the image, taking naps every now and then, because the image is comfortable and seems to fit in with the decorative scheme of our historical house. The image is homely.

The image, however, is not alone. Sturken would say it is tangled up with the less emplotted and therefore less talked about images of these lost people and Kent State. Gordon would suggest that this entanglement is the result of the furniture without memories sharing a space with “complex personhood,” the second complication to life. This second phenomenon occurs when the people lounging on furniture without memories (such as Miller’s mother or perhaps even a Kent State student that discovers for the first time Vecchio’s non-student and runaway status) also “remember and forget, are beset by contradiction, and recognize and misrecognize themselves and others” (4). That is to say, as much as the furniture photo of Mary Ann Vecchio may blend in with a desired narrative, people still recognize the inconsistencies the image has with what they remember and forget; as mentioned earlier, nearly everyone that has an
investment in the Vecchio photo is aware of its deceptiveness. That is not to say that when this happens people will necessarily abandon their furniture without memories. It is usually too comfortable for this, and such an abortion usually obliges them to reassess or recreate several other memories that were constructed in compliance with the memory in question.

Gordon’s goal is to underline the ways in which one’s awareness (as vague as it may be) of a contradictory complex personhood amongst furniture without memories resembles a haunting. Like Freud’s notion of the uncanny, Gordon explains, “haunting describes how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities…” (8). Freud would similarly say that the uncanny feeling occurs the moment an item of furniture that has for so long fit perfectly in our house simultaneously seems out of place. The ghost, for Gordon, which is said to do the haunting, is whatever it is (the piece of furniture, a detail within or around the furniture) that causes us to feel this uncanny sensation. “The ghost,” she says, “or the 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, in its own way, of course” (8). Thus, the photograph of Mary Ann Vecchio becomes a ghost in more than one way. The photo is a ghost when the private person (such as Miller’s mother) is confronted with the two memories, each struggling for dominance and both haunting whichever one happens to be in the forefront. The photo also becomes a ghost when one remembers the incident in a different way, or even when one (which includes but is not limited to outsiders) remembers that they do not actually remember the incident even though (from frequent media exposure and discussions about the incident) they seem to have convinced themselves they do remember.

The second kind of haunting usually occurs when an excluded or seemingly contradictory image awkwardly appears inside the previous emplotted narrative. An example of these haunting images (one that I stumbled across while doing research for this project) appears in an April 1970 Daily Kent Stater in the form of a Campus Day flier. The advertised Campus Day is similar to an annual event, Flash Fest, which is held today at Kent State, usually at the end of the semester or quarter. If Campus Day is anything like Flash Fest, it involved activities, games, small local bands and a concert by one or more popular musicians. As part of the 1970 event, a joint concert was to be performed by B.J. Thomas, Gary Puckett and the Union Gap and comedian David Frye. The Union Gap was best known for the hits “Young Girl” and “Woman
Woman,” while B.J. Thomas, who had just released a best-of album towards the beginning of 1970, was known for the hit song “Raindrops Keep Falling on my Head.” David Frye was a comedian who specialized in Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon impersonations. (See figure 5) Because Kent State University was closed down immediately after the shootings, Campus Day 1970 never took place. This flier, however, still lingers in a semi-transparent roll of microfilm found in a steel drawer on the second floor of the Kent State Library. Should someone happen upon this badly-worn reel of film—most likely (as I was) in the process of advancing ahead to the “more-interesting” month of May—a haunting is likely to occur.

The most obvious reason for the haunting is that the concert never took place, and therefore the flier does not “fit in” with the date of May 9, 1970 or the historical milieu of Kent in 1970. The historical furniture of May 9, 1970 consisted of an empty campus occupied only by upper administration, full-time staff members and FBI investigators. Thoughts of an imaginary concert on May 9 forces one to notice the emplotted historical narrative of the shootings. Doing so, the boundaries of the four-day block of historical significance will stretch and pull as one

Figure 5: Campus Day Advertisement in the April 28, 1970 Daily Kent Stater
notices this post-May 4 event to be advertised on April 28, a date that is also not important because it is not connected to the May 4 shootings. April 28 is not like May 1, which is important because it is the day students protested in downtown Kent; nor is it like April 30, which is important because it is the day Nixon announced the planned invasion of Cambodia, an address said to have ignited the student unrest at Kent. April 28 and May 9 (the Campus Day version) are, like many days, not important. However, seeing them so close to a so-called important day could initiate a haunting that forces one to acknowledge the possibility that the comfortable furniture of numbers, months and days may have been privileged over the raw experiences that were forced to yield and take the shape of desired narratives. The beginning of May is orderly and easy to remember. It also supplies us with the captivating term, May Day, which an event happening on May 9 might not allow. A similar phenomenon has occurred with 9/11, a date that not only rolls off the tongue, but also alludes to the emergency rescue service—a delightful coincidence too good to ignore. Should the World Trade Center attacks have occurred on 9/14 or 11/2, the unhomeliness of these dates would force us to say the month as we do with holidays like the Fourth of July. Nobody ever celebrates “7/4.” This kind of ghost—the kind that holds a historically insignificant day at the same level as a historically significant one—reveals a subjective narrative tangled up with what was thought to be historical objectivity, and such an uncanny feeling has the power to make the haunted search for more.

This ghost also haunts with its ability to swallow us, as Gordon describes, “sometimes against our will and always a bit magically, into the structure of feeling of a reality we come to experience, not as cold knowledge, but as a transformative recognition” (8). This “transformative recognition” consists of the realization that Kent State did not look the way we have for so long imagined it to look, which then forces us to realize that our image of the campus today has been primarily influenced by this illusory image of the past. This flier is unhomely because there is no room for B.J. Thomas and Gary Puckett in the historical house of Kent State 1970.

In nearly every account of the Kent State shootings, Kent State is contextualized or emplotted along with Vietnam, Nixon and all stories of campus unrest at more radical schools such as Berkeley. Should there be a soundtrack for this contextualization it would most likely consist of songs of a political or revolutionary nature. Buffalo Springfield’s “For What It’s
“Worth” belongs in this house blueprint—the twang of the intro guitar echoing in the background of tanks and troopers moving up Kent’s Main Street. In Jeff Kaiser’s 2001 video documentary, Kent State: The Day the War Came Home (one of the more popular documentaries of the event), the soundtrack includes Jefferson Airplane’s “Volunteers” and Creedence Clearwater Revival’s “Fortunate Son” and “Run Through the Jungle.” In James Goldstone’s 1981 docudrama, Kent State, Crosby, Stills, Nash and Young’s “Teach Your Children” is played during the intro and the National Guard actually rolls into campus to the sound of “Ohio,” written specifically about the Kent State shootings. B.J. Thomas and Gary Puckett were not included in any of the films about the event. One might even consider it disturbing to imagine Allison Krause falling to the ground with “Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head” playing in the background. The maker of such a film might be heavily ridiculed for disrespecting the seriousness of an event with a happy and bubbly song. However, while such a reemployment might “misfire,” as White puts it, resulting in a lack of serious consideration, it is still important to consider along with all other possible emplotments “so as to provide different interpretations of those events and to endow them with different meanings” (1715). White suggests a similar “misfire” when imagining Kennedy’s life to be reemplotted in the form of a comedy. Perhaps the point of this is that if it seems completely inappropriate to replot an historical event in a certain way, we may be placing too much emphasis on our desire to make the historical event fit an “appropriate” emplotment than we are the event itself and the lessons that can be learned from it.

