

Utrecht University

MA Contemporary Theatre, Dance and Dramaturgy

Master's Thesis

150,000 Ways of Saying Goodbye: Constructing the Space of Ritual Mourning in Digitalised Memorial Sites

A scenographic examination of how the digitalised memorial sites *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember* – as affective, commemorative, and navigational spaces – act as sites of ritual mourning.

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Abstract

In this thesis, I present a reading of ritual mourning from a scenographic perspective. Using the digitalised memorial sites *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember*, I deconstruct their spatial qualities to depict how expressing grief, as a subset of identity formation, is inextricably linked to the context of a performance environment. Within trauma studies, a significant body of work exists examining the impact of traumatic representation on an individual. Within theatre studies, however, the research I have found engages largely with notions of liveness and how technology alters such processes of representation. I have thus attempted to assign digitalised memorials – as performances – equally affective agency. Combining a methodology of expanded scenography with a reading of ritual as performance presents a transformation of the memorial sites into dynamic forms of cultural activity, whereby expressions of grief take on relational forms. With supporting notions from commemorative, site-specific and nomadic theatre practices, I present the term *ritual mourning* as a processual method with which to transform and contextualise identity and grief in communal forms.

I thus come to propose digitalised memorial sites – as affective, commemorative, and navigational spaces – as sites of ritual mourning in their ability to create transformative spaces which are open to the relational encounter and exchange of bodies, objects, and environments. In employing the lens of theatre studies, I attempt to ground digitalised memorial sites as spaces in which expressions of grief are granted transformative potentials, thus insinuating the possibility of offering a diverse and communal space in which to tackle collective trauma.

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Introduction

In what now seems like a lifetime ago, reflecting on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic brings up a need to address the spatial constraints in which we collectively lived. Enforced quarantines, separation from communities and loved ones, and the ensuing solitude had a tremendous impact on the physical and mental health of the global population. With no means to engage in our surrounding environment and the people in it, alternative forms of communication became the norm. In the context of theatre, the closing down of performance venues risked the very existence of the cultural sector, thereby motivating theatre makers, artists, and practitioners to find alternative modes of performance making. Since then, new, hybrid forms of theatre have been made, existing in the digital spaces of Zoom and as online publications, among others¹. Many such performances would seem to tackle the problem of immersion²; how to fully engage participants³ who do not share the performance space. Such alternative, digital performances would thus aim to transport (or remove, even) the participant from their personal environments to that of the performance, thereby negating the impact of their identity and context in the process⁴. Thinking of the traumatic effects of the pandemic⁵, however, engaging with digital works cannot altogether remove the participant's personal context, as this will inevitably influence the way in which the work is received. The pandemic

¹ Notable examples of such performances include the digital recording of Simon McBurney's performance *The Encounter* by Complicité and Nineties Productions' Zoom version of *Memento Mori*, both of which I had the pleasure of viewing.

² In my simplest understanding of the term as surrounding a spectator in the total environment of a given space.

³ This brings about a crucial distinction: whereas "spectator" is oftentimes used to refer to an audience member, I have opted for the word "participant". Without delving into the nuances of the terms, I find the term "participant" as best encapsulating the active, co-creative potential of what would otherwise be a passive spectator. This collective authoring forms a significant part of addressing the research question, and as such, any mention of "spectator" will be found only in quotations.

⁴ I acknowledge that this is a large generalisation, however, this was my personal experience in watching and making digital performances. This was certainly also a result of such hybrid performances being a rather new phenomenon, and as such, an obvious goal would be to want to transport the participant to the theatre space.

⁵ While relevant, this is not the subject of this thesis and as such, trauma will not be handled beyond the introductory paragraph.

brought about large-scale individual and collective trauma, and as such, the emotional (or, as this thesis will favour, the affective) side of digitalised performances cannot be ignored. This prompted my search for performances which, aside from being digitalised, engaged with the participant's identity and context as much as it did with that of the performance.

In line with the traumatic nature of the pandemic, the digitalised memorials *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember*⁶ present the case for engaging a participant's context amongst that of the performance space, with a specific focus on how expressions of grief transform the performances into dynamic spaces of ritual mourning. The choice of "ritual", seeing ritual as performance, is motivated by its analytical agency and dynamic, transformative potentials in relation to performance. Ritual mourning, as I will define in the theoretical framework chapter, enables such processes to occur. Labelling these memorials as performances stems from their spatially constructed abilities in engaging bodily, material, and environmental relations between the participant, and as such, motivates the application of expanded scenography as a method of analysis.

This thesis will thus address the following research question:

How can digitalised memorial sites – as affective, commemorative, and navigational spaces – act as sites of ritual mourning?

Upon considering three types of spaces, as motivated by pillars within expanded scenography, this thesis comes to suggest that *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember* act as sites of ritual mourning by creating transformative spaces which

⁶ (*Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall*; *In America*), respectively.

are open to the relational encounter and exchange of bodies, objects, and environments. These three notions – tied in with “affectivity”, “materiality” and “relationality”, as taken from expanded scenography – correlate to the chapters *Affective Space*, *Commemorative Space* and *Navigational Space*, whereby the culmination of the encounters presented in each chapter create a dynamic mode of cultural activity, as desired in seeing ritual as performance. By approaching ritual mourning as a process, as opposed to an outcome, *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember* can be seen as dynamic and transformative spaces of cultural activity through identity formation, enhanced by scenographic encounters.

Introducing the Digitalised Memorial Sites

Site I: Walk the National Covid Memorial

Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall is a mural located along the Southbank River in London, England. Courtesy of the volunteering Covid-19 Bereaved Families for Justice group, the wall is filled with over 50,000 hand-drawn hearts painted by 1,500 volunteers in ten days, starting March 29th, 2021. Each heart represents an individual who passed away from the COVID-19 virus since March 2020. The digitalised version – the primary focus of this thesis – is a tableau which enables a participant to scroll along the wall, with audio testimony submitted by the bereaved inserted at arbitrary intervals.

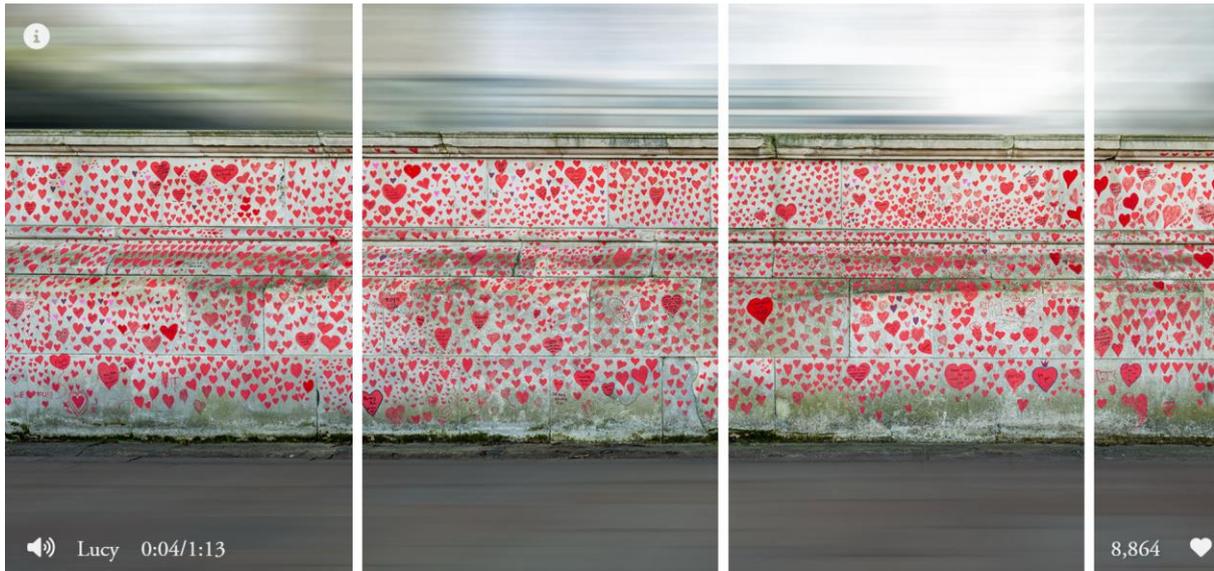


Figure 1.0 (above) – A screenshot of the start of the digital memorial (Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall).

On the top left-hand side corner, an information icon allows a participant to see practical information, such as funding matters, stakeholders, and additional administrative information. On the bottom left-hand side, an audio button shows the playing testimony which can be muted at any point during the experience. On the bottom right-hand corner, a heart icon, paired with a number – representing casualties – which increases rapidly as the page is scrolled. The value goes up to 150,837.

The background of the mural has been blurred and the tableau is split by vertical white lines to connect the otherwise fragmented panorama. In the audio, generic background noise is heard. On the wall there are hearts, mostly red but some purple, in various sizes and shapes. On the larger hearts, there are messages and notes from loved ones. Some hearts are filled in, others are not. When used with headphones, as recommended, the audio testimonies pan and fade, as they would when passing by a person who is speaking.

Site II: In America: Remember

With similar ties to the pandemic, the exhibition *In America: Remember* was located on the National Mall in Washington D.C. from September 17th until October 3rd, 2021 (*In America*). With more than 660,000 annotated white flags, a digital memorial was created to host the thousands of messages honouring the deceased. Visitors were encouraged to write personalised notes for their loved ones, where volunteers transcribed digital submissions in case of a visitors' physical absence. The digital memorial consists of a satellite image of the National Mall, with the ability to scroll, and zoom in or out of the image. Aside from the National Mall, participants can scroll beyond the memorial for a satellite view of Washington D.C. as a whole.

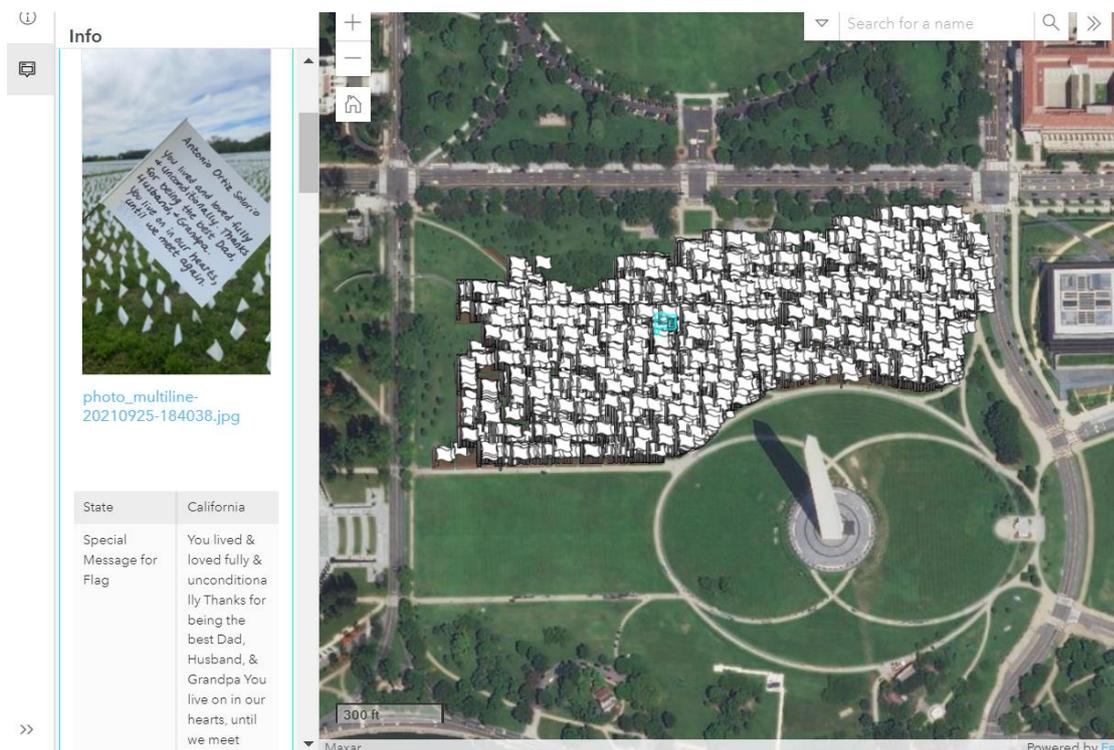


Figure 2.0 (above): A screenshot of the National Mall, with the Washington Monument towering over. On the left (by way of clicking on a flag), an information panel states the name of the deceased, their home State and the message written on the flag.

On the top right-hand corner, a search bar enables searching for a specific person's flag by name. The map has links to social media, through which a user can share the memorial link on their profile. A home page contains further details on the construction of the memorial, information on resources and funding bodies, as well as a brief biography of the artist who made the work: Suzanne Brennan Firstenberg. The digital memorial has no sound. When zooming in, numbered grids used for planting the flags are displayed.

