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Framing public memory: Developing moral vernacular discourse through photographs of the new Sandy Hook Elementary School

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On December 14, 2012, after killing his mother, twenty-year old Adam Lanza drove to Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut and took the lives twenty first-graders and six school teachers and staff members. A few months following the shooting, a committee gathered in Newtown to pass a vote that would demolish the school building to construct a new one. The new Sandy Hook Elementary School was publicly unveiled to journalists on July 29, 2016 which created a pictorial event that allowed the larger public to witness the new building through the medium of online photographs. Through a critical rhetorical reading of the new Sandy Hook Elementary School through online pictures, I argue that the building is a non-memorial that symbolically functions as memorials through online pictures. The analysis illustrates that four of these photographs of the new Sandy Hook Elementary School operate in relation to a moral vernacular public memory by reclaiming the utilization of space, re-conceptualizing the place of memorializing, and permitting rhetorics of affect to remind the public to keep their government officials accountable for their safety. To conclude, the analysis denotes the nuances and new avenues for memorializing through online photographs specific to vernaculars in relation to gun legislation.

On December 14, 2012, after killing his mother, twenty-year old Adam Lanza drove to Sandy Hook Elementary in Newtown, Connecticut carrying three weapons with him: a XM15-E2S Bushmaster rifle and two pistols (Vogel, Horwitz, & Fahrenthold, 2012). Upon entering the school building, Lanza proceeded to take the lives of twenty first-graders and six school teachers and staff members (Katersky & Kim, 2014). In less than two minutes, Lanza had corned an entire classroom of first-graders and fired eighty rounds – the entirety of the shooting lasted fewer than eleven minutes (Sedensky, 2013). The shooting ceased once Lanza took one of the pistols he had carried with him into the school and committed suicide (Bell, 2012). To date, the Sandy Hook massacre stands as the deadliest elementary school mass shooting and the second deadliest shooting on a public-school ground (second to the 2007 shooting at Virginia Tech).

A few months following the shooting, a committee gathered in Newtown to pass a vote that would demolish the school building to construct a new one (Kelly, 2013). The new Sandy Hook Elementary School was publicly unveiled to journalists on July 29, 2016 (Furfaro, 2016). Given the recent shootings at Virginia Tech in 2007 and the killing of 49 people in a nightclub in Orlando, Florida on July 12, 2016 (Ellis, Fantz, Karlml, & McLaughlin, 2016), the construction and opening of the new Sandy Hook was situated within a context of bloodshed and political strife over gun control laws. The public opening of the building produced the first series of images of the new school. The photographs of the dark, natural wood façade adorned with hues of orange, red, blue, and yellow glass and similarly colored bars over bullet-proof windows positions the school building as a visually stunning, yet provocative text. Moreover, the new elementary school is the first of its kind: a contemporary school equipped for education and protected by state-of-the-art security measures and the first public building to be torn down and rebuilt following a mass shooting (School Safety Infrastructure Council, 2015).

Rhetorical examinations of public memory and memorials in general have been extensive, but not yet exhaustive. Scholars have made recent moves to expand our understanding of public memory in relation to texts outside of official memorials and museums (for example, Biesecker, 2002; Hess, 2007). Based on the premise that the Sandy Hook Elementary School is a non-memorial that can't help being a memorial, I position the new school building as a public structure situated within competing official and moral vernacular discourses. A larger framing of the critical turn in rhetorical criticism illuminates the nuances that surround non-memorials that symbolically

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function as memorials through pictures. Specific to the text at hand, the analysis finds that such structures assist in constructing and challenging public memory in relation to gun legislation reform and the possibility for vernacular arguments and judgments. More specifically, as posed by Aaron Hess (2007), this essay contributes to an ongoing discussion related to the query: "What happens to public memory when it is experienced away from public spaces and in private homes?" (p. 341).

In order to support this thesis, my analysis will focus on the first photographs of the new Sandy Hook Elementary School provided by journalists and circulated through various online media websites. It is worth noting that, because of the state-of-the-art security measures, the larger public will not be able to interact with the school building like other normative memorials. This difference warrants a visual reading since most Americans will experience any process of memorializing the shooting by looking at photos of the new building. By the conclusion of the analysis, I illustrate how the images of Sandy Hook articulate moral vernacular stances which attempt to rupture official discourses by making the school building function symbolically as a memorial. In essence, the official discourses surrounding these images produce a rhetoric of acquiescence while vernacular messages rooted in the Sandy Hook images challenge this anesthetization by advancing other possible realities in relation to gun violence. The vernacular nature of the images purposefully creates an official discourse to be questioned: the words and actions of governmental officials that have yet to produce change in relation to gun legislation reform.