Gordon helps to make the haunting created from “appropriate” historical emplotments (which are usually considered true and not emplotted accounts at all) more clear in her analysis of the haunting that occurs in Toni Morrison’s Beloved. In this historical text, Gordon sees the half-woman, half-ghost Beloved to uncannily haunt the text’s readers by forcing them to acknowledge a reality masked by an historical script. This ghost, Gordon continues, haunts us because she “barely possesses a story of loss, which structures the very possibility of enslavement, emancipation, and freedom in which the Reconstructive history of Beloved traffics (140). That is, Beloved is not a ghost that haunts readers with a slave narrative. Rather, she haunts the reader with the thought of something more confusing and inexplicable made simple by the slave narrative. In an interview about the novel, Toni Morrison tries to explain that the book was not about the institution—Slavery with a capital S. It was about these anonymous people called slaves…. When I say Beloved is not about slavery,
I mean that the story is not slavery. The story is these people—these people who don’t know they’re in an era of historical interest. They just know they have to get through the day. (Gordon quoting Morrison 142).

In a parallel application of Gordon and Morrison, the image of the Campus Day 1970 flier and even the image of Mary Ann Vecchio once one realizes who she is, creates a haunting image of normal (some would say boring) people doing things without any awareness that “they’re in an era of historical interest.” How can we talk about Kent State in 1970 (or any succeeding year) without talking about the Shootings with a capital S? The Campus Day flier haunts us because, similar to Beloved, it “barely possesses a story of loss, which structures the very possibility of [the National Guard’s occupation of Kent’s campus, student protests of this presence along with the war in Vietnam, and the consequential shootings] in which the [revolutionary] history of [May 4] traffics.”

When Gordon says that Beloved “barely possesses a story of loss” I do not think she means to insinuate that the text is not at all about loss. Rather, the text is more about the private loss that more public histories of enslavement, emancipation, freedom and reconstruction have seemingly erased or relegated to a ghost-like status. Much of this relegation, Gordon explains, was in the attempt to emplot the losses and traumas of slaves into an easy to understand and remember story that would hopefully hasten the end of slavery and initiate the beginning of reconstruction and civil rights. Such a hi(story), however, Gordon explains, required historicists of the time to make sure that all facts were believable (145). That is, if slavery was to be emplotted into a familiar story of oppression, it could not contain facts and variables that would prevent the audience from making the connection. That is why the history, Gordon continues, required apprehending just what aspects of slavery and the slave experience would, indeed, be believable, that is, consumable by an audience who may or may not have believed in slavery, but whose parameters of knowing were certainly established within the larger confines of the existence of racial slavery itself. Sounding truthful, acquiring the condition of believability, then, was as important to the slave narrative’s success as a political document as any truth about slavery it would remit. (ibid.)
We may also see this political editing of experiences that benefits cultural consumers in the historiography of May 4. Unlike the image of Mary Ann Vecchio, B.J. Thomas does not belong in a political document written to interest consumers in the injustices that occurred on May 4.

This explanation of slavery and May 4 historical emplotments still does not explain what happened to the loss or trauma that was edited to take the form of a believable historical narrative. How does one mourn a loss or recover from a trauma when the only available image of the loss is not what she remembers or ever desired? Such a predicament involves not only mourners like Jeffery Miller’s mother but also anyone else whose definition of what they lost runs contrary to the historical emplotment. Can mourning be carried out when the image of one’s loss is no longer what they remember or are these people doomed to some kind of endless mourning or melancholia? I would argue that at the heart of this predicament is what Dominick LaCapra has described as a conflation of loss and absence.

In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, LaCapra makes an important distinction between loss and absence that many historiographers have failed to do. Absence may be situated on a transhistorical level, whereas loss is on a historical level. In this way, “losses are specific and involve particular events, such as the death of loved ones on a personal level…” (49). Absences, on the other hand, are similar to the foundational narratives we have been considering to be used in emplotment, such as good versus evil stories or template for a tragedy. LaCapra explains that there is a great temptation to conflate the two when writing history, and that when this happens, “one faces the impasse of endless melancholy, impossible mourning, and interminable aporia in which any process of working through the past and its historical losses is foreclosed or prematurely aborted” (46). That is to say, should we attempt to mourn an absence in place of a loss (should we mourn the loss of innocence, for example, instead of a person), not only will we fail to successfully mourn the person because we are distracted with mourning the absence (the mythical loss of innocence), but we will also fail to mourn the absence because, in actuality, we never lost it (or desired it) to begin with. On the one hand, mourning is never completed; on the other, it is never even initiated.

If we can consider historical emplotments of traumatic events to contain both an absence (mythical narrative such as the crucifixion and Pietá of Christ) and a loss (actual historical event like the May 4 shootings) than we may suggest that certain victims of losses (such as Elaine Miller Holstein or certain parts of the university community in 1970) may be prevented from
mourning their loss because of the ambiguity historical emplotments such as the Vecchio photo have inflicted upon it. However, as I mentioned earlier, that is not to say a quick solution to this complicated mourning is to somehow stop emplotting. Rather, should we assume that it is either impossible or undesirable to report and comprehend history in a non-emplotted manner, one “potent antidote,” as White observes, could be for historians to “recognize the fictive element in their narratives” which would then limit their “ideological preconceptions which they do not recognize as such but honor as the ‘correct’ perception of ‘the way things really are’” (1728). This could then help to prevent certain conflations of absences and losses so that an image like the Vecchio photo or an explanation of 9/11 based on biblical language will not be misconstrued as the loss that is to be handled as these narratives have described. Finally, as LaCapra adds, by not conflating absence and loss, one would historicize and problematize certain forms of desire, such as the desire for redemption and totality or, in Sartre's words, the desire to be in-itself-for-itself or god. One would also help prevent the indiscriminate generalization of historical trauma into the idea of a wound culture or the notion that everyone is somehow a victim (or, for that matter, a survivor). (77).

We may also add that certain people like Elaine Miller Holstein will not be haunted by images of their loss that is also not their loss, and if they do encounter such ghosts, they will no longer be the only ones that can see them.
Works Cited


CHAPTER TWO

For the Benefit of the Melancholic: Clinical and Cultural Concepts of Loss and the Struggle for Cultural Empowerment at Kent State University

As a form of power, subjection is paradoxical. To be dominated by a power external to oneself is a familiar and agonizing form power takes. To find, however, that what “one” is, one’s very formation as a subject, is in some sense dependent upon that very power is quite another.

JUDITH BUTLER, The Psychic Life of Power

Who counts as human? Whose lives count as lives? And, finally, What makes for a grievable life? Despite our differences in location and history, my guess is that it is possible to appeal to a “we,” for all of us have some notion of what it is to have lost somebody. Loss has made a tenuous “we” of us all.

JUDITH BUTLER, Precarious Life

Melancholia occurs, on the one hand, as a clinical/medical condition and, on the other hand, as a discursive practice through which an individual subject who is classified as melancholic or who classifies himself as melancholic is legitimated in the representation of his artistic trajectory.

JULIANA SCHIESARI, The Gendering of Melancholia

The implication, of course, is that to become melancholic one would need some kind of access to cultural production, that is, what Irigaray calls ‘access to a signifying economy’ whereby the subject in question…could represent loss, could create out of the feeling of loss some valid way to articulate that loss, that ‘painful dejection,’ meaningfully [sic].

JULIANA SCHIESARI, The Gendering of Melancholia

As Judith Butler observes in Precarious Life, loss has the stern reputation of making tenuous we’s of large groups of people, constituting them politically “by virtue of the social vulnerability of [their] bodies” (20). And this “we” has the power to exclude, the power to decide who is allowed to grieve a loss, and even the power to determine what is grievable and what can be considered a loss. Such is the case, Butler writes, when powerful we’s, hegemonic we’s, are at war with not so powerful we’s, as witnessed over the last five years in Afghanistan and Iraq. In such venues, a loss is only a loss when it is an American loss. But even within these
large, collective we’s there is much contention. This conflict can be observed in the World Trade Center Memorial debate over how we are to memorialize and commemorate, who has the right to do these things (a right that is greater for those owning more stock in the loss) and how long such performances of grief should last. It seems, therefore, that even though “we” can agree that we have all lost on September 11, we still cannot (nor does it seem right that we should) agree on what it is we have all lost in these attacks, which may also translate to an uncertainty over what we have desired that has been taken away from us.