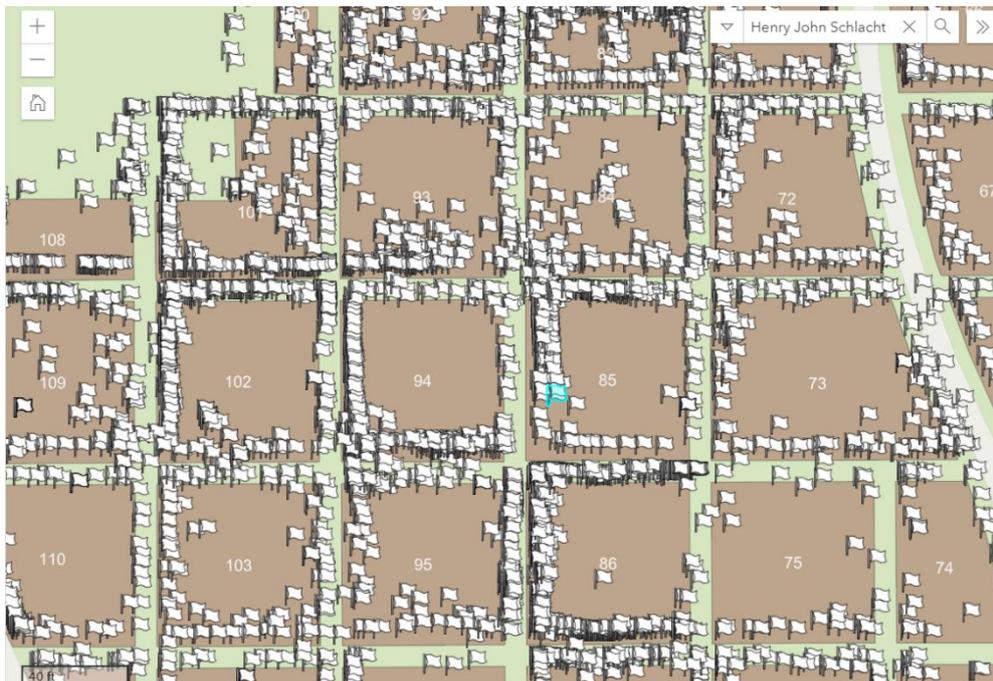


Figure 2.1 (above): A screenshot of a zoomed-in version of the map, showing numbered plots and their flags.

Theoretical Framework

In addressing three separate, yet deeply entangled types of space⁷, the theoretical framework is approached also as such a form. Whereas expanded scenography, ritual as performance and my own notion of ritual mourning form the backbone of the analysis, each chapter introduces new theories which best support the respective arguments. As such, further details on the theoretical framework will be introduced throughout each chapter, with continual reference to expanded scenography and the ritual aspect to ground the arguments in relation to the research question. The application of expanded scenography will be done in relation to what I call (constitutive) elements, whereby I have selected certain aspects within each memorial - ranging from sensory tools to objects – as points of focus. The approached perspective is thus that of a participant, with a focus on how scenographic elements may enable a participant to contextualise their otherwise internal grief, through spatial engagements⁸.

In short, the case studies act as sites of ritual mourning through the following transformative processes: *Affective Space* approaches transformation in the form of personal and collective identity, supported by the notion of affective architectures and community within the theatre. *Commemorative Space* depicts the transformation and materialisation of memory, supported by insights from site-specific performance theory, and *Navigational Space* presents the use of digital technologies in mobilising and thus transforming grief within the memorial site. In contextualising these outcomes within expanded scenography and ritual as performance, the outcome of the memorials as sites of ritual mourning can be assessed.

⁷ Due to format limitations, I have omitted the discussion on distinctions of space, place, and site. While I find considerable value in defining and defending my choice of word (especially in relation to my analysis of site-specific performance), I have surrendered to using the terms somewhat interchangeably, with the conscious intention to use the words as separated from their distinct definitions.

⁸ Opting for a participant's point of view is motivated by the desire to understand how digitalised memorials, as commemorative platforms, could be used as primary, or in the very least as more pronounced, places for processing and productively transforming grief.

Ritual as Performance

Assessing the ritual mourning potential of *In America: Remember* and *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* requires an understanding of the term ritual. Examining the term will focus specifically on the notion of ritual as performance, following Richard Schechner and Gavin Brown⁹. Valuing their approaches to ritual as performance stems from the dynamism which they attribute to ritual, which aligns with what I find the most valuable aspects of expanded scenography, namely its focus on the contextual, relational, and situational qualities of performance.

Brown's journal article *Theorizing Ritual as Performance: Explorations of Ritual Indeterminacy* (Brown) explores how ritual can be 're-conceptualised as performance' (4). The crucial element in this reconceptualisation is the inherent indeterminacy of ritual form, an understanding which enables the transition away from ritual as a repeated (somewhat passive) action into a 'dynamic and substantive mode of human activity' (3). Brown's 'ritual performance' stems from a paradigm shift whereby "ritual" has lost its meaning as an 'explanatory category' (7). This loss of meaning, attributed as being a definitional issue, stems from globalisation, whereby ritual has become associated with any form of social life possessing a sense of routine or repetition. To avoid abandoning the concept entirely, Brown proposes the new term 'ritual performance' as the solution.

The pejorative connotations of ritual stem from the Reformation, whereby the term was used as a 'religious weapon to discredit competing practices of worship' (7). For instance, whereby the worship of God was considered the "true religion", any other conventional, repetitive actions were classed as a "mere ritual". This hierarchy established ritual action as monotonous

⁹ While the notion of ritual was originally interrogated by Victor Turner - whose work inspired that of Schechner and Brown - its entanglement in Turner's "social drama" asks for an argument far more detailed than is permitted within the scope of this thesis. As such, arguing for ritual as performance is done with the conscious acknowledgement that it omits certain foundational elements.

and as an ‘empty mode of cultural activity’, in turn making the practice essentially redundant. Thus, to introduce a sense of dynamism to the practice of ritual requires several (non-linear) considerations. These include I) moving *away* from ritual as a ‘secondary expression of cultural meaning’, in other words, as something other than ‘culture *in action*’ (7), II) respecting ritual as also a secular practice, making ritual practice voluntary¹⁰, and III) in line with it as a secular engagement, not assigning ritual practice a specific time or place, thereby allowing room for ‘individual expression’ (7). With these considerations, ritual can be seen as a ‘creative and dynamic mode of cultural activity’, prompting Richard Schechner’s association of ritual as a ‘*genre of cultural performance*’ (8).

In Schechner’s redefinition, the term ritual acquires analytical agency. Schechner understands ritual in relation to a ‘restoration of behaviour’, attributed as the main characteristic of performance (Brown, 8). This behavioural restoration refers to the ability in which actions (i.e., behaviours) can be entirely separated from those who carry out said actions. Through this separation, behaviours can be ‘stored, transmitted, manipulated and transformed’ (8), creating a database of actions, if you will. This database is easily retrievable, which, when reconfigured and reorganised, can transform an otherwise scripted performance. In short, Schechner asserts that the very *form* of ritual itself - as an action which can be stored, repeated, and manipulated - can function as the basis for ‘transformation in ritual performance’ (8). Ritual performance can thus be seen as an agent of change, thereby becoming an active, dynamic, and creative mode of cultural activity, one which can be applied to the analysis of *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember*.

Positing the memorials as rituals stems from their commemorative and transformative potentials. The memorials – separated from religious institution and connotation – encourage

¹⁰ As opposed to obligated and therefore disliked.

individual expression. In their locality as publicly accessible platforms, individuals can voluntarily view the memorials at their own discretion and associate their personal meanings – politically or socially, for instance - with the sites. Being memorials, they invite a very specific (albeit culturally diverse) set of behaviours from visiting persons, through which the commemorative actions can be separated from those who carry them out, as desired by Schechner. The memorial sites become infused with the commemorative responses, developing their memorial identity over time. In visiting the sites, new forms of remembrance are influenced not only by the already existing potentialities of the memorials, but by individuals’ personal contexts, thereby encouraging transformation of the memorials and their meanings. Having established *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember* as rituals, specifically understanding ritual as performance, their analytical potential – namely their ability to transform an otherwise passive memorial space into a dynamic mode of cultural activity - can be unlocked by establishing how they act as sites of ritual mourning.

De-Christening Ritual Mourning: A Processual Term

Defining ritual mourning includes combining various perspectives on the initially separate terms *ritual* and *mourning*. As established, seeing ritual *as performance* introduces a sense of spontaneity to the practice, removing associations of repetitiveness from ritualised actions. Whereas grief is seen as the internalised experience of loss, mourning encompasses a wider range of outward expressions of grief, from conducting funerary preparations, to wearing black clothing (e.g., to be “in full mourning”) and to sharing accounts of a loved one. Following these understandings, I present ritual mourning as *the process in which outward expressions of grief are contextualised and materialised in a collectively accessible and curated form*. Key in this understanding of ritual mourning is two main factors. Firstly, its release from spatial and

temporal bounds, through which it is entirely contextually dependent, and thus transformable. Secondly, its reliance on the relational encounters between bodies, objects, and environments, following expanded scenography, through which such contextualisations and materialisations of grief are enabled. Ritual mourning is therefore not the reaction or response to an event, but rather the culmination of elements in a given space which, in storing them, enable relational and dynamic forms of cultural activity to take place. Within an affective space, such activity involves the formation of a diverse range of encounters and identities, within commemorative space dynamic activity involves the creation of communities of grief, and within navigational space activities include a contextual mapping of identity¹². The strong ties to scenography and site-specific performance motivate my definition of this term.

Methodology: Expanded Scenography

Through an expanded understanding of scenography, digitalised memorials can become a tool with which to analyse ritual mourning. This spatial methodology lends itself from Thea Brejzek's originally coined notion of 'Expanding Performance' (Brejzek), in line with which scenography has become increasingly applicable to a wider range of fields and applications. As community artist Tanja Beer quotes, in considering political and social agency as intertwined with scenographic approaches the scenographer 'emerges not as the spatial organizer of scripted narratives' but instead as the 'author of constructed situations and as an agent of interaction and communication' (Beer, 8). Beer's own understanding of expanded scenography¹³ includes allowing audiences to be more active co-creators, encouraging spatial

¹² The chosen constitutive elements of these activities, ranging from auditory and written testimony to the conditions of creation – as will be elaborated in succeeding chapters – are by no means the only elements worth investigating in each case study. Instead, I have selected the elements within each memorial which, from a participant point of view, were the most noticeable and impactful – and thus scenographically interrogatable - qualities.

¹³ In contrast with *expanding* scenography, a term suggesting continual developments to the field, as opposed to an interrogation of what currently persists.

agency, and acknowledging that ‘space is political’ (9). This increasingly complex and nuanced definition of *expanded* scenography prompts the application of the term following Joslin McKinney and Scott Palmer in *Scenography Expanded: An Introduction to Contemporary Performance Design*. In its expanded form, scenography is seen “not simply as a by-product of theatre but as a mode of encounter and exchange founded on spatial and material relations between bodies, objects and environments” (McKinney and Palmer, 2). The book presents three main pillars within expanded scenography – relationality, affectivity and materiality¹⁴ - which assess ‘*how*’ scenography operates, and its potentialities both ‘within and beyond the context of performance’, as explained in Lucy Thornett’s review of the book (Thornett, 191). In outlining the constitutive elements of *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember*, they are assigned scenographic values which enhance the ritual mourning potential of the memorial sites. Using expanded scenography, the digitalised memorials are interrogated as sites of ritual mourning, whereby their entanglement within relational contexts and encounters enables such a methodology to be applied.

Using expanded scenography’s notion of affectivity, the chapter *Affective Space* presents *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember* as sites of ritual mourning by respectively transporting the locality of the participant, thereby assigning identity to both the deceased and bereaved, and by emphasising the participant as a co-creator of the memorial, enabling communal expressions of grief. In using visual and auditory means to create an interplay between bodies, objects, and environments, the memorials’ ritual ability for individual expression and collective authoring enables them to act as sites of ritual mourning.

Commemorative Space further develops the argument presented in *Affective Space* by examining how material encounters can further contextualise identity and grief. Using

¹⁴ These pillars will be introduced separately throughout the chapter analyses.

testimony, in relation to expanded scenography's notion of materiality, the memorials engage in commemorative and site-specific theatre practices through which a participant's memories enable a ritual transformation to take place. This transformation refers to seeing culture *in action*, following Brown, whereby the scenographic desire to form relational encounters is achieved by infusing the resonances of a participant's memory with that of the memorials'. As such, the ritual mourning potential of the memorial sites is achieved through material encounters, whereby the otherwise scripted memorial sites are transformed into dynamic, contextually rich, and collective commemorative platforms.