Reading the school through the medium of visual images permits the building to commemorate and question – not just a specific historical event, but a series of events involving the mass killing of children (and adults) in modern American memory. Therefore, this analysis of the Sandy Hook Elementary School will advance by first reviewing relevant literature in relation to public memory, critical rhetoric, and vernacular discourses. I then offer a synopsis of the larger discourses surrounding the shooting and arguments in relation to gun legislation reform. These larger contextualizing discourses will situate my critical reading of the contested function of the Sandy Hook Elementary School, as articulated through the medium of photographs. The criticism concludes with a larger discussion on the implications in relation to public memory, online memorializing, and vernacular possibilities.

Tracing Public Memories and Web-Based Vernaculars

The expansion of research in relation to public memory has opened the rhetorical textual vault beyond the exploration of speaker-oriented discourse. The majority of rhetorical inquiry into public memory has focused on public memorials. From a rhetorical perspective, memorials act as living symbolic discourses produced through interaction, manipulation, and contested memories (Bodnar, 1992). Through the analysis of numerous commemorative texts, like memorials, a rhetorical critic of public memory can provide insight into the ideological and political nature of a culture's history. One area of interest is not only how public discourses can establish a collective memory, but how people and smaller publics are able to reject certain memories (Morris, 2004). In other words, contested public memories contain markers of competition or various voices attempting to define and make sense of previous events (Browne, 1993). Historically speaking, the primary avenue that people crafted this shared or contested sense of the past was through narrative history. However, since the mid-twentieth century, cultural critics of memory have noted how the use of visual texts (memorials, monuments, and photographs) has increasingly replaced the oral traditions of the past (Benjamin, 1999; Frisby, 1985; Halbwachs, 1980).

Although this concern is grounded within the study of collective memory, the gradual public shift toward relying on visual texts to articulate meaning and remembering is being noted by contemporary visual critics (Olson, Finnegan, & Hope, 2008). What situates visual arguments as a distinct phenomenon within public memory is "how much greater is their potential for rhetorical power than that of purely verbal arguments" (Blair, 2004, p. 52). As a visual rhetorical critic, I am interested in exploring and denoting the influence images have on the viewing public specific to constructions of public memory (Benson & Frandsen, 1982). Since my reading of Sandy Hook Elementary School is guided through a visual medium, I must imagine the online audience that is viewing these images and their subsequent arguments about public memory. As I reveal throughout my analysis, the online visual images of the school elicit a vernacular discourse that is counter to official utterances surrounding the rebuilding of the school and gun control legislation.

In line with these tensions between official and vernacular discourses, the critical turn in rhetoric assumes that society is a contested terrain, a battleground between domination and freedom (Kellner, 1995). Critical rhetoric

emphasizes "the dimensions of domination and freedom as these are exercised in a relativized world" (McKerrow, 1989, p. 91). Based on the critique of domination, this outcome recognizes the repressive and productive role of power and ideology within a given rhetorical text and discourse. This particular analysis highlights how the ideological pull between vernacular and official discourse surrounding the school building produces a contested memory and function of the physical place. Here, I understand vernacular as a specific subjectivity that does not occupy an official position. Situated as such, these voices are concerned "with defending the interests and rights of their respective social segments" (Bodnar, 1992, p. 16). Hauser (1999) advocates for a conceptualization of vernacular discourse as rationality expressed through "the use of symbols to coordinate social action, or *rhetoric*" (p. 84, emphasis original). This framing of vernacular is productive to this analysis based on its prioritizing of an "everyday talk" that is rooted within a language of common meaning. Thus, I advance that my role as the critic in this essay is to amplify vernacular rhetorics to expose the opening of and existence of alternative public spaces, judgements, arguments, and memories.

Although a more community-specific approach to vernacular is prioritized through a critical framing, I engage these discourse through a web-based approach recognizing how such participation with public memory cannot directly account for variances across intersectionally oppressed identities (Howard, 2008). In other words, I cannot lay claims to specific, yet equally diverse vernaculars, but instead am interested in how public memory, engaged through online images, creates the space for counter-official statements and realities. The existence of these pictures of Sandy Hook expands the discursive space for a "vernacular web to emerge" that is both difficult to discover and generalize and harder to control (Howard, 2008, p. 501). Subsequently, coupling a school building, as read through online pictures, with contested discourses challenges how rhetorical scholars must conceptualize vernaculars within a pervasively online world.

Hence, the analysis seeks to understand how vernacular discourses attempt to (re)present their own versions of previous events to articulate and instill their values into public discourse. An interest in value prioritizes the understanding of how moral vernaculars are used by individuals not to seek convergence on such values but "agreement on consequences for which there is accountability" in relation to human rights (Hauser, 2008, p. 443). In this case, accountability for the safety of the public specific to gun legislation. For Hauser, this reading of vernacular discourse prioritizes two types of moral discourses. On the one hand, thin moral vernaculars are manifested in official discourses in which the public aims to challenge the official through a rhetoric of accountability. While on the other hand, thick moral vernaculars become embodied rhetorical performances that empower those who have been structurally or ideologically suppressed or disenfranchised. Both forms of discourse are equally important, but when one becomes more prevalent in the reading of a text possible consequences on material and symbolic levels may vary.