A similar “we” was formed after the loss of May 4, 1970, and as we have observed so far, while all those within the “we” have suffered through the same event that seems to have killed and wounded the same people, certain mourners, such as the parents of the slain, are forced to rival their definitions of the loss with different definitions provided by the student body, the university administration, the political right and left and the nation as a whole. This chapter will examine this seemingly inevitable conflict that arises when a loss takes place in a public space, make visible some of the various stakes these opponents in grief have and, using the theories of Judith Butler and Juliana Schiesari to complement those used in chapter one, expose within a single loss such as May 4 or September 11 a cultural and a clinical melancholia, both of which are entangled to the point of further complicating, prolonging and reanimating the losses “we” all have in common.

*Kent State University vs. the May 4 Task Force*

After the May 4 Coalition (the group organized for the purpose of stopping the gym addition) began to crumble and dissipate in 1977, the May 4 Task Force took the reins once more. This was partially prompted by the notion that the university was trying to regain power after an apparent “victory” at the Battle of Tent City. The observed maneuver, led by President Brage Golding, was the creation of another committee to relieve the CPC of its former duties of organizing May 4 activities. This group, entitled the May 4th Commemoration Committee (later to be dubbed the May 4 Observance Committee) stated in its 1978 report that “all the programs around May 4 each year should be planned with a view not to propagandize but rather, to provide inspiration and stimulation for people to think and reflect on their own” (Basi 3). “What happened here,” they stressed, “was tragic, but we need to move forward in a reaffirmation of the human prospect” (ibid.). They recommended that from that May 4 on “the university remain open; but all classes and all non-essential services be suspended from 12 noon to 6:00 p.m….}
While Golding’s life-affirming committee appeared to make a compromise by allowing the commemorations to continue so long as the university had more control over them, they seemed to clash immediately with the Task Force (just as the CPC and the Task Force clashed), fighting with them only three months later about the proposed speakers for the 1978 commemoration. In April the committee rejected the Task Force’s proposal to have Clark Kissinger, former president of the Students for a Democratic Society, speak during the event because it was “not appropriate” (Mazzone 1). Other speakers in question were Malcolm X scholar Abduhl Alkalmat and political activist Daniel Ellsberg. James Myers, of the Kent Area Growth Association at the time, commented that the inappropriateness stemmed from these people never having a role at Kent on May 4 (ibid.) May 4, Myers implied, if it is to be a commemoration, should actually commemorate the four dead and the event that occurred on that date. He did suggest that it would be acceptable for these speakers to speak on May 3 or 5 (ibid.).

Later that week, Golding announced the complete canceling of classes on the upcoming May 4, a move that his assistant, Dr. Robert McCoy, said to be “‘in direct response to allegations’ of insensitivity to and cover-up of May 4 by administration” (Lang 1). This response, McCoy continued, “was an act of ‘conciliation, not in response to pressure. We do acknowledge May 4, by proclaiming a day of observance. We regret it isn’t the day of observance we hoped for’” (ibid.). The act of “conciliation” was most likely with the May 4 Task Force who, if we recall, had been requesting the official holiday prior to the gym controversy. However, when they received word of Golding’s decision to cancel classes, as Brenda Lang writes in her Daily Kent Stater report, the Task Force greeted the news with “light laughter and skepticism of ‘ulterior motives’” (ibid.) Craig Blazinski, spokesperson of the Task Force commented that “‘This is no gift from Golding. This was done because it has been a demand of the Task Force for the past three years, and because of the support the Task Force got from the students. Golding was forced to do this. It was not out of the goodness of his heart’” (ibid.). Alan Canfora declared the news as “a total victory” and wanted Golding to continue his
concession by recognizing the Task Force’s program (the one that included Kissinger) as “honorable” (ibid.). By this time May 4 commemorators had been clashing with the university for nearly eight years, and after failing to rename the buildings and losing the gym battle, the Task Force would not accept Golding’s class-canceling gesture as anything less than a sign of triumph. Golding, however had a different interpretation in mind. “‘Nothing,’” he is quoted in the same article, “‘I can say can be expected to reduce tensions significantly until there is some recognition by parties at both ends that the vast majority of us in between wish them to abandon the idea of victory and join us instead in resolution’” (Lang 3). Positing the university as a victim, and perhaps even disguising a demanded submission as a requested union with the May 4 Task Force, Golding failed to resolve this battle over commemoration and mourning.

A Reevaluation of Melancholia

It will get us nowhere to concern ourselves with who was right or wrong in this debate; if such a determination were profitable it is likely that the phenomenon of complicated and prolonged mourning in a public arena would be less common. Rather, it seems more beneficial to better understand how or what it is both of these opponents are mourning and/or appropriating the loss of May 4, for it seems that if they both had the same definition of the loss—if they both truly were a consistent “we” united by the loss of May 4—then this conflict should not have occurred. Doing so, we must first reevaluate and revise our definition of mourning and melancholia utilized thus far.

Thus far, I have been using melancholia as a somewhat negative condition brought on by prolonged or unresolved mourning. Such an interpretation suggests that a loss was not conclusively mourned because what was lost in the object cathexis may have been ambiguous or unknown to the mourner. This ambiguous and unknown loss prevents the mourner from properly testing the reality of the loss, resulting in its failure to detach its libido from the loss and reattach it (invest it) to other real and present objects. When this happens, the ego, failing to reattach its libido to something else, and still lacking the libido’s original attachment, is sent on a frantic and unstable object hunt. It is at this moment of desire without destination that the libido reverts itself inwards towards the seemingly more stable ego. The ego, however, being a poor substitute for the lost object, is adopted only with a condition of ambivalence. Thinking its ego is the lost object, the mourner then curls up on itself to close off the unimportant outside world; everything it needs is inside. At the same time, however, the mourner hates and neglects its ego.
because it knows it is not the same as the lost object; the person thinks only of the way things were and not of the way things are. Any healthy investment the ego would make to itself and its appearance is aborted and reinvested in the concentration of the loss. In this way we can say the ego has been consumed by the loss, seeing in itself only its failure to authentically substitute the loss and make things the way they were before the loss ever occurred.

According to Butler, there is perhaps another way we should be interpreting and applying this Freudian tool. In her earlier work, *The Psychic Life of Power*, Butler underlines a peculiar and almost paradoxical condition of subjection that occurs to one afflicted with a complicated loss. On the one hand, a person who has lost something is “dominated by a power external to oneself”—surrendering one’s agency to that power and power holder (1-2). It is with this kind of subjection that the patient internalizes the loss into its ego, negating the ego and all ego praise—a condition we have been calling melancholia.

On the other hand, a different kind of subjection occurs the moment this patient begins to ambivalently regard its ego as the object cathexis. Such a move, Butler remarks, allows us to question just what it is (another self?) that is reflecting (even if negatively) on the ego (168). “Is the one,” Butler asks, “who ‘takes’ itself and the one who is ‘taken’ the same? (ibid.). If it is not the same, Butler deduces, then we have to wonder whether or not this reflecting ego existed “prior to its melancholia,” or whether it was created out of the melancholia (ibid). Should we agree that only one ego exists at a time within a single mourner (even if it is a short period of time), then this reflexive ego is born out of melancholia and may be considered the initiation of what Butler terms “psychic life.” Should we consider the ego in its self-loathing form to be stepping out and looking back, then we must also acknowledge that the ego’s melancholic “subjection consists precisely in this fundamental dependency on a discourse we never choose but that, paradoxically, initiates and sustains our agency” (2). The lack of agency in a complicated loss is paradoxically the ingredient for such agency.