Finally, the chapter *Navigational Space* uses the scenographic notion of relationality to round off the entanglement of identity and context within a performance space. By exploring mobility in the theatre, this chapter posits the case studies as sites of ritual mourning by presenting the digital environments as sites of dynamic transformation. The entanglement of multiple realities, political contexts and identities transform the static memorial sites into fluid spaces of relational encounter, whereby the emphasis on encounters and co-creation highlights the benefit of using expanded scenography in understanding digitalised memorials as sites of ritual mourning.

Chapter 1: Affective Space

This chapter presents *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember* as sites of ritual mourning by examining how affective elements – in the form of hearts, flags, and sound - influence a participant’s individual and collective identity. In presenting affect as a relational practice within the theatre, the case studies examine the relation between space and body in materialising and contextualising grief, enabled through engagement with the affective landscapes of the memorial sites, as presented by expanded scenography’s notion of affectivity. The sub-chapter *Transforming Identities Through Affect* explores the role of affect in transforming a participant’s identity in *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall*, with insight on how the collision of space and affect can influence a participant’s sense of self in relation to the larger context of the memorial. The sub-chapter *Collectivising Grief*, on the other hand, presents *In America: Remember* as a site of ritual mourning through the way in which its affective elements call for a participant's engagement, resulting in a co-creative memorial space, as desired by Beer’s expanded scenography.

Affectivity within expanded scenography presents scenography as a tool with which individuals’ affective landscapes can be created (McKinney and Palmer). These landscapes manifest gradually, whereby their understandings are ‘founded in sensual, emotional and aesthetic responses on the part of the viewer’ (11). In using a series of elements (lights or sounds, for instance), participants ‘dwell’ in the constructed space, in which they “[attune] themselves to the way the space and the things in it are working on their bodies as a way of re-connecting with ourselves as sensing bodies” (11). Scenography thus becomes a critical form through which participants’ engagements with their bodies and spaces can be understood, on both an individual and collective level. *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In*

America: Remember invite interactions between participant and platform, thereby altering traditional forms of audience reception as experienced in a theatre auditorium. Existing as digital forms, the case studies utilise various tools - ranging from aural soundscapes to written notes - to produce affective spaces for the participant. Such relational notions can be likened to the role of the feedback loop in the theatre, whereby bodies, objects and environments directly influence each other.

Jean Marsden's *Affect and the Problem of Theater* discusses the impact of communal emotion within a theatre audience and presents the case for theatre as being inextricably bound with emotion and community (Marsden). The article is embedded with James Boswell's 1774 account of his theatre experiences and the notion of 'sympathetic response' (1), an eighteenth-century concept used to depict the role of emotion in the feedback loop between audience and stage action. Marsden asserts that theatre's ephemerality is what makes it impossible to 'recapture retail' (297)¹⁶. Theatre is depicted as a communal event, as opposed to only a private experience, and as such, it 'cannot exist without an audience' (297). A feedback loop mechanism persists within the theatre, whereby the actions of a performer invite an audience response, which, again in turn, informs the performers' ways of further expression. The collaborative, and relational, nature of this feedback loop enables theatre to be defined by 'the affective response of its audience', whereby Marsden uses the term 'emotional response' to refer to the 'collective affect' that is the interaction between a performance and its audience (297). In analysing the sympathetic response in both case studies, their potentials as sites of ritual mourning become clear.

¹⁶ Such notions of representation and reproduction have been extensively interrogated by scholars including Philip Auslander and Peggy Phelan, for instance.

Transforming Identities Through Affect

Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall finds its potential as an affective space in its ability to incorporate the participant within a digital environment. In viewing material representations of the deceased, complete with a testimonial soundscape, the participant reflects on their identity in relation to those presented in the memorial site. Ritual mourning through identity formation takes on a much more private form, in which expressions of grief are subjective and individual. The memorial uses elements, in the form of aural testimony and pictorial representations to create an affective landscape¹⁸ through which a transformation of participant identity takes place. This process requires a participant to re-contextualise their expressions of grief in relation to their identity, in turn creating individualised forms of ritual mourning.

The memorial is laden with emotional outpourings by the bereaved. When first viewing the platform, the most striking visual image is the hand-drawn hearts, in mass scale. The greyness of the concrete wall is contrasted with an outpouring of support in the form of red and pink hearts. The wall, almost entirely covered in hearts, feels like an overwhelming testament to love for the deceased. Focussing on individual hearts bears a heavy weight as it is associated with an actual person who has surviving family and friends. As a participant, seeing the ease with which people are reduced to a simple drawing of a heart is incredible. At first glance, this form of commemoration seems bittersweet and endearing: with the inability to carry out funerary plans, *still* a way has been found to memorialise loved ones. As soon as scrolling begins, however, the rapid increase in death toll overbears the sense of care that has been placed in the mural's drawings. No longer do the hearts represent the undying love for a *real* person who has value and identity, but rather a brutal reminder of how miniscule a single life really

¹⁸ As a point of further interest, Sara Ahmed's *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* examines the role of politics and identity in feeling emotion, and how objects and bodies influence these experiences. Whereas Ahmed's work relates to race and belonging, creating a collectively curated memorial contains similar notions of group identity as what Ahmed presents. However, using this work would require, besides a clearer distinction between emotion and affect than what I provide, a further dive into the context of which Ahmed writes about.

is. As the deceased count increases, the hearts merge into one big, infinite swirl of red and pink, no longer distinguishable as individuals, but a marking of a remains-less mass grave. The very first impression of *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* is, through the visible space alone, a site which produces a range of emotions. In my experience, I first felt that of a sadness associated with the beauty of the commemorative action, but soon, these turned into disbelief. Once coming to terms with the difficulty of carrying out “proper” forms of commemoration – such as individual headstones – anger set in. Anger not only from the multiplicity of ways in which the pandemic affected our daily lives, but anger towards an institution and government which failed so miserably in tackling the problem. Whilst not having British nationality, a sense of grief *for* their nation was certainly shared. Countless saveable lives were lost, which adds a bitter touch to an otherwise genuine memorial. There is a clear sympathetic response in the form of raw emotion when first viewing the memorial, and, in line with scenography’s affectivity, I too found myself dwelling in the constructed affective space. An emotional development thus takes place, in which the participant finds their body increasingly acclimatising to the memorial site, noticing changes in the way their body and space interacts. A shift to considering identity, however, surpasses mere emotion.

In *Towards a Digital Theory of Affect* (Bressani), Martin Bressani develops an understanding of affect which goes beyond emotion. Emotions are seen as ‘reactions to determinate objects’, referring to sadness or anger, for instance, whereby they are always caught in a ‘subject/form’ and ‘form/content’ relationship (161). Although Bressani expresses the lack of accurate vocabulary to describe affect within a cultural-theoretical realm, he presents a series of associations to define the term. Affect somewhat opposes the binary form of emotion, being referred to as ‘non-intentional’, ‘immanent’ and as a ‘dynamic reality’ consisting of a ‘bundle of sensations’. Bressani’s affect can be applied in practice, through which it enables a new ‘mapping of belonging and identification’, whereby a participant can

assess their subjectivity in relation to those being memorialised (161). Being unable to distinguish individual identities from the massive collection of hearts, a participant is forced to turn inwards: *who am I in relation to the hearts? Where do I fit in amongst the anonymised masses?* Approaching affective sensations in relation to oneself invites ritual tendencies on a deeply profound and saddening way. A participant might experience a sense of expendability and loss of identity – if 50,000 people can be memorialised by a heart, with no further mention of what their lives amounted to, what is the point of trying to lead an impactful life? What is the purpose of forming an identity – a form of personal expression within a community of others – if one drawing is what will come out of it? The encounters between participant and memorial are thus deeply rooted in the scenographic relations between bodies, objects, and environment, in which the memorial slowly, through individual expression, gains ritual qualities. Whilst this is only one possible response, out of many, contextualising affect requires further consideration of the spatial qualities within *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall*.

Bressani calls for an ‘architecture of affect’, comparable to scenography, referring to the need for buildings to be a ‘total environment in which subject and object coincide to emerge as affective landscapes’ (159). This call stems from his understanding of affect as being something we live within. As such, an architecture of affect cannot be ‘object based’ but needs to be the result of a ‘contamination of the virtual with the actual’ and vice versa (159). This augmented reality is enhanced with the introduction of digital technologies, renewing the understanding of what constitutes an affective landscape. In a digital realm, space is no longer ‘stable, autonomous or homogenous’, as it becomes invaded with ‘affective elements’ (159). Besides the hand-drawn hearts in *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall*, other affective elements include the aural soundscape and the verbal testimonies¹⁹. A participant’s affective

¹⁹ While these are by no means the only affective elements within the digital memorial, these are the first things which stood out to me when experiencing the site for the first time.

response is enhanced through the “reality augmenting” aural features of *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall*²⁰. The background noise, consistent with the auditory cityscape, grounds the participant in a distinct urban environment. The memorial encourages the use of headphones to maximise the auditory experience, referring to the panning of sound from one ear to the other. Placing the participant *within* the Southbank scene transports them to an in-between space between their locality and that of the memorial site. On a simple level, this transportation gives the participant a sense of “being there”. They experience a changing relation to their environment; spatially, emotionally, and physically. As will be determined in the sub-chapter *Delocalising the Memorial Place*, using headphones in site-specific performance asks the participant to “reprise” the city in question, a process which is influenced by their personal context and history, and which ultimately affects their continually evolving sense of identity. The verbal testimonies add another layer to the affective qualities of the memorial: participants gain insight from the deceased’s lives, getting to know other represented identities through very detailed, deeply personalised accounts. Hearing the tones of voice, inflections and diction used in the testimonies creates another layer of meaning to the words being spoken: there is the identity of the deceased, and that of the speaker, whose *way* of giving a verbal account acts as an additional testimony. Hearing primary testimony is a reassuring encounter within *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall*: whereas a moment of existential crisis may have briefly persisted, gaining more detailed accounts of individuals confirms that the deceased *are* valued. While, on a moral level, there is no moment of doubt regarding this fact, having no material encounters to support this notion makes for a temporarily dire

²⁰ Such mentions of augmentation bears resemblance to the transformative qualities of audio walks, as is briefly discussed in the third chapter on navigational space. Investigating *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall*’s aural design as a virtual form of an audio walk is certainly worth doing, however I will save this as a point of further research.

experience. Getting to know the deceased – their pasts and occupations – makes room for the participant to find themselves amidst those histories.

The ritual mourning potential of *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* as an affective space becomes increasingly clear: the range of encounters and identities a participant engages with fulfils the need to create a dynamic, non-scripted environment, whereby a transformative space emerges through the affective engagement of the participant and the memorial site. An architecture of affect, as well as expanded scenography, is clearly applicable to the memorial site: what was initially only quantitative, referring to a mere number depicting death tolls, was transformed into something qualitative, through space (162). Numbers were assigned identities, lives, and values, which, through spatial means can be integrated in people's affective environments. Finding the value in Bressani's work can be highlighted in relation to seeing ritual as performance: the dissociation of the memorial from a specific place or time makes way for a participant's individual expression. In engaging with a wide range of localities, identities and affects, a participant enables the memorial's transformation into a dynamic mode of cultural activity, whereby the participant is continually tasked with re-connecting with their sensing bodies as invited through scenographic affectivity.

Whilst there is a productive space in which *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* can act as a site of ritual mourning, the ability to properly materialise and contextualise one's grief relies on the ability to create such a space in a collectively curated and accessible form. Some such relations are established, since the participant can relate their identity to those being represented on the memorial site, but having only a handful of testimonies (compared to the tens of thousands of hearts) still assigns the majority of identities as unidentified, anonymous public. Without more context to ground a participant in, achieving communal, collectivised grief is challenging. Ritual mourning – from an affective point of view – is thus largely limited to the individual as a private encounter with the masses. While there are still ritual mourning

potentialities— including the transformation of individual identity, the personal materialisation of grief and a *potential* for creating group identity— achieving full ritual mourning requires a more widely accessible form of collective grief. By being more community oriented, as opposed to identity focussed, *In America: Remember* entangles the participant *within* the community of the deceased and the bereaved, inviting expressions of grief which are much more collectivised and relational.

Collectivising Grief

In America: Remember assigns a co-creative agency to the participant, whereby expressions of grief become communal, thus making the memorial more capable of acting as a site of ritual mourning. In relying on the feedback loop as understood within the theatre, and by seeing affect as a cultural practice, the communal authoring of the memorial transforms the site into a dynamic mode of cultural activity, taking the form of collective expressions of grief. The use of flags and the lack of sound - opposing it's London counterpart - invites a distinct affectivity within the participant: the modes of encounter shift from an individual level to that of a communal one, whereby relations between bodies, objects and environments become contextualised within a larger social sphere. Additionally, referring to Beer's understanding of expanded scenography, the memorial site's digital form enmeshes it within cultural norms, thereby enhancing *In America: Remember* as a site of transformation and ritual mourning.