When considering the moral vernacular in relation to official discourses, "we begin to understand that resolving the gun debate requires new rhetorical strategies that presume a clash between irreconcilable worlds" (Eckstein & Partlow Lefevre, 2016, p. 14). The moral vernacular rhetoric of accountability recognizes that we do not agree on legality and what "common sense" gun reform means, but we have the capacity to transcend those differences for the sake of public safety and health. When public school becomes the text of interest, this critical paradigm, which frames the vernacular as moral, calls the critic to examine how images produce, contain, or attempt to dismantle political, ideological, and moral interests (Ludes, Nöth, & Fahlenbrach, 2014). Just as discourse (re)produces an ideology that offers an ideal or normal way of living in the world, images can (re)produce this worldview through pictures (Kumar, 2014). In this sense, images that circulate a rhetorical text can operate as facets of a political and repressive ideology that disadvantages and disenfranchises particular groups of people while offering the space for its own critique and potential dismantling.

Ultimately, critical inquiry centered on an online, visual medium should either unveil the discourses of power and oppression at work or uncover how pictures can be channels of social justice and activism by challenging the viewer not to forget (Brouwer & Horowitz, 2015). By focusing on how images can be sites of empowerment, the subsequent analysis of the new Sandy Hook school building is particularly interested in how this pictorial event plays a vital role in the circulation of moral vernacular discourses specific to gun violence and gun legislation reform.

Framing Vernacular (Re)Construction

Within and outside the parameters of Newtown, Connecticut, the aftermath of the horrific shooting of twenty-six victims threw another log into the fire surrounding recent calls for stricter gun control legislation. Rhetorical scholars, Christopher Duerringer and Zachary Justus (2016) note that the civil right to owning a firearm continues to be recognized by the federal and judicial government while this same right continues to be at odds with concerns of public safety. Other rhetorical critics have argued that the shooting that occurred at Sandy Hook is what created a stalemate within larger discussions surrounding gun legislation (Eckstein & Partlow Lefevre, 2016).

Since the shooting in Newtown in 2012, more than 1,890 mass shootings have occurred and 254 shootings have happened on school grounds (Everytown for Gun Safety, 2017; Mass Shooting Tracker, 2017). Given this larger context following the devastating shooting at Sandy Hook Elementary School, I believe it is imperative to center official and vernacular discourses in relation to gun legislation reform rather than others like mental health. Regardless of the state-by-state changes in gun legislation reform, five years after the shooting more than 100 gun safety measures have been rejected by Congress (Cooper, 2017). The mental health of Sandy Hook shooter, Adam Lanza, continues to receive attention from the media (see Sanchez, 2017). Although enormously significant, utterances about Lanza's mental health focus the dialogue around a lone-wolf scapegoat which undermines any attempt to tackle gun policy reform. In other words, from a political standpoint, it has become the norm for politicians to blame such gruesome violence on the actions and mental illness of an individual rather than addressing larger, structural issues surrounding weaknesses in gun legislation. Ideally, we would address both. However, the status quo consists of officials using an emphasis on mental illness to make honest dialogue about gun access and violence irrelevant and therefore difficult to address.

As these discourses surrounding gun violence permeated within the public sphere, on May 10, 2013, an appointed committee of twenty-eight members unanimously voted to have the Sandy Hook Elementary School building demolished and replaced (Kelly, 2013). In October 2013, an overwhelming vote of 4,504 to 558 by Newtown citizens supported the selected committee's decision to have the school rebuilt (Chappell, 2013). The vote also allocated $49.25 million state funds to cover the cost of demolition and rebuilding (Tuz, 2013). Therefore, on October 25, 2013 almost a year following the shooting, demolition began on the Sandy Hook Elementary School (Miller & Hudson, 2013).

For the students who were attending Sandy Hook on the day of December 12, 2012 as kindergarteners, 70 of them returned to the new school building as fourth graders (Furfaro, 2016). Further, 60 percent of previous staff and faculty returned to their previous jobs (Eaton-Robb, 2016). The new school has been designed to be environmentally friendly, attractive, a place to learn, and above all, safe:

> Visitors will need to pass through a driveway gate with a video intercom, across a moat-like rain garden and past two police officers and a video monitoring system to get inside. Its ground floor is elevated, making it harder to see inside classrooms from the outside. All the doors and windows are bulletproof. (Eaton-Robb, 2016, para. 12)

This new Sandy Hook Elementary School was ultimately built on the same land on which the last building stood, but on a different section (Hussey & Foderaro, 2016). This utilization of the same land will have a compelling role in some of the arguments articulated by official discourses which advocates a particular utility and meaning behind the new building. Broadly speaking, the building itself contains no markers to commemorate the lives lost in December 2012. A task force has been working to erect a memorial elsewhere in Newtown to memorialize those who were slain in the shooting (Furfaro, 2016). With these contexts in mind, the preceding analysis will explicate the official and vernacular discourses in relation to the new building and its online circulated images in relation to how a contested memory is created through claims over space, place, and affect.