It also seems that while melancholia initiates this agency, it does not necessarily guarantee agency. “Melancholia,” as Butler explains, “produces a set of spatializing tropes for psychic life, domiciles of preservation and shelter as well as arenas for struggle and persecution” (171). That is to say, if psychic life is born out of the division of internal and external worlds that occurs from the ambivalence the patient has towards his ego, then psychic life *may* occur
(may be constructed) out of the same spatializing tropes used in melancholic ambivalence. “If Melancholia,” Butler elaborates,

constitutes the withdrawal or regression of ambivalence, and if that ambivalence becomes conscious through being represented as oppositional parts of the ego, and that representation is made possible on the condition of that withdrawal, then it follows that this prefiguration of the topographical distinction between ego and super-ego is itself dependent upon melancholia. Melancholia produces the possibility for the representation of psychic life. (177, my emphasis)

A person at Kent State that is said to be mourning the loss of May 4, according to this notion, is (has been) given a melancholic language of distinction that may or may not inspire the representation of psychic life.

It is difficult, at first, to apply this theory of prolonged mourning to a loss as complicated and widely shared as May 4. We are not dealing with a single person and a single ego. Butler highlights such a complication in Precarious Life when comparing nations with individual psyches. They are not the same, she admits, “but both can be described as ‘subjects,’ albeit of different orders” (41). “When the United States acts,” Butler continues, “it establishes a conception of what it means to act as an American, establishes a norm by which that subject might be known” (ibid.). And when a university acts, we might say, it similarly establishes a conception of what it means to act as a student or member of that university. But even when we do this, behaving as a we that says we Kent State administration, faculty, and students have lost on May 4, the “we” is fragmented; everyone has lost something different. Nevertheless, Butler’s interpretation of melancholia in Psychic Life seems to put forth the proposition that even if we are “tenuously” united in a single loss (a unity that we have observed to be full of conflict), there is still the question of healing and psychic life that may come out of such healing that must also be spread out amongst the “we.” That is to suggest, should there be something to gain from a loss, and should there be varying parties competing over control of the mourning of this loss, then perhaps such contention is also over a kind of power either acquired or accredited when one finally gains control of such a sought-after loss.

Such a notion may require us to distinguish, as Juliana Schiesari does in The Gendering of Melancholia, between two different kinds of melancholia (both of which can occur simultaneously), so that the condition is “not only a type of disease but also a form of cultural
empowerment” (94). That is to say, the prolonged mourning of May 4 is not only a type of prolonged personal desire for a lost object, but also a kind of desire for a culturally assigned power to those with a legitimate claim to a loss others have deemed worthy of prolonged mourning. Similar to Butler’s musings on cultural conditions that make certain losses more grievable than others (and some not at all), Schiesari analyzes the “attribution of value [given] to some subjects who lack but not to others who appear equally lacking” (ix). Schiesari makes this assertion after noting the drastic difference between early and late melancholia, focusing primarily on the manipulation of gender and the cultural relegation of women by barring them from the privileged status of mourning awarded to men. For me to make a similar claim with memorialization, I will need to momentarily follow her steps.

Clinical and Cultural Melancholia

While most scholars argue that melancholia thought to be caused by an excess of black bile and melancholia thought to be caused by complicated mourning are two different phenomena, Schiesari argues that they are similar, even if this similarity is only their utilization of the condition to manipulate power and subordinate women. In noting this similarity, Schiesari reminds us that Aristotle thought “all men who have become outstanding in philosophy, statesmanship, poetry or the arts are melancholic” (6) and the Florentine philosopher, Marsilio Ficino, a “self-described melancholic,” is known to have later removed any negative connotations from the condition in his book about the strong intellectual characteristics of melancholic men (Schiesari 7; Radden 13). Ficino, Schiesari contends, “equat[ed] the Aristotelian clinical category of melancholy with the Platonic poetics of ‘divine’ frenzy...turn[ing] melancholia into a positive virtue for men of letters and ‘populariz[ing]’ it to the rest of Europe” (7). This seems to have influenced even Freud and the later psychoanalytic understandings of melancholy that considered the condition to be “a specific representational form for male creativity, one whose practice converted the feeling of disempowerment into privileged artifact” (8). It seems that after detecting a positive and often extraordinary side effect to the condition of prolonged mourning (a side effect that is most likely the spatializing tropes Butler detects as a precondition to psychic life), male philosophers and psychologists installed a gendering control device on the phenomenon to allow them to continue studying the condition without upsetting the current balance of power.
Schiesari offers us an interpretation of Freud’s “Mourning and Melancholia” that is slightly different from the one I have been using (and it arguably differs from Butler’s reading as well). When we look closely at Freud’s essay, Schiesari argues, we can see that Freud illustrates two sides to melancholia:

On the one hand, Freud gives us a ‘clinical’ picture of the pathology of melancholia; but on the other hand, by referring to Hamlet and the melancholic’s visionary talents (i.e., his ‘keener eye for the truth’), he points to a cultural apotheosis of its victims, whose sense of loss and ‘melancholy’ is thus the sign of their special nature. This set of convergences suggests the degree to which the psychoanalysis of melancholia remains within the Ficinian tradition. (11).

In melancholia, both humoral and psychoanalytic, it seems that men are granted creative agency from the condition while women are given another condition. If we follow Schiesari’s gesture to *Hamlet*, for example, we can note that it is Ophelia who exhibits serious melancholic symptoms that foreshadow her suicide. Horatio, to illustrate this point, reports that she is importunate and distraught with a mood that needs pitied (4.5.2-4), and “She speaks much of her father,” indicating that it is the loss of her father that has made her this way (ibid.). When King Claudius sees the way she is acting he declares that her behavior is “[a] poison of deep grief! [that] springs all from her father’s death” (4.5.72-73). Hamlet, on the other hand, is given much more agency with his condition. In act 2.2 he tells Guildenstern and Rosencrantz that “I have of late—but wherefore I know not—lost all my mirth, forgone all custom of exercise; and indeed it goes so heavily with my [melancholic] disposition that this goodly frame, the earth, seems to me a sterile promontory” (2.2.287-290). Hamlet actually refers to his condition in a move Butler would call a melancholic turn, establishing agency through the criticism of one’s own ego. He also gains agency from the humoral expectations of his melancholic “disposition,” which imagine him to be intelligently and philosophically insane—walking around in the second scene of act two with a book in his hand.

Whether one reads Hamlet’s disposition with a humoral or psychoanalytic understanding of melancholy, it is Hamlet’s disposition, not Ophelia’s, that is given legitimacy. “Not only,” Schiesari continues, “does the male display of loss convert it into gain, but the ‘loss’ displayed is one whose expression is derived from the devalued cultural form of women’s mourning” (12-13). Ophelia is never given the chance to express her loss in an artistic fashion, a cultural
subordination that reinforces any agency Hamlet has derived from his loss. That is, should Ophelia and her pathological mourning be absent from the play, the division line between creative melancholy and pathological melancholy would be blurry or absent, changing the way the other characters and readers of the play evaluate Hamlet’s behavior as well as the balance of power.

To support Schiesari’s gendering of melancholia, Jennifer Radden, in *The Nature of Melancholy*, gestures us to nineteenth century self-help writer, Samuel Smiles, who notes that the only remedy for the tendency toward ‘discontent, unhappiness, inaction and reverie’ that he names ‘green sickness,’ which can be likened to melancholy, is ‘action, work, and bodily occupation of any sort’ (Smiles, 1862: 256). This conviction was expressed even by medical writers of the nineteenth century, such as Janet and Freud—although the so called rest cure, recommended by Kraepelin, for example, in the treatment of involutional melancholia, and prescribed especially for middle- and upper-class women, also achieved popularity. Work was valuable primarily for men; for women it could be harmful. (17)

Schiesari would argue, here, that the melancholic male is given a cultural legitimization that obliges him to do work (and good work he is obliged to do) to cure his melancholy with “his artistic trajectory” (15). On the other hand, the melancholic woman (should this term have been used) was considered fragile and sickly and required rest. Such a condition, as Radden observes, is what afflicted writer Charlotte Perkins Gilman—a condition called neurasthenia that was often hard to distinguish from melancholia (17-18). Perhaps gender was one of the only major distinctions between the two conditions at the time.