From an affective point of view, *In America: Remember* enables a broader form of ritual mourning through its focus on community. Upon viewing the memorial for the first time, the birds-eye view seems like a significantly detached form of memorialisation. Seeing a satellite image grounds the participant in the National Mall space, although there is little emotional

response at first glance. Seeing a cluster of white flags is a point of intrigue, but the site requires some navigation. Although, much like *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall*, the tremendous scale of deaths is striking, the flags look like little more than placed objects. With no auditory media, the memorial seems passive, unfamiliar, and far removed from personal identity. However, it is once again upon closer inspection that *In America: Remember's* affective elements reveal themselves as capable of ritual transformation. The most prominent elements within the memorial include the representational white flags – as material and identity – and the lack of audio. In exploring these chosen elements, *In America: Remember* proves to be a fruitful space for communal expressions of grief.

Despite not taking place in an auditorium with an audience and performers, the memorial enables moments of ‘sympathetic response’. Marsden’s feedback loop can be seen as multi-faceted. In navigating the digital memorial, movements reveal specific parts of the memorial which affect any subsequent actions. In dragging the map, for instance, one might move entirely away from the flags on the National Mall, and instead investigate the surrounding architecture within Washington D.C. This includes the Capitol building, the White House, several memorials as well as residential streets. Upon an eventual return to the flags, one has engaged with the urban city in its diverse forms²¹. These interactions influence ways of moving, and immediately embed the contexts of the city within the lived reality of the participant. As such, even before seeing any of the actual flag content, a participant is embedded within the conditions of the city. These interactions make little impact on personal identity, since the focus is moved towards the city and its context, as opposed to a reflection of self. The emotion within a ‘sympathetic response’ is more inclined to concern the memorial space, in its complex

²¹ Such engagements include gaining insight to domestic life, as well as greater political concerns, for example the storming of the Capitol building in January 2021.

political entanglements. The ability to assign affective and collective meaning to the memorial site happens upon viewing the flags more closely.

Seeing testimony, as opposed to hearing it like in *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall*, invokes an entirely different way of relating to a person. Notes are often shorter and include nicknames or inside jokes unrecognisable to an onlooker, yet they still encapsulate the deceased's relations and the emotions felt by the bereaved. Handwriting and formatting also reveal insights into the bereaved, which is contrasted with the very formal and tidy notes of those whose flags were written by a volunteer (see *Figure 3.0 below*). The use of white flags is an interesting feature. Flags, as national symbols, represent pride and unity, deeply rooted in forms of patriotism. Displaying a national flag asserts a certain confidence in one's nation, signifying trust, and respect. A white flag, on the other hand - although perhaps used simply for its ease of being a blank canvas - is known to represent surrender or truce. Surrender, perhaps in the form of being invincible by nature, or alternatively truce, in the form of accepting the pandemic's effects and honouring the deceased through a representational object. There seems to be a complex, intangible relation between the scenographic encounters, whereby body-object-environment relations are, from the very materiality of the memorial's elements, contestable. Every participant is likely to attribute a different interpretation regarding the construction of the memorial, making it hard to quantify how exactly affectivity comes about. However, returning to McKinney and Palmer's definition of scenography as a *tool*, it seems favourable to have a wide range of affective landscapes. Coming about gradually, albeit rooted in a participant's 'sensual, emotional and aesthetic responses' (McKinney and Palmer, 11), means that the memorial - as a site of ritual mourning - happens over time. By giving participants the time and space to attune to the space, it seems plausible for collective authoring to occur. The sense of collective authoring exists in the process of viewing the flags. With a multitude of deeply personal accounts, a participant creates a network of identities and

experiences, in which they themselves are also embedded through the act of viewing and navigating the space. The interaction between the memorial and the participant, despite not being corporeal, aligns with Marsden’s notion of collective affect.

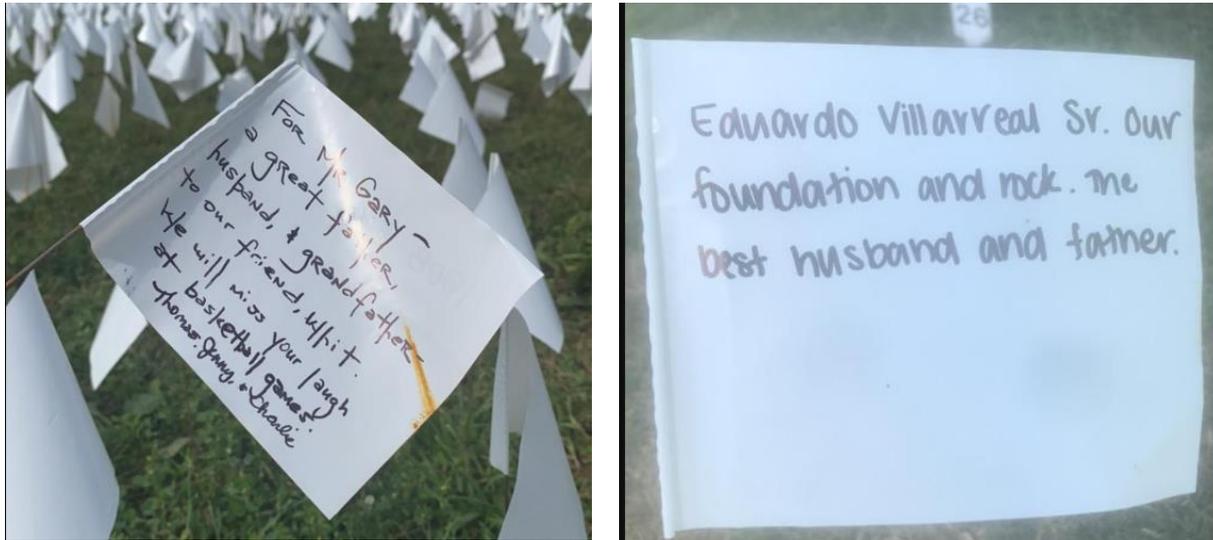


Figure 3.0 (above): on the left, a personally written note contrasted with the note on the right, as submitted online and written by a volunteer (*In America*).

The memorial is not so much a reflection on personal identity like *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall*, but the participant’s role within the feedback loop is clear. On some level, there is the sense that the memorial is being viewed from the perspective of an onlooker; someone who merely searches and filters through a platform. Since the memorial is being viewed from above, there is no sense of being directly implicated within the memorial. Nevertheless, viewing the deceased within the context of their familial ties create a sense of community to which the participant belongs. One “gets to know” the deceased, with their home states acting as markers to contextualise their lives. Whereas *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* invites reflections on who the participant is in relation to others (a somewhat binary approach), *In America: Remember* invites a participant to reflect on *how* they engage

with the space and its affective elements. These forms of relationality enhance the affectivity of the memorial site, which is heightened through the auditory qualities.

The lack of sound in *In America: Remember*'s digital platform does not immerse a user spatially or temporally in the same way as *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall*, but its very silence acts as a form of commemoration. Instead of taking a moment of silence to pay respects, a constant silence allows room for careful consideration of the visual elements presented. Being removed from such a dominant form of sensory engagement invites a participant to experience the affective landscape as a site for expressing grief, through silence; a distinctive form of the feedback loop. The sympathetic response becomes harder to interpret, as no clearly distinguishable forms of expression are depicted. Nevertheless, much like moments of silence, this commemorative act is collectively respected, thus developing the memorial as a site of ritual mourning further. Grief becomes contextualised through the interactions with, towards, and in relation to the affective elements of the memorial. The participant's materialisation of grief takes form through the prolonged silence and the way in which they navigate the platform. In quickly browsing the memorial, the mourning activity is rushed and perhaps less genuine. In taking the time to read the testimony, think about the deceased and reflect on their own contextual situatedness, ritual mourning becomes a communal activity²². Expanded scenography is thus a critical tool with which to understand the participant's relational engagements in the memorial space, whereby the combination of affective elements enables the application of ritual mourning to *In America: Remember*.

²² If I were to continue with applying Sara Ahmed's notion of affect, I could explore affect as being "sticky", or as sustaining or preserving the 'connection between ideas, values and objects' (Ahmed, 29). I would apply this notion to note that "communal" within ritual mourning does not merely refer to shared activity among participants, but also the collective environment of the memorial site. This includes the elements within the sites, which, following affectivity, are implicated within the bodily experiences of the participant.

To fully grasp the impact of affect as a relational and thus scenographic practice requires an understanding of the space in which the memorial is constructed. By discussing the digital form of *In America: Remember*, the memorial is presented as a site for ritual mourning through its altered form of engagement and its entanglement within the social constructs of space²³, whereby the application of affect as a cultural practice enables the ritual transformation of the memorial site into one of dynamic cultural activity. Discussing community within digitalised memorial sites thus requires, besides a theatrical approach, a digital approach.

The journal article *From Mediatized Emotion to Digital Affect Cultures: New Technologies and Global Flows of Emotion* proposes a definition of digital affect cultures, using digital memorial culture to exemplify the argument of affect as being ‘situational’, ‘contextual’ and as a “relational performance that has the capacity to form communities of practice” (Döveling et al., 2)²⁴. *In America: Remember* creates a sense of community by combining individual freedom with shared moments of respect. Freedom refers to the participant’s ability to roam around the space, move beyond the constructs of the memorial ground and engage with the affective elements. Despite grief manifesting in many different forms, entering a digitally curated space enables shifting between a constructed mourning space and a personal mourning space. This fluidity is shared between all mourners, since participants engage with the memorial in ways that fit within the constructed parameters of the site, yet they can express any cultural grieving mechanisms in the safe home environment. As such, aligning oneself emotionally with the community of a digital affect culture invites a sense of belonging (2). Seeing affect as a relational practice links to Marsden’s claim of communal experience in the

²³ A return to this notion is made in *Chapter 3: Navigational Space*

²⁴ It is important to note that this article aligns digital memorial culture with social media activity, making the following analysis an extrapolation of the discussed material such that it is applicable to *In America: Remember*.

theatre, whereby the interconnectedness of elements, bodily expressions and emotional experiences create diverse communal encounters and spaces. By accepting these emotions as cultural practice, affect can be seen as ‘something people do’ (Döveling et al., 8), as opposed to have, adding a transformative layer to the process. This transformation may take place as communal ritual action, becoming an almost tangible process; an outpouring of grief through relational practice. However, digital affect cultures are also seen as cultural constructs, deeply entangled in power relations, much like the memorial sites. Even in digital form, certain ‘emotional scenarios’ are ‘normalized at the expense of others’ (2), privileging culturally accepted forms of ritual, commemorative, and thus affective practice. Depending on a person’s contextual situatedness, certain forms of mourning are associated with a higher sense of ‘cultural intelligibility of affect’, heightening the extent to which mediatisation approaches emotions as cultural products. In other words, mediatisation has presented society with a series of acceptable forms of performing affect, creating a norm of ‘what and how we should feel’, and how to ‘do emotions’ (2). Any deviation from these accepted norms equals exclusion, in essence invalidating those experiences. The benefit of digital platforms, therefore, lies in subverting those ‘normalized performances of emotions’ by offering an alternative mourning ground; a ‘platform for contestation’ (2). Forms of grief thus become more diverse, personalised, and accepted. This expansion of grief – of *doing* emotion - by taking place in a temporal, spatial, and social sphere, also enables a ‘reconfiguration of the relationship with the deceased’ (2). Digital affect culture invites a two-way relational encounter to take place: that between the deceased and the bereaved, and that among the community of mourners. In accepting the contextual differences which govern forms of mourning, *In America: Remember* can be understood as a digital affect culture, in which a combination of affective elements and relational encounters enable the likening of the memorial as a site for ritual mourning.

In presenting *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember* as affective spaces, their constitutive elements can transform the memorials into sites of ritual mourning. By inviting a participant to explore the platforms as relational spaces, referring to expanded scenography in its call for exchange between bodies, objects and environments, the memorials invite the participant to consider their personal and collective identities. Through affectivity, the memorials' affective elements ask the participant to turn inwards to their sensing bodies, such that their locality within the memorials is assessed. By addressing the feedback loop and digital affect cultures, the memorials become diverse spaces for contextualising grief, through which ritual mourning is enabled. While *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* has a more individual focus and *In America: Remember* has a more communal approach to identity formation, the application of expanded scenography presents the memorials as sites of ritual mourning, whereby the iterative qualities of the affective landscapes transform the memorials into spaces open to the relational encounter and exchange of bodies, objects, and environments.

Chapter 2: Commemorative Space

This chapter presents materiality, as understood in expanded scenography, to propose the memorials as sites of ritual mourning through examining how material encounters impact a participant's experience of grief. Using forms of spontaneous memorialisation and testimony as the main objects of analysis, *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember* become ritual mourning sites by infusing a participant's histories and memories with those of the memorials, thereby creating transformative spaces which enable relational encounters between bodies, objects, and environments, as desired within expanded scenography. Through a mapping of commemorative practices, the memorials are presented as spaces in which the participant's identities are developed in relation to historical contexts, moving beyond identity as presented in *Chapter 1: Affective Space*. In assigning memory and grief material dimensions, a participant's engagements with such dimensions can be assessed, whereby scenographic materiality transforms the memorials into sites of dynamic activity. Such activity involves the creation of communities of grief, as demonstrated using site-specific performance theory, thus enhancing the ritual mourning potential of the case studies.