The Online Photograph as Vernacular

Continuing the thoughts on how the new Sandy Hook Elementary School will function in relation to public memory, this section provides a reading of four of the photographs that were taken by journalists on July 29, 2016.

I have selected to focus on these online photographs because they speak directly to the building itself. The analysis does not account for other visual images (like memes, for example) that exist in relation to the shooting at Sandy Hook. Although these images may represent another facet of argumentation on gun legislation, their existence as memes presents an entirely different text that I cannot adequately account for here. Consequently, understanding the online moral vernacular of the following pictures begins by mapping the various official discourses surrounding gun legislation and the rebuilding of Sandy Hook. From this perspective, statements from politicians, like Senator James Inhofe, during legislative debates proclaimed, "I think it's so unfair of the administration to hurt these families [of Newtown], to make them think this has something to do with them when, in fact, it doesn't" (quoted in Bendery, 2013). The rhetoric of "this is something beyond citizens" trickles down into the ways other people in official positions talk about the new Sandy Hook school. For example, Newtown's First Selectman Patricia Llodra articulated that despite the tragedy that took place, Sandy Hook "will be a place full of laughter, of love, and learning" (quoted in Furfaro, 2016, para. 3). Llodra also believes that by focusing on that one devastating day "does not erase the wonderful things about our 300-year-old community" (quoted in Hussey & Foderaro, 2016, para. 16).

Further, District Superintendent, Joseph V. Erari Jr., provides that the new building was not meant to be a place for remembering what happened on December 12, 2012, but to be a "warm and calming environment" for students to learn and teachers to work (quoted in Hussey & Foderaro, 2016, para. 13). Both Llodra's and Erari's remarks are reflective of the belief that it would be inappropriate for both the land and building to function as a memorial for the twenty-six lives lost; the new school building symbolically (and perhaps literally) has nothing to do with the lives lost, rather the lives of those who continue. Memorial scholars have explored and noted such rhetorical moves by arguing how the use of physical place can become the basis of an argument for moving on. More specifically, Foote (1997) provides the term *rectification* to explain the public's action when a place of tragedy is "put right and... reintegrated into the activities of everyday life" (p. 23). This process of rebuilding is based in the thought that physical spaces are "innocent bystanders" of violence and tragedy. By treating the land and new school building as an innocent bystander, these official discourses propose that it would be inappropriate to utilize the physical space to commemorate and memorialize.

By emphasizing the functionality of the new school building, these official discourses advocate for a rhetoric of acquiescence by focusing on the town's ability to move on in spite of tragedy and lack of comprehensive gun legislative reform. As noted by Engels and Saas (2013), rhetorics of acquiescence function to disempower citizens by crafting numbness by silencing and limiting avenues for deliberation. In no way am I arguing that these messages diminish or attempt to neglect the massacre that did occur. Rather, this move to think about the new school building in terms of the future instead of the past (re)produces a larger societal acquiescence by highlighting a community's ability to move on and continue with the status quo in which little has changed to make all communities safer through gun control reform. Here, the official discourses of acquiescence prioritize a reading of the space of the new Sandy Hook Elementary School. For example, during the aftermath of the shooting at Sandy Hook, political and public figures denounced eulogies, vigils, and memorials for articulating comments about gun control reform (Duerringer, 2016). For this group of individuals, the comments made by gun legislation reform supporters were shameful and inappropriate; eulogies in particular were indecorous because they attempted to link gun control policy to the murders of innocent people. These remarks only continue the tension between public safety and civil liberties.

Ultimately, the call for civility and respect of the dead crafted a political and social discourse that sought to honor the deceased through business-as-usual tactics. Through statements made about the land and physical building of Sandy Hook, we can see how official discourses relied on rhetorics of acquiescence in order to craft the "ideal way" in which the public is to react to the new school building. In this case, these arguments prioritize an ideology that favors American's ability to move on from tragedy regardless of political talk and legislative change in relation to gun control policies. Therefore, the rhetoric of acquiescence demands that the school building be celebrated for its functionality: students attending classes to learn, while teachers and staff work to earn a living, and a community healing itself. In terms of public memory, official discourses advocate a construction of the past that is less interested in the discursive and material repercussions of little gun legislative change than celebrating a community's ability to pick themselves up, dust themselves off, and move on.