For Schiesari, the gain a male melancholic derives from his loss is “derived from the devalued cultural form of women’s mourning” (12-13), suggesting that it is more a matter of culture and not individual melancholic turns that is responsible for the benefits of melancholia. That is why Schiesari labels women melancholics (such as Ophelia) as clinical melancholics (also known as depressives) and men as cultural melancholics. This implies that women melancholics (Ophelia) were actually more likely to be reacting to a complicated loss then men were. That is, should men gain cultural legitimacy from being melancholic, the disposition (whether it be humoral or psychological) was often welcomed or even sought out. If the man
actually had melancholy due to a complicated loss, we might also say that the cultural legitimacy gained from being melancholic hastened his recovery from the condition and even commenced a melancholic turn that would enable him to gain agency over his ego. Women, on the other hand, can be said to have nothing to gain from melancholia, being told instead that they were pathologic and depressed and subjected to rest cures that prevented them from expressing their conditions artistically. If the woman really had a complicated loss, one could argue that her inability to ever acknowledge her melancholia as melancholia would further complicate the loss responsible for the condition.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, a shift occurred in the venue of melancholia characterizing the disorder as less of a subjective and artistic disorder (which was previously only ascribed to males) to a more objective condition of the brain. “The growing medicalization of madness,” Radden explains, “the shift, documented by Foucault, from a conception of mental disorder as ‘unreason’ to one in which it is a tamed, muted medical condition, has been widely portrayed” (21). Such a move, one might argue, would put an end to the cultural legitimization given to the male condition as both males and females would now only be depressed. Schiesari argues that “one could represent the lexical shift from melancholia to depression as a historical one from valued to devalued, from masculine to feminine” (16), and later writes that the melancholic of the past was a ‘great man’; the stereotypical depressive of today is a woman…what we know today as clinical depression is a form of melancholia—or melancholy—but without the romanticized discursive apparatus, that is, without a discourse suggesting that to be ill of this disease is also to be granted a privileged status. The historical disappearance of the category of melancholy has left only its devalued and quotidian counterpart, depression—which, as Radden has remarked, is now viewed as a ‘woman’s complaint.’ (95). Schiesari is referring to Radden’s earlier work, “Melancholy and Melancholia” (1987). In Radden’s later work, in which she responds to Schiesari, she adds that the idea of depression as a condition directly linked to sex is being challenged to the point that “some studies suggest a shift, with fewer women relative to men suffering depression since the 1980’s” (44). This may also be to say that the “discourse suggesting that to be ill of this disease is also to be granted a privileged status”—a discourse Schiesari argues to have parted from melancholia—has not actually left melancholia, but has instead left the realm of gender. Before only men could benefit
from melancholia while subordinating women. Now it seems that with the rise of funeral, medical and pharmaceutical industries it is anyone who seeks out power and control over others. This later group of grief usurpers has a larger pool of grief to drink from now that both male and female losses can be manipulated.

Similar to the male melancholics that turn loss into cultural gain while simultaneously devaluing the cultural status of women, these modern usurpers are able to benefit from peoples’ losses by elevating the importance of the grieving process while peddling expensive caskets, monuments, funerary procedures (such as embalming, usage of a funeral home to view the body and a cemetery plot, memorials and commemorations)—items and services people now believe they can no longer provide on their own terms. The key difference, however, is that modern grief profiteers seem to elevate the cultural status of the mourner without passing along any of the intellectual benefits or cultural power that previously accompanied such a position. Schiesari mentioned that the modern day depressive is a woman “without the romanticized discursive apparatus, that is, without a discourse suggesting that to be ill of this disease is also to be granted a privileged status. But the romanticized discursive apparatus does not seem to have completely disappeared. It is almost as if they have honed in on the shift of power Butler describes that occurs when the melancholic pushes away from his ambivalence into a newly charged psychic life, draining only the power from this phenomenon without interfering with the conditions that cause and sustain the melancholia. This is especially the case when someone loses a loved one in a highly publicized event like September 11, May 4 or a murder investigation; while others culturally profit from the drama (gaining political leverage from it, uncovering conspiracies and competing with other journalists and news organizations in a quest to produce the most captivating article with the most stunning photograph or video footage), mourners like Elaine Miller Holstein or Jackie Kennedy Onassis are forced to look at a tattered and bloodied image of their loved ones over and over and over. To try to imagine how these people attempt to mourn a loss in the clinical way, we might consider what it would be like to try to mourn the loss of Jeffrey Miller or John F. Kennedy without thinking about publicized manners in which they died.

Public Grief and the Multi-Stranded Knot of Clinical and Cultural Melancholia

We can now be sure that the conflict over mourning practices at Kent State involves much more than just two opposing sides. It is possible that both the university, the May 4 Task Force and the parents and close friends (who are almost inevitably included in memorial and
commemoration decisions whether they participate or not) are mourning in both clinical and cultural ways, some to different ratios than others. Initially, we can argue, everyone mentioned above mourned mostly in the clinical way; everyone regretted the loss of the four students and very few wished for any further violence to ensue. Over time, however, everyone began to interpret the loss and attach different meanings to the four dead. The May 4 Task Force, for example, as I mentioned in the introduction, have on many occasions inferred or declared that they wanted the loss to further legitimize their political battle against Vietnam, Nixon, the draft and for the rights to peaceful assembly and student protest. The university, being more conservative, wanted to keep the loss in the university family. In the meantime, whenever they chose to listen and participate in the debate, the parents were forced to challenge their own memories of what was lost with these other definitions, perhaps being haunted at times with contrary images or even with their own fading images that were being overpowered by the more popular memories (perhaps it is safe to use the word emplotments here) of who their lost children really were. All of this, we may now suggest, is the result of a tenuous “we” covering everyone with the blanket of a single loss that is actually different for everyone. Thus, whenever Kent State University does anything to commemorate or memorialize the loss of May 4, all people who identify themselves with Kent State or May 4 are implicated in the way in which this service is carried out. And so we can understand why a liberal group like the May 4 Task Force is put in a position of either hanging up their political beliefs because a “conservative” university wants them to join (i.e. submit to) their team, or challenging the university with a commemoration that includes Clark Kissinger as a keynote speaker. And similarly, we can see why a “conservative” university might grumble when a Task Force appears to want a political rally disguised as a memorial service.

Circling back to the accomplishments of chapter one, we may also parallel these theories posed by Butler and Schiesari with those of White and LaCapra. Doing so we might suggest that the battle over entitlements to cultural mourning and melancholia is similar to a battle over appropriate emplotments of history. In this way, it seems, a kind of cultural empowerment or privileged status is placed on certain emplotments and other emplotments are relegated or not even brought to the surface. This may be observed, for example, in the partisan-based political emplotments that the university administrators and the May 4 Task Force seem to have favored the most. Such emplotments fix a loss (which must be emplotted to be understood but could be
emplotted in multiple ways) in one or two narratives that ultimately limit our understanding of the event itself, while making the loss (due to the limited emplotments) appear to be more ideological than it really is. In this way, one cannot discuss Kent State and May 4 according to alternative narratives (such as B.J. Thomas and Gary Puckett) because the culturally legitimized emplotments have relegated other possible narratives to irrelevant and ghost-like statuses.