Materiality, within expanded scenography, is defined as the “properties and capacities of things, places, bodies and the ways they interact and impact on our experience and understanding of performance and of the world more generally” (McKinney and Palmer, 8). It is thus applied beyond mere objects and can be used to encompass all components of a performance. Assigning spaces materiality enhances their potential in creating a ritual environment. Participants can also be seen as materials, as they become entangled within scenography's ‘expansion’ through ‘physical presence, energy, attention and response’ to the surrounding scenographic elements (13). In line with this thought, a participant becomes a

constitutive of the memorials, in which their presence and forms of interaction continually develop the sites as commemorative spaces. Since a participant's input informs the eventual expansion of the memorial site, presenting memory as material allows examination into how grief can be materialised in digitalised memorial sites.

The use of materiality, as presented by McKinney and Palmer, is employed to establish a participant's memory as material within a commemorative environment. Using this proposition, a participant's ability to anchor memory to place enables a materialisation of grief, achieved through an analysis of spontaneous memorialisation practices, the digital memorial form in emphasising memory as material, and the notion of cenotaphisation. The first sub-chapter, *Materialising Memory*, addresses how scenographic encounters enable the processing of grief within a participant, as a result of which the development of identity (or individual expression, following Brown in his reading of ritual as performance) can transform the memorials into sites of ritual mourning. The second sub-chapter, *Transforming Material Memory*, materialises the somewhat elusive processed grief by contextualising the process within site-specific performance. In this reading, the application of expanded scenography becomes clear. In highlighting the entanglement of the participant's context with that of the memorial site, the participant's co-creative agency is enhanced - the desired outcome in both expanded scenography and site-specific performance. In accepting such a fluid space of creation, the memorials become sites of ritual mourning.

Materialising Memory

Processing grief requires an indication of how the memory of a deceased, as commemorative practice, affects a participant's scenographic experience. Using James D. Sidaway and Avril Maddrell's *Deathscapes: Spaces for Death, Dying, Mourning and Remembrance* (Sidaway and Maddrell), as well as individual chapters taken from this book²⁵, *Materialising Memory* attempts to liken scenography's materiality to the analysis of commemorative practices. Using commemorative objects and testimony, *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember* become sites of ritual mourning by transforming a participant's identity.

Establishing the memorials as commemorative spaces is done by tracing memorialisation practices through history. In understanding memorials as communal spaces of mourning, a participant's grief can be contextualised in relation to scenography's materiality, whereby the impact of space, and the objects in it, inform the participant's experience and expressions of grief. Upon conducting such an assessment on the individual level, materiality can be extended to depict *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember* as sites of ritual mourning.

The development of contemporary forms of memorialisation – as presented in *Bringing the Dead Back Home: Urban Public Spaces as Sites for New Patterns of Mourning and Memorialisation* (Kellaher and Worpole) – can be traced to the Victorian Era, after which cemeteries as the 'principal focus for funerary rituals' have been favoured by more local (and public) forms of memorialisation practices (171). The benefits of these local forms of

²⁵ Namely *Chapter 8: The Production of a Memorial Place: Materialising Expressions of Grief* (Pettersson) and *Chapter 9: Bringing the Dead Back Home: Urban Public Spaces as Sites for New Patterns of Mourning and Memorialisation* (Kellaher and Worpole).

memorialisation include the ability to ‘[anchor] memory to place’ and ‘inscribing the familiar streetscape with the names of those who once lived there’ (175). Additionally, a tree or bench – both common forms of memorialisation - is easily visited daily, as opposed to a ‘grave... in a cemetery or crematorium many miles away...’ (176). Such memorialisations are observable in the memorials: the inscription of hearts with names and messages in *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* serves as a form of perdurable rite, as is observed in one of the testimonies by “Susie”:

“At least his name is out there [on the wall] for people to see and understand... he took up space, he was important, and he deserves to be remembered” (*Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall*).

In America: Remember also enables anchoring memory to place, as a message is displayed to inscribe an identity and life to an otherwise empty flag. With both case studies being online, a sense of permanent inscription is achieved. Kellaher and Worpole argue that local forms of memorialisation can be seen, symbolically, as a ‘gift to the neighbourhood’, whereby rituals can be integrated on a more communal scale in the form of anniversary gatherings, ‘the laying of a wreath’ or the ‘attachment of open letters’ (176). In both *In America: Remember* and *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall*, the appreciation of a communal grieving space is evident. With geographically vast countries, accessing these memorials online enables larger community groups to memorialise and pay their respects to the deceased, whereby commemorative gestures can be carried out in respective homes and with respective customs. The value of such memorialisation activities can be found in the application of expanded scenography. Tanja Beer’s application of the term assigns agency to both space and participant, whereby the space becomes infused with the context of its creation. In co-creating a memorial,

the participant influences, but is also influenced *by*, the memorial site. As such, from the very development of the memorials, a sense of encounter and exchange of spatial and material relations exists. In inscribing a deceased's identity to the memorials, on top of that of the participant, the sites become delocalised²⁶ as they encapsulate identities of living and non-living persons. In doing so, the memorials gain ritual potential: they become culture *in action* as histories and identities merge in a shared space.

Such culture in action can be found in Sidaway and Maddrell's examination of the spatial shift of dying and remembrance from private, regulated sites to more urban forms of commemoration. They argue for the closely tied relationships between 'space/place' and 'death/bereavement' and their entanglement in embodiment, affective and cultural processes (1)²⁷. These relations are seen as the result of the process of 'cenotaphisation' (Kellaheer and Worpole, 169), deriving from cenotaph, meaning a memorial or tomb to commemorate people whose remains are elsewhere. Cenotaphisation, following Kellaheer and Worpole, is a contemporary form of separating 'mortal remains from most privileged site of commemoration'. As such, acts of memorialisation undergo both a 'spatial and temporal separation' from the remains of an individual (169). A clear example, historically, is the missing bodies of those who have been lost in battle, without the ability for any remains to be returned to the bereaved. With mass casualties, but no bodies to bury, cenotaphisation enables memorialisation to occur, albeit in alternative forms. The separation within memorialisation acts can be related back to Gavin Brown's notion of ritual, in which the freedom from spatial and temporal constraints enables individual expression on the part of the participant. As such, memorialisation activities enable the participant to develop their identity beyond an individual

²⁶ This proposition will be tackled in the final chapter *Navigational Space*.

²⁷ Sidaway and Maddrell use the term *Deathscapes* to refer to this intersection of private and public spaces of dying and remembrance. To avoid placing unwanted emphasis on this term, I did not include it in the main body of work. Instead, my focus lies in the relationality between space and memorialisation activities. Placing emphasis on contextual situatedness bears likeness to site-specificity, a relation which will be further explored in the next sub-chapter.

or communal form, as suggested in *Affective Spaces*, but rather, the participant (in combination with such a personal and communal sense of identity) relates their subjectivity in relation to the context of the commemorative space. *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember* are entirely removed from the material remains of the deceased, even more so with the funerary backlog the pandemic created, and as such, are centralised spaces for commemoration, relying heavily on outside inputs (in the form of submitted memorialisations) to exist. The use of objects (in *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall*) and testimony in both case studies enhances the application of materiality within this chapter.

Exploring scenography's materiality further prompts exploring the memorial as a material place for grief. By presenting the spontaneous memorialisation activity in *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall*, an understanding of how objects impact a participant's experience can be gained. Through relational commemorative engagements between bodies, objects and the memorial environment, a participant's otherwise passive memorialisation activity becomes communal and dynamic, enabling the transformation of the site into one of ritual mourning. *The Production of a Memorial Place: Materialising Expressions of Grief* (Petersson) confirms the memorial as a material place for grief. Spontaneous memorialisation has been the subject of decades of academic study; as Petersson describes it, involves the placing of objects, such as flowers or photographs, alongside a site of sudden death. This can include the location of roadside accidents or violent acts, among others. For culture scholar Jack Santino, what he calls a 'spontaneous shrine' is the "primary way to mourn those who have died a sudden or shocking death, and to acknowledge the circumstances of the deaths" (Santino, 5). As can be observed when scrolling along the Southbank stills (see *Figure 4.0* below), moments of spontaneous memorialisation stand out against the very planned and carefully curated backdrop of the mural. Flowers placed at regular intervals remind the participant that this is a place of a sudden

and traumatic death, despite being detached from the locality of the ‘accident’, or site of passing. The intense contrast between the participant’s and the memorial’s context inevitably impacts any understanding of the memorial and its broader global context. Materiality is visible in the way it presents distinct realities and memories, rooted in engagements between participant and memorial. Through such realisations, communities of grief may come about as coping mechanisms. While there are no spontaneous shrines visible in *In America: Remember*, using white flags as commemorative objects enables a similar effect as the shrines. Instead of flowers, a planted flag signifies a similar moment of “I was here” for the participant, acting as a materialisation of memory.



Figure 4.0 (above): A screenshot of flowers placed along the Southbank mural. A plaque commemorates the victims of Human Bovine spongiform encephalopathy (BSE), or mad cow disease (*Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall*).

Contemporary memorialisation practices have increased over the past decades for several reasons. Petersson argues that by visiting an accident scene, one can work on their ‘understanding of the death’ (Petersson, 149), thereby acting as a form of mental processing of

the event. Carrying out symbolic gestures has shown to further aid in an individual's ability to process the initial 'intense emotions of grief and difficult thoughts'. The material manifestation of these emotions sets off a much more large-scale and communal reaction. Placing objects by memorial sites makes the emotions 'lasting and visible to others' (150). As such, through placement of objects, memorial places can function as small rituals themselves. Passers-by, albeit perhaps removed from the accident site or trauma of the incident, may take a moment to pay their respects, place other material objects or carry out symbolic gestures of their own, thereby assigning inherent ritual value to the memorial place. The memorial is thus transformed into a dynamic space of cultural activity through materiality, enabling the association of the memorial as a site of ritual mourning.

It is crucial to address the digital form of both case studies when addressing memorial places. Petersson outlines the outcomes of a conducted survey, in which partakers were asked to assign importance to memorial sites. Interestingly, a majority favoured the 'home-based memorial as the memorial place over the grave', whereby the bereaved assigned least value to the accident site (149). To rephrase this, although many memorialisation practices favour the locality of the accident site, the critical point lies in identifying the locality of the memorialisation activity. In an online environment, as is the case with *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember*, there is a physical change of location (from a live setting to a digital one), whereby it could be argued that the case studies are somewhat removed from the process of memorialisation. However, it is precisely with this understanding of locality that the analysis of the memorials as sites of ritual mourning can be applied. In providing a communal space in which to share memories of a deceased, participants can develop their sense of identity within the context of the pandemic. By being a shared space, the memorials are assigned analytical agency in the form of material encounters. Each encounter adds to Schechner's behavioural database, whereby succeeding encounters – through

materiality – continue to develop identities of participants, space, and its objects. The cumulative potential of memories influence any succeeding experiences of the memorials. The sites become increasingly complex networks of experiences and identities as memories are materialised within the platforms.

The focus on memories as transformative is heightened through the corporeal absence of the deceased, as understood through the notion of cenotaphisation. In applying these notions to the case studies, expanded scenography presents the memorials as relational environments, in which the interplay between bodies, objects, and environments creates a space of ritual mourning. The development of identities and community by contextualising grief transforms the memorials into dynamic ritual spaces. As such, presenting a series of material encounters in aiding transformation supports the idea of materialising memory. Internal grief, which is often heavily influenced by a bereaved's memory of the deceased, can create spaces of ritual mourning through its materialisation. However, without bodily remains to ground the deceased's identity to location, a transformation of the materialised memory is required. In other words, the memorial sites are now charged with personal contexts, memories, and stored behaviours. The collective memorial spaces enable these relations to be dynamic, fluid, and iterative. However, so far, such processes have only been presented as an outcome, with no mention of how this truly comes about. To achieve full ritual potential, such dynamic processes of ritual mourning need to be contextualised within the social realities of the participant's environment, thus fulfilling the scenographic need for body-object-environment encounters. Approaching the case studies as site-specific performances enables a more substantiated application of ritual mourning, supporting expanded scenography in favouring the participant as a co-creative agent.

Transforming Material Memory

Site-specific performance presents a case for activating and transforming a participant's material memory, through which communities of memorial exchange can be created. In assessing the relational encounters between spaces and bodies, as expanded scenography demands, an attempt at contextualising participants' grief in sites of ritual mourning is made. Gay Mcauley's *Site-specific Performance: Place, Memory and the Creative Agency of the Spectator* examines the spatial and definitional distinctions within site-specific performance, discussing the strong links between place and memory, as well as the political implications of working with site-specificity (Mcauley). This proposition is what motivates my likening of the digitalised memorials to site-specific performances. Using this work, the materialised memory within *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember* will undergo a scenographic transformation such that it can confirm the memorials as sites of ritual mourning. In depicting a participant's context as deeply entangled with that of the case studies', the memorials are presented as transformative spaces, open to the relational encounter and exchange of bodies, objects, and environments.