Moral Vernaculars: Space and Pace

First image: http://www.nytimes.com/2016/07/30/nyregion/new-sandy-hook-school-is-ready-nearly-4-years-after-massacre.html?_r=1
Second image: http://bigstory.ap.org/article/c8def31120c34b228741f661556ab8a4/sandy-hook-school-opening-public-4-years-after-massacre

If this is how official discourses encourage the public to think about the new Sandy Hook Elementary School, a critical lens moves us to consider how online, moral vernacular discourses attempt to rupture the ideology of acquiescence. The images of Sandy Hook provoke moral vernacular meanings which challenge the official renderings of how the land on which the building was rebuilt crafts an ideal utilization of place. By permitting the building to symbolically "gesture outside itself," the first image offers the possibility for the structure to exist as a memorial for the lives lost on that very land (Blair, Jeppeson, & Pucci, 1991). Based on this assumption of symbolic power, the images challenge what is encouraged to be forgotten so that those memories and bodies can be remembered. The framing of the first image does remind the viewer that the building does have a functional purpose: students do need to learn and people need to do their work. However, given the nature of this school building as a non-memorial that can still work as a memorial, the "place" in which the process of memorializing occurs – the private space of one's home – calls for a kind of moral vernacular discourse that becomes embedded in people reliving their memories in a space unique to other normative memorials. Therefore, arguments over space and place are two-fold: utilization of land and the power of memorializing in private places.

The first image specifically denotes how the capturing and framing of a place brackets what else exists outside the frame. The focus of the image expands rhetorical possibilities, permitting the viewer to make their own claims about the building. A photograph's ability to articulate beyond the spoken language of official discourses evokes a sense of power when the viewer can give their own meaning to the structure through the gaze of an observer. This distancing between actual space and memorializing place transcends the politics of policy and legislation so that the larger public may recall the history that has transpired between then and now. Consequently, this unique private place of memorializing holds the capacity to undermine the functionality of the space in which the building stands. In this particular case, the private places of commemoration mark the memory place (the school building) for "exceptional cultural importance" (Blair, Dickinson, & Ott, 2010, p. 28). In other words, the production of the first image extends the rhetorical and symbolic possibility for the "space" of the building to be called upon as a memorial. These semiotic consequences remind us that the power of a rhetoric of acquiescence has ramifications that influence material day-to-day realities – getting back to work and moving on become powerful forces for official discourses.

The "place" for the process of memorializing evokes postmodern sensibilities in that it deploys an "incredulity towards metanarratives" (Lyotard, 1984, p. xxiv). These images do not tell us what to think which opens the discursive for multiplicity. Provided the postmodern problem of lacking meta-discourses that sanction or legitimize other discourses, visual mediums like photographs grant one possible avenue for the public to invoke clearer rhetorics of monumentality and commemoration. By establishing the "place" for memorialization as outside the space of the structure and land on which it rests, the picture "leaves the functionalism of modernism aside" by placing the viewer outside of the physical structure in order to emphasize the non-functional aspects of the building so that commemoration can be brought to the foreground – further integrating the moral vernacular with the symbolic (Blair et al., 1991, p. 279). By placing the viewer outside the physical location of the building, the functionality of the building becomes secondary to the process of reminding and mourning the lives lost on that December morning. Here, the building maintains its signifier but the signified becomes articulated through the

moral vernacular which disrupts the official signified of functionality and moving forward. For the moral vernacular, functionality becomes a culprit in the continuing discourses that have failed to make necessary changes to federal gun legislation.

By positioning commemoration before functionality, this first photograph works to remind the viewer how the untimely death of children should not be something we should expect to return to. This image reminds us that the norm should be the modern parental experience which provides a sense of a mundane, seemingly predictable lives for themselves and their children (Sloane, 1991). In other words, any gesture towards functionality of the new Sandy Hook Elementary School can also serve for the moral vernacular by arguing that the presence of the new building represents the bloodshed and pain that occurred and the political gridlock that refuses to mandate reform. The killing of twenty children becomes a crime against the public, therefore, the images articulate a moral discourse in which suffering does not end with their deaths. More importantly, this image's framing of the entirety of the school building reminds the viewer that "our memory of that time *should not* die out with them" (Brouwer & Horowitz, 2015, p. 543, emphasis in original). As long as this first image continues to circulate, official discourses will continue to be challenged by moral vernacular utterances that call for accountability and change.

Consequently, the image itself is political and partisan – ascribing a divide and clash between official and moral vernacular readings of public memory. These first two images are not printed or recirculated in other media/mediums. With the current case study, they exist solely through the digital sites. Unless in public at work or with friends, the viewing and subsequent commemoration of this text and series of events is done in isolation and in private. However, the place of memorializing produces challenges for vernacular discourses that wish to disrupt the official. Although this distancing between actual place and space of memorializing might assist in expanding the discursive possibilities for the vernacular, the lack of "being there" might pose problems on a material level. With this first image, there is no indication of what kind of building or activities occur within – there are no clear signifiers that this is a school building. In this instance, this image only has power when actively sought by a public member or is contextualized by an online article discussing the finalization of the new school. In this case, the lack of physical markers underscores the symbolic possibilities for those who might identify with the vernacular. Such concerns of online, pictorial memorials will be further developed in the conclusion. For now, the notion that online pictures provide unique and potentially empowering spaces for the vernacular to formulate arguments about the utilization and meaning of a place further guides the analysis specific to how the public is supposed to "read" the new school building.