At the same time, this cultural melancholia conflicts with the clinical melancholia in the same way LaCapra describes a loss that is conflated with an absence. In such a way, losses (the four dead) are conflated with emplotted absences (such as the loss of innocence) so that clinical mourning of the actual loss is diverted by the cultural mourning of innocence, and the cultural mourning of innocence is prolonged because it was never lost to begin with. Should one, like a parent, attempt clinically to mourn the loss of their child, they will have to contend with others who have subscribed to a culturally emplotted aspect of the loss. Such was the case with the parents of the four dead who had to try to mourn their losses while receiving hate mail and obscene phone calls from people that did not view their children as grievable losses at all. Thus, the loss, for these parents, to double back to Butler, was precariously dependent on a culture that determined whether or not the four dead were human (if they were not, they were called bums), which ultimately determined whether or not the loss was grievable.

Both the contention over memorialization and commemoration and the conflation of several interpreted losses into the singular signifiers of Kent State University and May 4 has created an atmosphere of ambiguity and uncertainty—one that has perhaps weakened the identity of all parties involved in the quest for cultural empowerment, and one that has equally prolonged the trauma of May 4 and the mourning of the four slain victims. This may be understood as a kind of clinical melancholia brought on and prolonged by cultural melancholia—one prolonging his own clinical mourning in an attempt to emplot in such a way that grants him cultural empowerment. And so, if I can be so brave as to identify a victim in this study, I would like to suggest that, should cultural empowerment and legitimization be a positive and just thing to obtain in life (and I suspect it is), than it seems that all participants that use a loss for causes other than clinical mourning are victims of a culture that has made loss and prolonged mourning an accessible avenue for cultural advancement. Should they refuse or be prevented use of such a currency, however, as Schiesari intimates when discussing early females barred of cultural advancement, they may be forced to “lapse into utter inarticulateness and [will] no longer find a
place in the symbolic order’s prime system, language” (15). The ability to privilege and subordinate such cultural status, as well as the potential to prolong clinical mourning of others is certainly a major pitfall of the practice.

The other shortcoming of this conflation (the first being the complication it causes to clinical loss) is the complication it can actually cause the emplotted narrative. “By not conflating absence and loss,” LaCapra observed, “one would historicize and problematize certain forms of desire, such as the desire for redemption and totality…” (77). In other words, should one emplot a loss within an important narrative that really does need to be further problematized and analyzed (such as balances of political power or the workings of democracy), such a cultural concept may be stunted or held back by the loss attached to it. That is to say, for one to use a loss as a catalyst for something like political awareness, the loss must always permeate the message. This could result in a message that never grows or matures beyond its association with the loss. Bill Arthell, a devoted liberal who attended the May 4, 1970 rally and was one of the 25 protestors indicted in the incident, discloses in an interview with Bills that “May 4 issues…have been a ‘drain’ on other political struggles of the Kent State left” (Bills 52). “I talk to people,” he continues, “and they have a distorted view of oppression because it’s looking through May fourth-colored glasses” (ibid.). Similar to Arthrell’s description of May 4 colored politics, commemorators that used the 2006 commemoration to promote political engagement by drawing parallels between today and the 1970’s failed to venture beyond the preliminary associations of Bush with Nixon and Iraq with Vietnam. While these connections were being made, bulky pictures of the four dead loomed in the forefront to prevent some of us from venturing much further than the year 1970. (See Figure 3)
Figure 3: Mary Ann Vecchio stands behind the dead to discuss her life 36 years later.

Photo by Adam Burkey
Works Cited


CONCLUSION

The May 4 Disease: Zombies, Politics and the Endless Battle Over Symbols

John: Look at this thing: “We Still Remember.” I don’t; you know, I don’t even remember what the man looks like.
Barbara: Johnny…It takes you five minutes.
John: Yeah five minutes to put the wreath on the grave and six hours to drive back and forth.
Mother wants to remember so we trot two-hundred miles into the country and she stays at home.
Barbara: Well we’re here, John, all right?
John: I wonder what happened to the one from last year. Each year we spend good money on these things…come out here and the one from last year is gone.
Barbara: Well the flowers die and…the caretaker or somebody takes them away.
John: Yeah, a little spit and polish you can clean this up and sell it next year. Wonder how many times we’ve bought the same one.

GEORGE A. ROMERO’S Night of the Living Dead

But the Gym Affair was bizarre and crazy, most of all. It was dumb, if not “wrong,” to build there. And it was dumb to protest it. What else could one expect? The disease that comes with May 4 broke out and ran rampant during those several months. America was not getting better, even with the war over. America was still not immune to things like May 4 burnout. That has a lot to do with the way we abuse symbols in our causes. A lot of poor kids in Cleveland could have eaten for quite awhile on what was spent on the Gym Affair. A lot of Cambodians too.

JOHN A. BEGALA, “The May 4 Disease”

The Unhomely Story of John A. Begala

If we can once more imagine the history of May 4 to be a house having at least four sides, we will be quick to notice the way in which it has been furnished (i.e. emplotted) and the intense attention critics have paid to such furnishing. The critical inhabitants and visitors of the May 4 house typically congregate in one large room where the fixtures of the political Right and Left are located. Similar models of these two large davenports have been placed together in other historical homes despite the fact that all decorators seem to agree that the polarized pair never
went well together. Such is the case in our May 4 home that is rattled daily by arguments over which item of furniture is the cause of visual discrepancy. (Interestingly, because of the bitter distraction the two fixtures have caused, most critics have never actually sat on the furnishings or attempted to use them according to their original functions.) The Right is certainly the wrong design, many will remark; the Ohio National Guard marched onto a college campus in “Normal Ohio” with live ammunition and wrongfully shot and killed four students just because liberal protestors wanted to bring an end to an unjust war. Two of the slain students were only going to class; the others, although protesting, were equally harmless. But the liberal students who triggered this forceful reaction, the other side interrupts, should not have broken the windows in those private businesses and they should never have gotten away with burning down the ROTC building. Governor Rhodes and the Ohio National Guard were only doing their jobs and therefore the Left is to blame for venturing too far beyond its designated fabric.

Amongst this struggle over legitimatized emplotments is John A. Begala, a former Kent State student who had also witnessed most of the tragedy. What makes his criticism different from others, however, is that even though he has expressed his preference for the Left and his disgust with the Right, he is more concerned with the way we are allowing the entire history and loss of May 4 to deteriorate. That is to say, while the primary historical focus on May 4 today is on the polarized battle between the historical emplotments of the Left and the Right, the historical event and loss of four students is being deferred along with all other possible emplotments. At the same time, the emplotment of liberal politics that Begala prefers fails to function as it was designed, being used instead as a kind of battering ram against the Right that makes the neglect of its function just as great as the neglect of the historical significance of May 4. Begala’s concerned awareness represents Avery F. Gordon’s “complex personhood,” as it allows him to move beyond this polarized furniture without memory so as to recognize and misrecognize [himself] and [the] others” (4). We may observe in Begala’s story a ghostly shade

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6 Because the Left can be seen as the key manipulators of May 4, the function and values of the Left decay at a faster rate than those of the Right, which is more defensive on the topic than it is offensive. That is not to say the Left is more manipulative than the Right; the May 4 shootings occurred because the Left was protesting—a direct attack on the Left that has made remembering May 4 more symbolically important to the Left in its battle over power than it is the Right. This point may be heavily contested, but when looking at other manipulated historical events, such as September 11, we can see a similar phenomenon happening to the Right instead of the Left. That is, because the Right has more at stake in the country’s reaction to the 9/11 attacks—reactions that include the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq—the remembrance, commemoration and memorialization of 9/11 is instigated (and will continue to be instigated) by the Right. Much like the Left of May 4, the Right of September 11 will suffer a symbolic political loss should the public decide it is no longer worth investing in them.
of unhomeliness.

Begala was not directly on the campus the moment the shootings occurred. On the morning of May 4 he chatted with some of the guardsmen before class to see what was going on. He also talked with students in and outside his class who were planning to go to the noon rally. However, although he seems to insinuate a desire to participate or observe the rally, he could not attend the demonstration because he had to work transferring books from the University Supply Center to the bookstore. From the bookstore he observed the commotion on the hill and walked over to find out that there had just been a shooting (Begala 125). That day John Begala had been let off work early.