Mcauley presents a series of interpretations of the term site-specific, the last of which will be applied to the digital memorial sites³³. Using the term in the 'strict sense of the word', site-specific work emerges from a 'particular place' and 'engages with the history and politics of that place', and with 'the resonance of these in the present'. Such work does not function in other locations, as it only exists in 'the site that produced it' (32). Opting for this definition

³³ For sake of clarity, other distinctions of the term will be omitted from this analysis. However, when constructing a performance, these distinctions are crucial to make, as they will significantly determine the moveability and wider, geographical possibilities of a performance.

stems from the deeply entangled histories and contexts of the memorial sites' locality, specifically in the case of *In America: Remember*³⁴.

Mcauley suggests that site-specific performance impacts place by “activating memories, enabling places to tell a variety of stories, and permitting the past to resonate in the present”. In doing so, the ‘creative agency’ of the participant is enhanced, as they are encouraged to bring their ‘own knowledge and memories of that place’ to a performance (28). A participant thus becomes a co-creator of the performance, impacting the ensuing development of the piece. What comes about is a relational mode of working, in which the material qualities of a performance become enmeshed; one influences the other and creates a communally developed work. This dynamic process of making performance, which presents almost identical considerations to expanded scenography, is certainly applicable to the digital memorial sites. The formation of identities relies purely on first-hand accounts, reflections and remarks made by the bereaved, which, when gathered, create a broad range of narratives to a vast number of passed individuals. Aside from memorial content, however, is the participant’s personal history and context, which influences the *way* in which the memorial sites are constructed, how they exist in space, and how they develop further. The ‘aesthetic experience’ of the memorial sites is unequivocally embedded within a ‘social reality’ (47). Mcauley’s example of this social reality is the journey a participant needs to make when visiting a site-specific performance, traversing spaces which are perhaps far removed from the performance content, yet crucial if the participant wishes to attend. While a physical journey in digital memorial sites concerns a (perhaps) shorter journey of sitting by a laptop, a social reality still exists in preparing the digital device, confirming internet connection, and placing oneself in an environment in which one can properly experience the memorial. The transition from a physical reality to a digital

³⁴ While this thesis assesses the memorial sites mainly in their digital forms, their contextual backgrounds cannot be ignored. Whereas this chapter will address a participant’s personal histories and contexts, the chapter *Navigational Space* will address the politics of space in the memorial sites.

one may take some adjusting, as methods of responding and engaging are altered through technological means. As such, the initial stage of preparing to view the digital memorials – getting ready for *'being there'* (47) - already establishes a social reality, which is distinct from that of any other participants. The use of expanded scenography runs parallel to the argument made using site-specificity. Appreciating the creative agency of the participant, the spatial agency of the memorial site and the political implication of space perfectly reflects Tanja Beer's notion of expanded scenography. In focussing on the exchange of these qualities, McKinney and Palmer's application of the term is also duly filled. As such, the combination of these elements is what enables the application of the memorials as sites of ritual mourning. The culmination of stored actions – taking form as social realities – enables the transformation of an otherwise scripted performance, following Schechner's line of thought. By being digital, social realities can become stored and retrieved, which in turn can be used to develop the efficacy of the digital platforms. In being diverse, the memorials undergo further transformation, thus creating dynamic spaces of ritual mourning.

Once in the memorial space, a participant's histories and 'memory systems' infuse the space, forming and altering the experience based on their own background, 'prior knowledge' and associations (47). In being site-specific, a participant recontextualises and "marks" London or Washington D.C., forever changing the way in which they experience the city, irrespective of their levels of familiarity with the locations. Interestingly, Mcauley remarks that when a participant enters a place with their situated knowledges, they bring a 'historical and cultural resonance' applicable to themselves, but also to that of their community, which may 'differ from that of their community' (48). This unpredictability, as Mcauley asserts, further assigns creative agency to the participant. It seems, therefore, that a participant's context, while individual, is still somewhat embedded within the context of their community, making performance inputs open and personalised, but still contestable. *Walk the National Covid*

Memorial Wall and *In America: Remember* rely heavily on materialised memories, accumulated from the bereaved and other members. In giving testimony, for instance, a contested space may emerge, in which the way of memorialising a deceased may be disagreed upon. Curating the commemorative space is thus the result of overlapping, or indeed entirely contradicting materialisations; significantly affecting the memorials as sites of ritual mourning. While confirming the transformative potentials of the memorials in their site-specificity, to see ritual as performance requires the fulfilment of, besides Schechner's considerations, Brown's. The association of ritual as a secular practice may contradict with certain participants' materialisations of grief. In wanting to achieve co-creative outcomes, ritual needs to be a voluntary practice which enables individual expression. In engaging with non-secular activities (though by no means negating the benefit or right to engage in such religious practices), the co-creative agency of the participant is undermined, or significantly challenged. As such, it would seem necessary to find an alternative criteria with which to assess the ritual mourning potentials of site-specific memorial sites³⁵.

Coming back from this slight tangent returns to the association of memorials as sites of ritual mourning through the contextual entanglement of the participant and memorial sites. In site-specific performance, participants, much like the performers, have a 'lived and embodied experience' (Mcauley, 50). This is achieved by being *in* the space of performance, as opposed to looking *at* a performance. Since *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember* are likened to site-specific performance in this analysis, the participant has an equally valid embodied experience as the developers of the memorial. By presenting a participant's personal history and context as marking a city, the removal of the participant's agency in the creative process would thus halt the performance's transformative nature. In objecting to change, influence or development, the memorial site would become static,

³⁵ Perhaps the subject of a future research paper...

outdated and as such, incapable of ritual mourning. With scenography's materiality highlighting the capacity of things, places, and bodies in impacting experience, negating a participant's embodied experience would remove the 'body' from the relational encounter, thus reducing the memorials to mere objects in space. The very value of a de-hierarchised presence between participant and developer includes the ability to share stories and voices, to engage with the memorial place and to activate memories. In line with ritual mourning, then, assigning historical and cultural value to the memorial sites contextualises them in a broad network of continually evolving insights. Through its co-creative agency, these materialisations are transformed – as other participants engage and interact with the space – thereby regularly contextualising grief within the participant. In producing such transformative outcomes, *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember*, as commemorative spaces, can be seen as sites of ritual mourning.

By exploring identity in relation to the context of the memorial sites, *Commemorative Space* presents the memorials as spaces which contextualise grief through materiality. In engaging with commemorative and site-specific practices, a participant's memories, histories, and context proves as a significant factor in the creation of sites of ritual mourning. Both *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember* enable expressions of grief through presenting the deceased in a collectively accessible and retrievable environment: an encounter takes place between the participant and space, forming interactions with the sites according to distinct social realities. In collectively authoring a digital commemorative space, a participant's grief is contextualised within the larger social environment. Expressions of grief are given a relational space in which to manifest, which, through contextualisation of self and space enable communities of memorial exchange to emerge. Exploring materiality in commemorative space confirms the attachment of memory to space, providing an

understanding on how objects, bodies and environments relate within a scenographic realm. This linkage reveals how a participant's creative agency forms relational encounters, whereby individual associations feed ritual mourning through the materialisation of memory *with* a contextualisation of personal histories. This process enables the expression of grief within communal forms of commemorative practice, thus establishing the memorials as co-creative and dynamic spaces. Through the culmination of these processes, *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember* act as sites of ritual mourning by becoming transformative spaces which promote the relational encounter and exchange of bodies, objects, and environments. While certain additional assessments may be required to be able to quantify the extent of ritual mourning present, as suggested by questioning the presence of ritual in non-secular commemorative practices, the application of expanded scenography in understanding ritual mourning presents the digitalised memorials as productive spaces for materialising and contextualising expressions of grief.

Chapter 3: Navigational Space

The final chapter utilises relationality, the final pillar within expanded scenography, to confirm the inextricable link between identity and context within the memorial space. Split into three sub-chapters, *Navigational Space* presents the digitalised memorials as delocalised spaces, whereby their constructions as a map and tour³⁸ enable the materialisation of grief. In calling for a consideration of the participant's delocalised subjectivity in relation to cultural and political contexts, as introduced in the previous chapter's analysis on site-specific theatre³⁹, the memorials become fluid spaces of encounter and co-creation, thus transforming them into sites of ritual mourning.

The sub-chapter *Delocalising the Memorial Place* presents the memorials as delocalised spaces, following nomadic theatre, in which digital technologies enable the mobilisation of a participant. An additional assessment of the memorials as site-specific performances develops the notion of identity further, whereby – once again aligning with expanded scenography – the participant's relations between digital technologies (object) and memorial site (environment) create broad contextualisations of grief. The sub-chapter *Maps in Materialising Grief* provides a cartographic reading of the case studies, in which the parameters of mobility highlight the entanglement of context and identity, supported by scenography's relationality. Finally, by providing spaces of encounter, *Colonising the Digital Map* interrogates the political implications of space within *In America: Remember* using Mcauley's

³⁸ In the case of *In America: Remember* and *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall*, respectively.

³⁹ I want to note that within this thesis I am conscious of my seemingly unconcerned application of site-specificity to the digitalised memorial sites. Since viewing the memorials is meant to be a remote experience, I make quite a leap in saying they are site-specific. Yet, by engaging in relational and contextual practices, a participant takes part in a form of home-based site-specificity. Through scenographic means, the participant's fluid locality enables engagement with the memorials in both their actual and virtual contexts, thus transforming site-specificity into something which can transgress digital borders.

site-specificity to serve as the final argument linking identity and context within a scenographic reading of ritual mourning.

Expanded scenography describes relationality as the way in which scenography ‘facilitates spaces of encounter’ between a participant and performer, and of ‘other spectators, spaces, sites and objects’ (McKinney and Palmer, 8). Through scenographic ‘strategies’, a participant can be positioned in ‘unfamiliar’ ways, through which they might gain ‘new insights about themselves, others and the spaces we all inhabit’ (9). Expanded scenography presents relationality as also occurring between the participant and the ‘natural and built environment’ (10). As such, determining how a participant moves in digital space presents the opportunity to assess how spatial constructions and their political implications – in influencing identity - can enhance ritual mourning potentials.

Delocalising the Memorial Place

In delocalising the memorial space through digital technologies, *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember* act as sites of ritual mourning by creating transformative spaces, in which relational encounters between participants, objects and the memorial environments are enabled – or mobilised. To understand how digitalised memorials invite ritual mourning requires an assessment into the very foundations of how a participant moves in such a given digital space. Liesbeth Groot Nibbelink’s *Nomadic Theatre* (Groot Nibbelink) examines movement and mobility as forms which affect a theatre experience, whereby its application to *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember* presents the various ways in which a participant moves and engages in their digital

environment. Following a loose interpretation of the concept of nomadic theatre⁴⁰, both case studies employ a mode of ‘deterritorialising the stage’, a process enabled through digital technologies (15). This deterritorialisation is enabled through various methods in performance: its locality in an urban environment, by performing in a public space and by having the public space ‘interfere’ with an otherwise ‘private encounter’ (18). Complicating the application of this notion to the case studies is their online form. Although the physical memorials are embedded in the urban public space, their digital representations are simultaneously in both the urban (public) and private environments. As such, the memorials exist in the blurred intersection of (digital) ‘performance’ and ‘everyday life’ (18). This separation from spatial bounds promotes the application of ritual as performance, whereby the delocalising qualities of the memorials make room for individual expression. As such, broadly applying the notion of deterritorialisation enables an understanding of how a participant’s identity may be transformed through digital tools. A participant becomes entangled in the encounters between the cityscape and those taking place in their distinct localities. Despite doing so to various extents, a participant is nonetheless mobilised as they are required to move and interact with the space, with the non-material presence of others and with those in their own surroundings. As such, following scenography’s relationality, a participant may gain new insights about themselves through interacting with the total space of the memorial sites.

To propose relationality more clearly, there is a need to address the mobile qualities in the memorials further, whereby the use of mobile screens further transforms a participant’s identity. This will serve to propose how the fluid digitalised memorial spaces encourage

⁴⁰ My use of Groot Nibbelink’s work comes with the acknowledgment that I apply the concepts of *Nomadic Theatre* – which have been coined specifically in relation to ambulatory performances – to the digitalised (and thus non-ambulatory) memorial sites. My use of these notions is motivated by the transformative qualities of the memorials, spatially and temporally, because of which I find it necessary to address the memorials as delocalised and deterritorialised spaces.

relational encounters to be made. As such, the case studies act as sites of ritual mourning through the complex engagements between the mobilised participant, and the intersection of their actual and virtual environments.