Continuing the discursive and visual dialogue between the official and moral vernacular specific to arguments over place and space, the second image contains magnets on one teacher's fridge: the magnet on the upper right-hand corner is a copy of the old Sandy Hook Elementary School sign and the ribbon contains the only clear recognition of the shooting. Although small, these magnets render the vernacular by undermining the official discourses that continue to proclaim that the building is not to function as a place for remembering, but learning. This photograph challenges this either/or dichotomy by at the very least asking: Why can't the school do both? Even if the first image sets limits on vernacular ideologies attaching constructs of memorializing, this image grants a stronger case to affirm the vernacular.

By containing traditional markers of memory or remembrance, this second image evokes a clear frame of how the picture is to be read and seen by the viewer. Provided the composition of the image and the arrangement of the magnets several claims can be made that are particular to a moral vernacular reading of the photograph. First, if the image is to read like script, moving from left to right, the picture becomes more clear – the top and bottom right corners of the image are blurred. With the blurred signifier of the old building situated in the top-right corner, a stark contrast is created within the image given the clarity of the ribbon in which the words "We'll Always Remember" curve down towards the bottom of the frame. The less-clear magnet of what once stood exists as something less visible than the clearer possibility of remembering. Second, the presence of a remembrance ribbon poses a specific reading over the contested utilization of space. For example, such ribbons often elicit direct calls to challenges overcome (the pink breast cancer ribbon) and wars fought in and survived (the yellow-ribbon). Even in many elementary schools across the country, for an entire week students, teachers, and staff wear red ribbons during "Red Ribbon Week" as symbols against drug use. In other words, these ribbons function rhetorically to make claims about private lives and experiences while being publicly visible. Therefore, the existence of this

remembrance magnet and its circulation through online images produces these same meanings of private lives being symbolically spoken within the public.

Specific to arguments over function of the new elementary school, this image advances moral vernacular possibilities by containing a clear marker of remembrance. In effect, the continued private lives of family members who lost loved ones during the shooting are called into existence through commemoration while one gazes at this particular photograph. The rhetorical power of such ribbons expands the possibilities for the new Sandy Hook Elementary school to exist as something other than just a school building, but an architectural form that reminds the public of a horrific shooting and the role that catastrophe played in the ongoing discussion on gun legislation. Specific to the moral vernacular, discourses over the place and space of the building and memorializing function through thin morals by employing rhetorics of accountability that aim to remind official discourses of their service to keep the public safe. Ultimately, this political commemorative leaning understands the architecture of the building as a medium of social discourse which is circulated through online images.

Moral Vernacular: Affect

First image: http://www.newstimes.com/local/article/A-sneak-preview-of-the-new-Sandy-Hook-school-8617842.php#photo-10679927
Second image: http://nymag.com/daily/intelligencer/2016/08/new-sandy-hook-elementary-still-evokes-tragedy.html

Affect as a communicative and rhetorical concept is understood as the capacity to impact. From this perspective, felt affections are actualized from embodied experience that can be recalled and recreated through the viewing of images (Jenkins, 2014). In this instance, a picture has "the capacity to affect viewers by cueing them to see photographs as documents of reality" (Jenkins, 2014, p. 449). The pictorial event surrounding the new Sandy Hook Elementary School enacts and deploys visualized documentary evidence. In this case, the parties involved (text and spectator) are related by their abilities to be affect and affected. From the work of Walter Benjamin (2006), distancing that occurs between an imaged event or space and the viewer gives spectators the capacity to judge a given picture and what it contains. Indicative of online memorializing, these vernacular affects are experienced through "remote sensing" (McCormack, 2010, p. 643). Since the building is a school and protected by state-of-the-art security measures, any affective sense making occurs outside and away from the actual existing place of the structure. However, as articulated in the previous section, this private place of memorializing holds possibility for moral vernacular affects to exist. This testing of images prioritizes the everyday as political because the latter is inseparable from the material – our politics have material consequences.

Given the symbolic possibilities of negation over utilization of place (the building) and space (arenas for memorializing), the photographs of the new Sandy Hook Elementary School also bring into question what emotive affects are deployed that help to secure adherence to vernacular memories surrounding the shooting and gun legislation. In this instance, since official discourses are political, the vernacular becomes political as well. As noted above, rhetorics of acquiescence encouraged by official discourses attempt to subdue political strife by encouraging the public to ignore politics and get back to their daily lives. Given that official discourses rely on rhetorical affects of acquiescence, the moral vernacular rely on other modes of affect in which other feelings are sensed to remind the viewer that the everyday is political (Deleuze, 1990).