The event, Begala explains, which he refers to as “it,” was followed by “the times of the Great Division in Kent” (126). Two schools of thought emerged immediately in the university: the “they-should-have-killed-more-of-them” school and the “let’s-face-up-to-our-unique-role-in-history” school (ibid.). Begala tells us that he was and still is a part of the latter school, which is why he “jumped into any and all forms of ‘legitimate activism” (127), working with the Center for Peaceful Change in 1971 (which defined itself as a living memorial to May 4) and later, as a graduate student, establishing the May 4 Resource Room on the first floor of the University Library (128-129). The room is still there and has served as a valuable resource for this project. However, Begala’s intense May 4 activism, as he reports, would not last forever, and soon after the dedication of the Resource Room he became infected with what he calls the “May 4 Disease.”

When reading Begala’s story, it is at first unclear what he means by the May 4 Disease. He tells us he became infected with it just after Nixon was reelected, a blow that when combined with May 4, 1970 and the annual May 4 ceremonies put him in a state of mental paralysis that eventually caused him to “quit it all to go to work and run for city council” (130). Here, one may be led to believe that the disease made him leave, suggesting that the May 4 Disease is a condition where one can no longer endure the topic of May 4 and, because people at the university did not seem like they would stop talking about the event soon, the only cure for the sickness is flight.

However, Begala later explains that after he left, the university began to change and heal between the years 1974 and 1977: “They were years of change everywhere. In Kent, they were years of renewed optimism. Violence no longer seemed possible. Time began to work its magic
on memories of May 4, and the possibility of ‘normalcy’ started appearing more frequently” (130). We might add to this recuperation the resignation of President Nixon in 1974, the conclusion to the Vietnam War in 1975, the end of the draft registration in 1975 and Jimmy Carter’s blanket pardon issued for all draft resisters in the beginning of 1977.

The May 4 Disease, it had seemed, was not as complicated as Begala originally assessed it to be, functioning now, after such recuperation, as a typical virus does, which can be warded off with an immune system strengthened by time. However, as Begala contemplates, not all viruses are curable, and some of them can “linger dormant only to break out again. Somewhere” (136), which is what he reports to have happened in 1977. While Begala was still away from Kent, the disease resurfaced in the form of a gymnasium syndrome that forced “normalcy” to “hit the skids again at Kent State University” (130). This description of the disease with virus-like characteristics still does not explain why it caused Begala to flee Kent State in 1973 instead of continuing to “spread the word” of May 4. This part can be accounted for when analyzing Begala’s change in attitude that he describes himself (although not directly) as having after being admitted back into the May 4 ward.

While Begala still seemed to care about May 4, he suddenly found himself to be at odds with the 1977 May 4 activists that were not unlike the kind of activist he was during the early half of the decade. After the gym controversy started (which he calls “the last hurrah”) he describes the ambivalent mood he adopted after being solicited by an old activist friend to use his legislative position to curb the university’s gym plans. The Coalition’s argument was that the site had “historical significance,” that the university wanted to build the gym as a way of covering up the incident and that it would ruin green space on campus. The latter argument was the only one that seemed to have any rational ground for Begala (131). He also did not understand why, if the site had so much historical significance, they wanted to stop the project this late after it was “discussed in public meetings for well over a year” (ibid.). For me, as I have suggested earlier in this thesis, this suggests that they did not acknowledge the historical significance of the land until after they understood how much cultural power such a loss-related signifier would grant them and their cause. For Begala, however, its suggestion was more ominous:

7 Begala accuses the crisis to be a trendy recycling of the Columbia “gymnasium crisis that started the student movement in the early 1960s” (130). “Like fads in fashion and music,” Begala remarks, “which start on the coasts and move inland, the gymnasium syndrome reached Kent late” (ibid.).
Anyone who has been to Gettysburg has seen a unique manner of “preserving history,” for there is preserved the whole battlefield and a few myths, as well as green space. There has also been built a very cheap industry around the gruesome affair. That part of Gettysburg came to mind during the months that followed. I visualized a May-4th-O’Rama, electronic-talking self-tours. I kept my mouth shut about those visions, though. The green space argument, however, was a good one. (131)

Begala was more concerned with the potential May 4 had of being consumed by a cheap industry than he was the idea of people continuing to reflect on May 4. May 4 was at risk of being lit up like a symbolic theme park that cared more about the power it obtains from selling tickets than it does studying any real historical significance of the event. Despite such a sentiment towards the importance of May 4, Begala had been considered either against or apathetic towards May 4. Such a failure to fit in with either of the sides is arguably the phenomenon that allowed Begala to think in the manner of complex personhood, the alternative to the binary furniture without memories.

Using the “save the green space” platform, Begala finally decided to travel to Kent and attempt to use his political experience and position to stop the gym. Before long, he explains, Tent City was rumored and then “suddenly appeared” (132). “Antiwar” and “pro-justice-in-America people from early 1970’s Kent State” arrived for a “last hurrah” and resurrection of the May 4 rhetoric that had already put Begala in a state of mental paralysis once before (132). Once this happened, Begala explains, “nearly everybody started choosing sides: ‘Build the Gym’ versus ‘Stop the Gym’ (ibid.). “In Ohio,” he continues,

With all its urban poverty, ‘country justice,’ low benefits levels for the poor, low subsidies for education at all levels, and gross apathy on all those problems, the great liberal cause was stopping a gym. It would have been only mildly disgusting had it not been for the right-wingers’ reaction to the protest. They made it significant, with their law-and-order, anti-communist rantings and petition drives. They sided with the guns and bullets and the human fingers on the triggers. Their activism, more than anything, made me get involved. (132).

Begala was trapped between the activism of the Left and the Right while also, on a more invisible sideline, being aware of a Left that had started to invest more in being a Left that was
victorious over the Right than it did in liberal causes. Begala was clearly against the Right and their “Build the gym” platform that was motivated mostly by their desire to conquer the Left by erasing May 4 from the cultural agenda. However, Begala’s battle was not just to “save” May 4. His position seems to have been one that desired to resuscitate a Left that did not know it was dead or dying while keeping the vulturous Right (which seemed to smell death) from taking advantage of the Left’s predicament. Unfortunately, as they are with others in states of complex personhood, the privileged binaries of historical emplotment were against Begala. In the historical home of May 4 that had been consumed by a battle of Left vs. Right, Begala could not make known a haunting of the Left without being perceived by the Left as either wanting a less haunted furnishing (the Right) or a new house that was not haunted. The latter would require him to flee once more.

It is because of this predicament of complex personhood that Begala could be against the Right, for the Left and the enemy of the Left at the same time. In a way, he became one of the ghosts he was trying to expose in the homes of May 4 and the Left. When approaching the Tent City protesters to propose a compromise of slightly rotating the gym away from the site, Begala reports that not only was the idea “not big with them,” but they also refused to work with him in a rational manner. “‘There has to be an alternative,’” he advised them, “‘that will not be too costly.’ I felt like a broken record on that point. ‘And you all have to support one, or all this is for nothing.’ I was told pretty directly what they thought of my ‘point.’ Alternatives were not their problem, they said. ‘It is the Trustees’ problem.’ That line got very old” (134). Begala’s essay uniquely depicts the frustration one feels when absent cultural emplotments are conflated with physical loss so that both the absence and the loss become complicated and prolonged.