Using mobile screens to enhance the performative potential of an experience is no new practice. However, their use as the primary form of reception means that a participant relies fully on its interactive, transformative, and affective potential. The forms of both memorials – much like the *form* of ritual in its ability to be stored, repeated, and manipulated – are optimised for both computer and mobile screens (see *Figure 5.0* below) , thereby becoming active and dynamic modes of cultural activity. The benefit of using mobile screens is the possibility for partakers to ‘co-create the map of spatial arrangement’ (Groot Nibbelink, 98), creating diverse ‘spatial representations’ in the process. *In America: Remember* already consists of a very clear spatial arrangement, designed to give the participant ease of access to each flag. *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall*, on the other hand, has a much simpler navigational plane, yet consists of a much more processual method of mobility. A participant’s co-creative potential – as desired in expanded scenography - is thus revealed in how they engage with the digital material. As digital forms which work on a desktop as well as a mobile phone, both memorials enable the free movement of a participant in their given space, merging one’s individual spatial representations with those presented on screen.

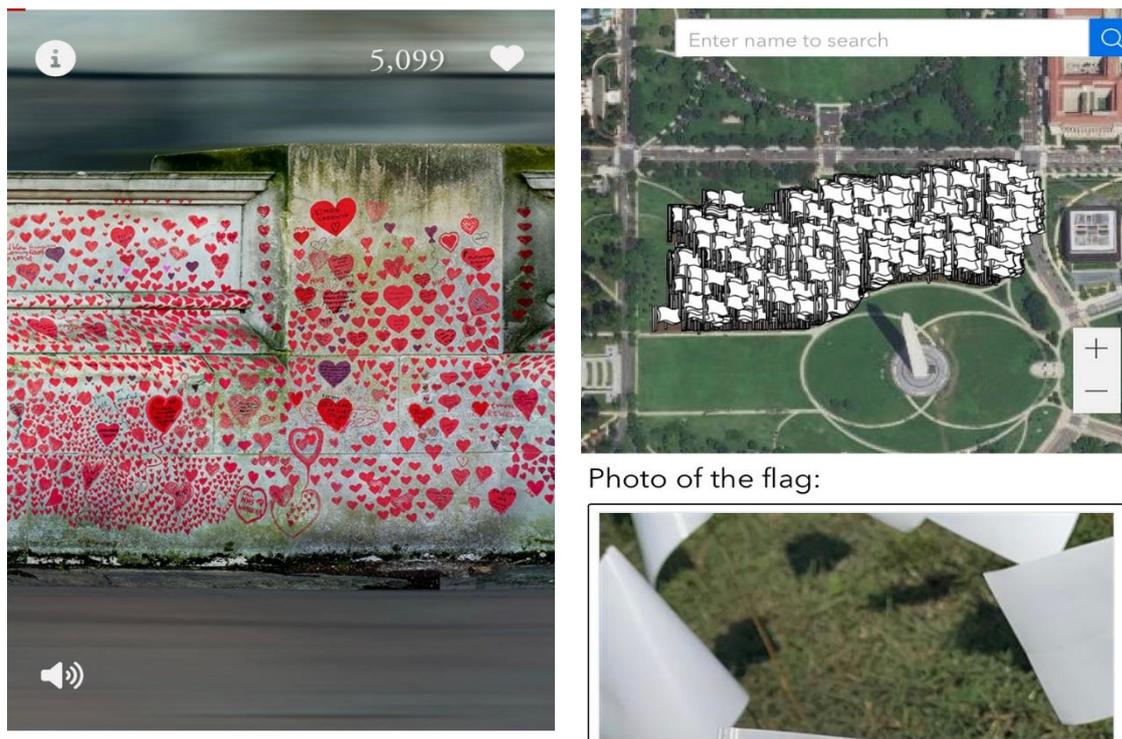


Figure 5.0 (above) – A screenshot of *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* (left) and *In America: Remember* (right) as viewed from a mobile telephone⁴¹.

Mobilising the memorial characteristics is enabled through the process of geotagging, as discussed in *Nomadic Theatre* in relation to digital technologies, whereby this mobilisation transforms the static memorial space into a dynamic site of ritual mourning. Geotagging refers to the process of assigning a location or object with ‘digitally stored metadata’ (99), making the retrieval of location-related information possible. In Groot Nibbelink’s performance analyses⁴², geotagging has been examined in relation to the pinpointing of a user’s location throughout their mobile trajectory, whereas in the case of *In America: Remember* geotagging

⁴¹ (*Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall; In America*)

⁴² Groot Nibbelink grounds her work on nomadic theatre using Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, as well as Mieke Bal’s work on cultural analysis. The performances *No Man’s Land* (Dries Verhoeven, 2008-2014), *Call Cutta* (Rimini Protokoll, 2005), *Trail Tracking* (Dries Verhoeven, 2005), *The Smile Off Your Face* (Ontroerend Goed, 2003-present) and *The Ruby Town Oracle* (Signa, 2007-2008) are used as case studies to present nomadic theatre as an ‘analytical tool’ with which to expose contemporary performance practices as “deeply engaged with local, situated and embodied operations” which continually “question our relationship with the places and spaces through which we move and that we create through movement” (Groot Nibbelink, 200). My use of Groot Nibbelink is perhaps further justified through this outline: the analytical desires of nomadic theatre run rather parallel to those which I present within ritual mourning. A point of development would include examining the intersections between nomadic theatre and ritual mourning further.

will be used in relation to the marking of plotted space, and in *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* it will serve as marking the intervals of memorialisation. Attributing the digital memorials as geotagged spaces shows how a fluid space can mediate relational encounters, in which interactions between participant and space materialise and contextualise grief.

In America: Remember has digitally marked flags on a vast grid, each of which corresponds to a corporeally absent individual. The flags are marked to set positions in space, giving them a 'layered presence and hence, an added meaning' (99). They can be found or retrieved and accumulate meaning through processes of where they are located, and next to whom, but also in relation to how their digital plots are visited by those online. *Walk the National Covid Memorial* has a similar layered meaning achieved through geotagging. Marking testimonies at specific intervals assigns a complex narrative to any given space, the hearts visible in that space and therefore the identities the hearts represent⁴³. Temporality is also implicated through the process of geotagging. Geotags point 'simultaneously to past, present and future' destinations, whereby intersections of 'embedded pasts', 'pervasive presence' and 'evolving futures' occur (99) – a familiar quality within ritual as performance. As remarked in the chapter *Commemorative Space*, both case studies are embedded in historical and cultural contexts, which are impossible to separate from their current and future formulations. Every flag on the National Mall and heart on the Southbank wall represents a memorialised identity, an accumulation of realities which has been placed alongside a plethora of other, distinctly characteristic realities. In navigating such a space, a participant is simultaneously observing, experiencing, and co-creating the already layered realities of the delocalised memorial space, providing a fluid space and opportunity – or relationality - for expressing grief.

⁴³ In actuality, the testimony order seems randomised, such that each experience of the memorial will give a different order of audio files. Although this certainly adds a layer of spontaneity on an interaction level, lacking a specifically marked location for testimony also affects the way in which meaning and commemoration can be assigned, and accumulated, over time.

Much like how site-specific performance was used to depict a participant's context as deeply entangled with that of the memorials in *Chapter 2: Commemorative Space*, site-specificity can additionally be used to further interrogate the navigational – and thus transformative - qualities of *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall*. Joanne Tompkins' *Site-Specific Theatre and Political Engagement across Space and Time: The Psychogeographic Mapping of British Petroleum in Platform's "And While London Burns"* proposes multi-sensory engagement as a production's tool in rendering 'critical thinking into physicality' (Tompkins, 226)⁴⁴. Tompkins defines site-specific theatre as a "performance that occurs outside the theatre venue in a place that is closely connected to the form and function of the performance itself" (225). In the article's analysis, Tompkins uses Platform's *And While London Burns* - an interactive audio walk contextualising the oil company British Petroleum - to expose how auditory formats in site-specific performances destabilise the locality of performance from a participant's physical space to a mental one. *And While London Burns* requires a participant to walk in London, following instructions given by a trader character through headphones. In combining the physical space with an auditory guide, a participant must, as briefly introduced in the sub-chapter *Transforming Identities Through Affect*, "reprise the city", in the process of which they engage 'mind, sense, physical movement' and a 'changing relationship to the environment' (226). In engaging with the city, participants transform their experience of it entirely, whereby their memory of the city (much like their memory of the deceased as presented in *Materialising Memory*) becomes permanently influenced by the production's mapping of it⁴⁵. The transformation takes place with the help of headphones, which 'interiorize the performance' and re-locate 'sound and physical presence' to a participant's brain (234). As such, the physical

⁴⁴ While psychogeography specifically will not be addressed in detail, notions of cityscape engagement and use of auditory technologies will delocalise the memorial sites and highlight the scenographic relations between the participant, the technological devices, and their environments.

⁴⁵ Tompkins exemplifies the potential of audio-walks with the 2004 *Ground Zero Sonic Memorial Soundwalk* in New York City, in which a participant's memories of 9/11 coincide with the constructed performance space of the audio track. As such, a participant's experiences of the city are forever rewritten (227).

space, which has been subverted, has a ‘destabilizing’ effect on the memorial space, whereby a participant can no longer clearly pin-point their locality. With no clear place to ground oneself in, a participant relies on the trader and eventual other participants in contextualising their experiences. As such, the memorials, as site-specific performances, rely on the relational and dynamic exchange and encounter between bodies, objects, and environments, thus enabling the transformation of the memorial sites into sites of ritual mourning.

In presenting the memorials as deterritorialised and site-specific spaces, a participant is granted the space to materialise and contextualise their grief. Through expanded scenography, the interactions with the memorial environments present participants’ identities as relational, whereby their delocalised presence calls for the reliance on digital technologies to gain bearings. By being spatially and temporally transported, as enabled through geotagging and the use of headphones (in the case of *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall*), the memorials act as sites of ritual mourning through their becoming of dynamic spaces of cultural activity. The spatial transformation of the memorials takes place largely as the infusion of contexts and identity between the memorial and the participant. Since such a process is hard to materialise, or quantify, an examination of the spatial parameters of the memorials – as constructed spaces – presents the ability to make the relation between identity and context tangible, thus calling for a presentation of maps as tools in materialising grief.

Maps in Materialising Grief

Employing a cartographic reading to the case studies confirms the relationality of the memorials. In understanding how scenography can facilitate encounters, the memorials are confirmed as sites of ritual mourning, enabled by the entanglement of identity and context within the participant. In likening *In America: Remember* and *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* to a map and a tour – respectively – the digital environments, as mobile spaces, become transformative through co-creative engagements.

Assessing *In America: Remember* as a constructed map reveals how grief can be materialised within spatial parameters, and how these boundaries facilitate, beyond identity formation, communal forms of ritual mourning. By making private encounters a public experience (and thus allowing the ritual phenomenon of stored behaviours), a participant's co-creative potential is further unlocked, entangling their identity within a network of relations and contexts. In using maps, the memorial further solidifies the notion of an archive of identities, becoming a site for Schechner's ritual form, and thus ritual mourning practices. Groot Nibbelink further investigates the implications of maps in a chapter on cartographies, focussing on the relation of maps to space and subjectivity (91). The impact of subjectivity can be determined through an understanding of the 'politics of location'. *In America: Remember*'s flags depict the states of origin of the deceased, thereby placing the deceased – along with an assumed sense of their national identity – in a specific context of perception by others, socially and politically (106). Since political inclinations within the United States are geographically determinate - thinking of swing states, for instance – choosing to display a deceased's state of origin on the online platform creates a layered narrative. In addressing Kathleen Kirby's *Thinking through the Boundary: The Politics of Location, Subjects, and Space* (Kirby), Groot Nibbelink associates location not as one particular point in space, but rather as a product of 'many interwoven,

interfering spatial layers’ (106)⁵¹. These layers are subject to continually fluctuating ‘sites and boundaries’, making the possibility of the memorial as a site of ritual mourning even more potent. *In America: Remember* undergoes a complex spatial reconfiguration as it can be accessed from anywhere, globally. This spatial reconfiguration is accompanied by participants’ diverse, yet highly specific subjectivities. These subjectivities are influenced by a participant’s own social, political, and cultural spheres, or ‘territories of meaning’ (106), thus implicating the memorial in a complex and entangled set of assumptions and beliefs. In navigating the map of *In America: Remember*, a participant is subject to the representations of such a space in relation to power and ideology, thus making the application of relationality, within expanded scenography, justified. In developing a relational and co-creative commemorative space, the memorial transforms into a site of ritual mourning, enhanced by its dynamic engagement with broader cultural contexts.