This third image elicits a reading that is relevant to the contested memory and utilization of the new Sandy Hook Elementary School. The emptiness of the hallway engenders memories about the bodies that will not be walking and running through those hallways. The blankness of the image prioritizes a reading which allows the viewer to place whomever they want. In other words, the emptiness of the image gives vernacular discourses

authoring by filling in the hallway on their own terms. Here, the moral vernacular of accountability provides the possibility for viewers to recall what might have been lost since the shooting took place. As political roadblock creates frustration and perhaps apathy, the image works to remind the public of what has transpired since December 2012. This affect of loneliness reminds the viewer of the empty spaces that continue exist in the lives of those who lost loved ones. This picture supports the voices of loved ones who have publicly made pleas for the deaths of their loved ones to mean something: "common-sense" gun policy reform. Erica Lafferty, the daughter of slain Sandy Hook Principal Dawn Hochsprung, in 2013 urged the Senate to consider their bill by pleading,

> We're here to demand action, and demand that we receive a vote, and that we're allowed to have some peace of mind that our loved ones didn't die for no [sic] reason...They died protecting the children they love, and they deserve to have a vote and they deserve to have died for a reason. (quoted in, McAuliff, 2013, para. 5)

Ultimately, the emptiness of the image promotes a moral vernacular reading of accountability by reminding the public of what happens when legislators and governmental officials promote the constitutional precedent of the second amendment over calls for public safety and life. The hallway's emptiness provokes affects of loneliness which permit the viewer to directly challenge the discourses of officials who have stated that gun legislation has nothing to do with the families who lost loved ones. Instead, this image works in favor of people, like Erica Lafferty, whose voices, resonate with hurt and frustration, echo through the hallway to remind the public of loss by evoking feelings of loss. With this third image, this empty hallway that curves into the unseen provides an emptiness and uncertainty that any spectator may have experienced in their life-time. Ultimately, this third photograph contains rhetorics of affect because of its capacity to provide evidence of the past while arousing feelings of loneliness.

Coupled with affects of loneliness and emptiness, the pictorial event surrounding the opening of the new Sandy Hook Elementary School also presents other affective possibilities specific to senses of "otherness" and feelings of being trapped. With the fourth image, as a viewer, we are positioned as an outsider: We are not students looking out, we are strangers looking in. In this instance, the framing of the photograph situates us as an "other." Our displaced positioning as public viewers within our private spaces of our homes further inscribes this affect of otherness – we are excluded from sharing the physical place of the building. The clearly raised level of the building and bars over windows illustrate this even more so. Adam Lanza was an outsider who managed to get his way into the original Sandy Hook Elementary School building. By zooming in on the physical structure and make-up of the building, this fourth image makes known the strategic choices that were made to construct a safe school for students and workers. As noted in the background information, the town and architects wanted to make it difficult for outsiders (or people who do not belong inside) to get in. Positioning the viewer as this "other" works to remind the spectator of who literally should be included and excluded within the boundaries of the building's walls.

This form of "othering" is not entirely unique to this structure, rather this affective appeal of otherness constructs moral vernacular difference. In this sense, otherness "is understood not in terms of what is, but in relation to what 'we' are not or do not wish to be...othering is the action of making some group into a clear contrast to 'us'" (Bruce & Yearley, 2006, p. 223). Here, our visual positioning as a viewer looking at the building from the outside offers a sense of what continues to keep us different: the value-based arguments over the defining and regulating of the second amendment. Since evoked through a moral vernacular, this otherness functions to transcend the boundaries of binary value systems to recall notions of accountability. This fourth image posits that this new Sandy Hook is a clear physical marker of what happens when the official is not held accountable. More specifically, this photograph highlights the extent the town of Newtown went through to construct a school that can keep their children safe – further integrating the documentary evidence of affective visuals. In effect, this image relies on affects of "otherness" to illustrate the stark reality of what happens when communities are forced to build expensive buildings to feel safer about sending their children to school. The vernacular is "other" to official due to a lack of accountability through which concerns of public safety continue to be defined and framed by official discourses as existing outside the reach of vernacular concern. Tied back to the conceptualization of thick moral vernaculars that permit performative vernacularism through embodied action, this photograph reminds the public that official discourses impact bodies both inside and outside of the school building. Such affective economies permit feelings

of "otherness" of the individual to align with a community that is oppositional to official subjectivities (Ahmed, 2004).

These affects of loneliness, emptiness, and bodies that cannot do service the vernaculars by allowing the viewer to make judgements about the building contained within the photograph. Entrenched with a moral vernacular, such affects discerned from the photographs expand vernacular interpretations of history. As the viewing public, we are capable of re-living and experiencing such senses as frequently as we wish given the accessibility of the online images. Bodnar (1992) once claimed that "public commemorations usually celebrate official concerns more than vernacular ones" (p. 16). As articulated through these two images, affective rhetorics permit the building to speak more from the concerns of the vernacular. More importantly, the moral vernacular has the symbolic capacity to completely claim the building as their own.