May 4 haunts John Begala and he similarly haunts May 4. His story is not a part of the standard furniture without memories. Unlike some other May 4 critics, Begala seems to have diagnosed the May 4 disease early on, which is why he fled in 1974. Such detection can be likened to Gordon’s complex personhood, as it produces an uncanny haunting that “describes

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8 While it is true that the Right also participated in this battle over May 4, the Left seems to have always hosted and financed May 4 related engagements. Tent City, for example, as Begala reminds us, not only cost the Left sufficient funds, but it also prevented the Left from having time to invest on more dire issues of the time. The Right, on the other hand, could continue their conservative ways during Tent City because all they had to do to participate was pick up a phone to summon the state-funded police that would physically remove the city of protesting liberals. It is hard not to wonder whether or not the Right silently encouraged or enflamed liberal protests over the preservation of the May 4 site because it not only removed the steam from the Left’s other liberal causes, it also diverted the attention away from the conservative causes that would triumph without liberal contention.
how that which appears to be not there is often a seething presence, acting on and often meddling with taken-for-granted realities…” (8). His story exposes an interesting disjunction in the “we” of May 4 and the way it remembers, commemorates and memorializes its loss.

An Emplotment of May 4 With the Undead

In the grainy Pennsylvanian world of George A. Romero’s Night of the Living Dead (1968), the recently deceased have mysteriously come back to life to consume the flesh of the living. The film focuses on six adults and a child who are boarded up in an old farmhouse with very little information as to what is going on. We are first introduced to one of these protagonists, Barbara, as she visits her father’s grave with her brother, Johnny. Johnny is not happy with having to waste a sunny day on such a grave scene, especially since they are only doing it at their mother’s request. It is here that an old and disheveled man attacks and disables John and chases Barbara to a farmhouse where she and six other characters will eventually be killed and consumed. The only character to survive the zombie attack, Ben, is shot and killed upon exiting the house by a group of militiamen that mistakes him for another animated corpse.

Nearly 93 miles northwest of this cemetery, which is located in Evans City, Pennsylvania, a much longer production can be said to unfold with a similar storyline and predicted outcome. For 36 years, Kent State University officials and students have been arguing over the significance and continuance of commemorating the events of May 4, 1970. They have similarly fought over who should control the commemoration, whether or not the next generation should continue to mourn an older generation’s loss, whether the event should be memorialized with a religious George Segal marker, a Canadian Ian Taberner path or a fragmented Bruno Ast design, whether the entire site of the event should be preserved or just the places of death and whether or not the university and undergraduate student activity funds should spend “good money” on these markers and commemorations. Like Johnny, several administrators and students of the 21st century have grumbled in editorials over why they should commemorate an event for another generation that has seemingly “stayed at home” in the 1970’s. While all these arguments unfold, something unheard of—a zombie, a tangle or a haunting—lurks nearby behind the conventions and politics that sway people to hastily conclude, whenever they look up, that it is just another visitor or caretaker there for the same reasons they are.

The introductory graveyard scene in Romero’s film focuses on the themes of time,
religion and memorialization more than it does the potential threat of the undead. In fact, it is not until the following scene in the farmhouse that we are given enough information to conclude that the attacking man in the graveyard probably was undead. While he appears unkempt and confused, it is hard to say that he somehow looks dead, which is why Barbara and John are not alarmed when he stumbles their way. The movie forces this “undead” information in the first scene to yield to the established conventions of time and daylight-saving time, religion and its superstition towards the dead, and the rituals of memorialization by visiting and decorating grave plots. Such a setup impels Barbara and the audience to reflect on the graveyard scene after the phenomenon of the undead is established (but not understood) so that they are left with an uncanny feeling; their ways of thinking (their furniture without memories) prevented them from seeing something as significant as a zombie. This is arguably why this poorly made movie has the ability to disturb people. The zombies in the movie force us to, in Gordon’s terms, “remember and forget, [become] beset by contradiction, and recognize and misrecognize [ourselves] and others” (4). The revelation or complex personhood the zombie sparks in our minds disturbs us in uncanny ways, not just because the zombies are scary, but also because the zombies have the ability to expose our addictions to conventions that prevent us from privately articulating concepts like death and loss. However, should we embrace such complex personhood too strongly, the zombie will infect us and we will find ourselves as “just another zombie” wandering aimlessly, once more, in a world without memories.

The conventions of memorialization and commemoration are powerful and have persisted longer than the subscribers to these conventions can remember. When a memorial is challenged the challenger’s feelings toward the lost object are immediately brought into question. That is why, when Kent State decided it was time to discontinue the May 4 commemorations, organized groups, with different meanings for the loss, retrieved the seemingly discarded loss and continued to mourn in ways they found appropriate. It is unlikely that Allison Krause, Sandra Scheuer, Jeffrey Miller and William Schroeder will be forgotten at Kent State University because the phenomena of private and public loss have become tightly knotted together. Should one pull on one strand of the entanglement and question why we are privileging these four deaths over hundreds of other Kent student deaths, the second definition of the commemoration is simultaneously tugged at: the commemorations are for political purposes; we need to commemorate May 4 so that it and events like it will never happen again. That is also the reason
used in New York with the World Trade Center memorial. But should we say a memorial and
commemoration is only for one or the other cause, a vulnerable underside to the commemorative
logic will be revealed and the ritual can, should one find it necessary, be harnessed or even
brought to an end. It is not right, the attacker of this weakness will argue, to privilege the deaths
of four students over the deaths of other students that may have contributed more to the
university and to society. Similarly, it is not right to memorialize and commemorate one
political issue over thousands of others, many of which are more recent and important. Such
vulnerability is rarely attacked because the meanings of memorialization and commemoration
are tangled so tightly that one may only sense (as one does a haunting) a discrepancy but never
manage to untangle it enough to articulate what it is.

Judging from Romero’s film and other stories about zombies, the private confrontation
with an indefinable zombie (one that supercedes all prefabricated language conventions) seems
to result in a kind of paralysis and flight similar to the paralysis and flight that took hold of John
Begala. Lacking a language to articulate a creature that contradicts several of her pre-structured
ways of apprehending the world, Barbara can either stare frozen in awe, “laps[ing] into utter
inarticulateness and…no longer find[ing] a place in the symbolic order’s prime system,
language” (Schiesari 15), or she can run like hell. It is unfathomable to Barbara how something
can be living and dead at the same time, just as it is unfathomable to people how an historical
event like May 4 or September 11 can be reemplotted. The alternative reaction (running like
hell) can be understood as resistance and refusal to accept the zombie into the current system of
language because acceptance requires us to reconsider not just what it means to be dead but also
what it means to be alive. Changing one structure usually leads to changing all structures, and if
we can just eliminate the ghost, creature or zombie that forces us to make the first change, it
seems that we can save ourselves from extensive, critical labor. This is what Butler means when
she explains how the United States has refused to consider Afghan and Iraqi children and
civilians killed by American fire to be human. Should we allow the deaths of these Others to be
grievable, we would then have to acknowledge their lives to be livable, pushing our reasons for
waging war against them in the first place into public scrutiny.

What I want to suggest in this thesis is that there are ghosts at Kent State University
summoned by the entanglements of loss and the agendas of the emplotments of loss that are
constantly being ignored. Out of respect for the dead (a simultaneous respect for life), we have
avoided any real investigations into why we mourn, memorialize and commemorate the losses of May 4 the way we do. However, if we do not question these things, not only do we risk complicating the loss for certain people that are forced to define loss in our way, but we also risk subordinating other people and events by excluding them from our definition of what it means to be worthy of memorialization and commemoration. Kent State has heretofore managed to survive despite this ghostly oversight. However, the phenomena of loss and hauntings are not unique to Kent State and therefore, should we agree that May 4 is on a much smaller scale than an event like September 11, we may conclude that the politics of loss used in the later tragedy will contain larger memorials, longer commemorations, greater battles over the rights to the loss and more unsettling ghosts. We may be able to out run or defeat three or four zombies with few casualties, but an army of zombies will eventually be impossible to avoid. My hope is that this recognition can be made without the victims of complicated loss and precarious life first turning against us in an equally injurious way.
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