Despite not making a significant attempt in establishing *Walk the National Covid Memorial* as a map, its navigational qualities present a suitable case for establishing the digital space as a tour. Groot Nibbelink presents the map and the tour as ‘two opposite spatial practices’ (104). Whereas maps are seen as ‘formalized accounts of spatial relations’, tours are seen as ‘spatial movements’ which ‘subvert the power relations inscribed in [a] map’ (104). To favour *Walk the National Covid Memorial* as a tour instead of a map is an encouraging prospect. Without an indication of spatial arrangements, in the form of a grid or birds-eye-view overview, the wall presents a case which is still grounded in locality (both physical and digital), yet ungoverned by the need for bearings. Defining a tour as concerning spatial movements allows *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* to be approached as precisely such a form. A

⁵¹ I attempted using Kirby’s text directly in discussing location. However, Kirby’s extensive reference to scholars and situations I was unfamiliar with made it difficult to encapsulate the main gist of the argument within what my chapter sets out to do. In encapsulating location in such eloquent terms, I have opted to rely somewhat heavily on Groot Nibbelink’s work. While I hope I have managed to balance this out within the broad theoretical framework, developing this chapter further would certainly benefit from a more critical engagement with the broader literary field.

participant is guided by two main factors: the directionality of sound and the constraints of being able to move only left or right through scrolling. In their motivation to scroll along the memorial, a participant is engulfed in an experience which surpasses spatial and temporal constraints, thus assigning ritual qualities to the space. The focus is moved away from needing to navigate the space and in its deeply personal testimony accounts, also promotes the release from temporality. By engulfing a participant in the context of its memorial, as opposed to its somewhat disruptive, or fragmented navigational elements, as is the case for *In America: Remember*, the power relations presented in the memorial are perhaps not quite subverted, but certainly more easily overlooked. The power relations in question do not concern the deceased subjects, as is the case in its U.S. counterpart, but rather the forms of power that exist on a larger, national scale, talking specifically about the circumstances surrounding management of the pandemic and its healthcare staff. As such, forms of ritual mourning are perhaps less prejudiced towards the individuals presented on the wall and manifest on a more affective, human level. In following the tour, which could be said to be guided by the testimonies (and crucially, not by a person, thereby enabling individual expression), the regular intervals of spontaneous memorialisation encourage the creation of a site of ritual mourning. In creating a constructed, yet voluntary space of movement, *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* becomes a relational site of ritual mourning in which a participant considers their identity in relation to the context of the memorial. The use of scenographic strategies to guide the participant in such a process makes the memorial a productive site of ritual mourning.

Constructing the memorials as cartographies heightens the entanglement of commemorative context within the participant's identity. Whereas participants bring their own, complex identities to the space, traversing a materialised, somewhat curated form of grief transforms these identities in such a way that ritual mourning acquires co-creative potentials.

Through scenography's relationality, the case studies call for a contextualisation of the participant's identity in relation to the memorials. In creating a map and a tour, the memorials create ritual spaces of stored behaviours (in the form of expressions of grief), whereby these qualities enable the transformation of the memorials into sites of ritual mourning. However, Whereas *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* becomes a site of ritual mourning with a focus on the participant's identity in relation to the context of the *memorial* (as object), *In America: Remember* goes beyond the politics of the memorial and associates identity as politically intertwined with the context of the memorial *as space*. To fully grasp the impact of navigational space in creating a site of ritual mourning, the following sub-chapter will conclude the thesis by examining relationality in historically contextual form. Through contextualising grief within a broader ritual environment (referring to the memorial space as laden with stored behaviours), identity undergoes its final transformation through contextual engagements, thus presenting *In America: Remember* as a site of ritual mourning⁵².

Colonising the Digital Map

To opt for a colonisation of space asserts a certain hierarchy between the coloniser and the colonised. In depicting the participant as both the *subject* of transformation and the *imposer* of transformation, identity becomes the relational tool providing spaces of encounter. In interrogating *In America: Remember's* political implications of space, identity formation proves to be the combination of personal and collective contexts, in which the re-colonisation of space *by* the participant calls for an assessment of identity *within* the participant . In engaging with site-specificity within a contested space, as the National Mall is, the participant becomes

⁵² Dedicating the final chapter to *In America: Remember*, and not both memorials, is not meant to undermine *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* as a site of ritual mourning. Instead, I am convinced that a similar argument on colonisation could be made for the latter case (albeit within its distinct context). Yet, within the format constraints of this thesis, I have opted to present the argument only in relation to *In America: Remember*, such that I can better elaborate my perspective.

entangled in a series of social realities, whereby the history of the memorial as Indigenous land merges with the participant's navigation of its colonised form. Through these contextual spaces of encounter, *In America: Remember* acts as a site of ritual mourning, whereby the merging of spaces and temporalities, in combination with bodily and material encounters, creates diverse contextualisations of grief, and thus a dynamic space of cultural activity.

Lucy Thornett's review of *Scenography Expanded* includes an overview of how technological space exists within power structures (Thornett). Thornett refers to Christopher Baugh and Dorita Hannah⁵³ in examining how digital scenographies can act as forms of 'resistance and critique' of both 'theatrical paradigms and broader power structures' (191). The potentialities of technology are expressed in their ability to transition a user from a 'mediated reality' into a "real reality" via intermediation'. While Baugh commends the possibilities of digital technologies in making performances more globalised, they also enable a 'scenographic critique of political and economic power' (Thornett, 191). Using *In America: Remember* as an example, presenting the memorial as a colonised site creates a dynamic context in which materialisations of grief manifest. In becoming implicated within a history of occupation, a participant's expressions of grief take on relational forms. This relationality refers specifically to a participant's associations with the cultural histories of the land sites, their original occupants, and the current representations of the deceased in that same space.

Assigning political value to a participant's navigational grid entangles it in power relations and social structures, from which a participant cannot detangle themselves. In the case of the National Mall, this regards – perhaps most prominently – the historical contestation

⁵³ Outlining their respective chapters *Devices of Wonder: globalizing technologies in the process of scenography* and *Screen Space: Bearing Witness & Performing Resistance* as found in the first section of McKinney and Palmer's book, *Technological Space*.

surrounding Indigenous land on which the National Mall was built⁵⁴. In describing the history of occupation, the infusion of social realities, following Mcauley's site-specificity, relationality and context as influencing factors in identity formation becomes clear. What is now the District of Columbia used to be land occupied by Native American tribal communities (Schreiber). More than a dozen tribal nations occupied the lands before European colonisers settled in the late 1700s, displacing the natives with a combination of war and disease. In 1790, the plots of land that is now the National Mall were owned by farmers whose lands were worked by African slaves (Roy Rosenzweig Center for History and New Media). Today, the history of Indigenous presence is dispersed throughout Washington D.C. with a range of museums and memorials. In navigating what was originally Indigenous land, a certain irony stands out in that the Native Americans' presence is acknowledged, but only in landmark form. *In America: Remember* favours the perspective of the European settler in the way that there is no mention of Native Americans on the memorial site. In digital form, the National Mall is thus viewed as a public space within a sea of memorials, one that is easily shared⁵⁵ through digital technologies.

The digital memorial, in being a map, colonises the already colonised space, but with a significant shift in focus from forcefully occupying Indigenous lands, to creating a space in which to reflect on the previous occupation⁵⁶. A participant is thus called to consider their identity and context in relation that of the memorial, whereby any memorialisation activity is inherently intertwined (and unremovable) from the context of the memorial site. The transition into a 'real reality' transforms the memorial into a site of ritual mourning, one which becomes infused with the stored behaviours of its occupants. Relating site occupation to identity formation prompts a return to site-specific theatre. Through Mcauley's notion of dominated

⁵⁴ Other notable cases of such structures include the fight for museum establishment rights (politically, but also spatially), and, socially, the privacy concern of presenting the deceased publicly on an accessible digital platform.

⁵⁵ With me, a white European, for instance.

⁵⁶ Granted, the lack of Indigenous mention on the memorial sites means that being aware of the history of the National Mall relies fully on a participant's independent ability to research the space, and as such, may not be a governing factor in the participant's exploration of the navigational space.

space – namely a space that is “transformed and mediated by technology and controlled by the institutions of political and economic power” (Mcauley, 29) – separating place from its embedded context is an impossible task. As such, the participant (in being an equally embodied and relational element) is also enmeshed within the context of the memorial site. Engaging with space is therefore impossible without consideration of forms of occupation, past and present. Thus, in navigating the memorial, a participant’s individual and collective identity is implicated within the broader context of the site. Through this temporally fluid relationality between bodies, objects and environments, a transformation of the memorial into a site of ritual mourning takes place.

Using expanded scenography’s notion of relationality, *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember* are established as sites of ritual mourning enabled through the delocalisation of the memorial place, the mobilisation of the participant in a constructed space, and the infusion of identity within the context of the memorial site. The transportation of locality introduces a sense of dynamism to the memorials, heightened by the infusion of contexts and identities in the memorial place. By likening the memorials to a map and a tour, a further notion of relationality is introduced as a participant co-creates the memorial site through their transforming subjectivities. This transformation enables individual expression within a shared cultural activity of expressing grief, thus confirming the suitability of applying ritual as performance. In utilising expanded scenography, *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember* - as navigational spaces - act as sites of ritual mourning by creating transformative spaces which are open to the relational encounter of bodies, objects, and environments, through which identity can be contextualised within the constructed space of the memorials.

Conclusion: Digitalised Memorials as Sites of Ritual Mourning

In this thesis, I have presented the case for how three separate interrogations of space, namely that of an affective, commemorative, and navigational space, can present digitalised memorials as sites of ritual mourning. Using a methodology of expanded scenography, this thesis has proposed *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember* as sites of ritual mourning by creating transformative spaces which are open to the relational encounter and exchange of bodies, objects, and environments. Such transformative spaces are understood by the deconstruction of the memorials into their constituent elements, whereby assessment into their diverse sensory and material qualities provide analysis into the ritual potential of the sites. In exploring the spaces through expanded scenography, referring to notions of affectivity in *Affective Space*, materiality in *Commemorative Space*, and relationality in *Navigational Space*, the memorials exemplify the relationality between a participant's identity and the memorial contexts. Through interactions between the participant and the memorials, the sites become dynamic platforms for expressing grief, whereby the emphasis on spatial and material relations – as exemplified by expanded scenography – transform the memorials into sites of ritual mourning. Approaching ritual as performance highlights the entanglement of such relations, whereby the memorials become infused with forms of individual and communal expression, stored behaviours, and thus cultural activity.

Chapter 1: Affective Space used the scenographic notion of affectivity to determine how encounters within affective landscapes prompt a reflection on individual and collective identity within the participant. Aided by a turn to the role of the feedback loop in theatre, as well as an understanding of affective architectures (as scenography) this chapter highlighted *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember* as diverse spaces for

contextualising grief, whereby the affective qualities of the memorials transform identity, and thereby also the memorial sites, into spaces of relational encounter and exchange.

Chapter 2: Commemorative Space further developed the role of identity by grounding it within a context of commemorative practice and site-specific performance. Using materiality, following expanded scenography, this chapter suggests that a participant's memories, as material, significantly impacts the ritual mourning potentials of the memorial sites, whereby forms of relational encounter become contextualised within broader social conditions. By presenting the inseparable relation between the participant's and memorials' contexts, the spaces become dynamic sites of ritual mourning.

Finally, by developing the by now contextualised participant's identity from a spatial and political perspective, *Chapter 3: Navigational Space* posited *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember* as sites of ritual mourning by transgressing temporal and spatial bounds, thereby creating deeply contextualised and entangled expressions of grief among participants. Supported by expanded scenography's concept of relationality, this chapter borrowed insights from nomadic theatre, site-specific theatre, and an additional review of expanded scenography to present the memorials as sites of ritual mourning.

I have thus presented a reading of digitalised memorials as capable of individual and collective identity transformation. In examining the interactions of bodies, objects, and environments, I have presented *Walk the National Covid Memorial Wall* and *In America: Remember* as sites of ritual mourning. While I have assigned three separate chapters to address material and spatial encounters through notions of affectivity, materiality and relationality, the critical point lies in seeing them as a holistic functioning, whereby their interplay is what attributes the memorials as sites of ritual mourning. It is thus the culmination of these different

types of spaces, their elements, and contextual encounters that enable the transformation of the memorial sites. Through a reading of ritual as performance, the transformative potentials of the memorials are justified, however, the analysis has shown that quantifying ritual mourning (namely as something which goes beyond speculation) is difficult due to its processual nature. In inviting diverse forms of expressing grief – the fruitful result of distinct identities and contexts - a more substantial form of analysis is needed to fully understand the implications of these contexts within ritual mourning. In addition to needing a more comprehensive indicator of such ritual processes, an extension of qualitative data collection is needed. By integrating audience research within my analysis - focussing on audience interaction, participation, and response, for instance - such further data collection can be achieved, thus enabling a further application of this thesis' argument within a practical setting. Nevertheless, employing a methodology of expanded scenography has provided a productive lens with which to present digital memorial sites, as affective, commemorative, and navigational spaces, as sites of ritual mourning.

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