Although official discourses proclaim that affects of anesthetization are ideal for moving on, these four images promote a different reading that sees these images as the products of our governmental officials' lack of action. In result, it became the vernacular's task to take matters into their own hands by constructing a building to keep teachers, staff, and students safe – the very act of constructing a new building is disruptive. However, given the private act of memorializing through the viewing of mediated photographs produced by news sources that circulate official discourses, such symbolic possibilities become problematic provided a public memory that is contested through online spaces.

Making Sense of Online Vernaculars and Public Memories

Through a critical visual rhetorical reading of the pictorial event surrounding the opening of the new Sandy Hook Elementary School, I have attempted to purport how the building functions as a non-memorial that can't help being a memorial when its images are circulated through various online sources. Given this access to the building's symbolic power via the Internet, the public's ability to read the text on their own terms and in the private spaces of their homes opens the discursive possibility to assist in shaping our public memory. As explored through my analysis, the four images explored attempt to rupture official discourses by reclaiming the utilization of space, re-conceptualizing the place of memorializing, and permitting rhetorics of affect to remind the public to keep their governmental officials accountable for their safety. The power of the photograph specific to public memory is that they allow us to continuously re-live the past; we always have that accessibility to view the building in ways material existence might prohibit some from ever seeing it. Therefore, online mediums that permit any process of memorializing offers a blend of personal memories and public discourses. Ultimately, reflecting back on Hess' (2007) question of how private acts of memorializing change any process of memorializing leads me to consider implications in relation to communication technology and understanding online, mediated, and dispersed vernaculars.

First, the use of communication technology to view the photographs (smartphones, computers, and tablets) "paradoxically increases both connection and disconnection" (Hess & Herbig, 2013, p. 2209). Online pictures of the school building expand connection to the physical place while distancing and, therefore, potentially ignoring an adequate awareness of the physical environment. In light of this, an understanding of what presence means becomes an imperative implication when rhetoricians are constructing notions of "public" and "memory." Viewing of buildings that contains markers of memory rely on an augmented reality through which the public can alter the ambiguity and absences of the memorial itself in order to complete their own memory of the shooting (Hess & Herbig, 2013). This notion of an augmented reality creates challenges for public memories as it underscores a "co-presence" in which the viewer attempts to overcome distance by increasing connection (or access) to the images themselves (Hjorth, 2011). In essence, the ambiguity surrounding the circulation of the pictorial event "invite us *to* think, to pose questions, to interrogate our experiences and ourselves in relation to the memorial's discourse" (Blair & Michel, 1999, p. 37, emphasis in original). More to the point, although online forms of memorializing might push rhetorical critics to re-conceptualized modes of memory and commemorating, these forms of memorializing offer the necessary places for the vernacular public to reflect on past events to help make sense of or challenge present concerns.

Second, understanding the vernacular online can be complicated and messy. This is not to argue that such readings should not occur, but that rhetorical scholars must be reflexive of the language we use to make sense of

public discourse in relation to public memory. More specifically, my analysis exposes how moral vernaculars expressed through mediated spaces has the potential to both expand and dilute what we mean by vernacular. In this case, vernacular discourse becomes understood as: (1) The act of the average human being becoming engaged in the creation of rhetoric; (2) The expansion of social actors and therefore, opinions and arguments; (3) Increasingly fragmented, but still a part of the process of knowledge, ideology, and policy production. Such possibilities for this type of moral vernacular can expand discursive possibilities for arguments and judgements about gun violence.

For example, in early in December 2016, the Know the Signs campaign (formed by individuals who lost family members in the Sandy Hook shooting) released a public service announcement (Peled, 2016). In this two-and-a-half-minute video, the viewer is made aware of how easy it is to overlook or ignore at-risk behaviors that could lead to someone taking up a weapon and creating a catastrophe. This video bridges together direct commentary about gun violence by putting it into conversation with mental illness. Since their voices have been silenced and undermined within Congress, these family members have found other outlets to articulate their messages to a larger public. The existence of this video demonstrates how we can talk about both mental illness and gun legislation control. From a critical orientation to power, ideology, and moral vernacular, rhetorical critics need to expand their research into exploring arguments about the inherent harms or possible avenues for change that exists with such discourses and utterances that circulate in relation to mass shootings, gun legislation, and mental illness.

Ultimately, the images of the new Sandy Hook Elementary School continue to expand how rhetorical critics understand public memory and vernacular rhetorics. Given the authority and power of a rhetoric of acquiescence, as public viewers, we are discursively situated to read the building in a particular way. This move does situate the new Sandy Hook as a building with a functional purpose. This outcome still acknowledges the building's role as an unintended memorial. However, this "memorial" will likely stand as a reminder of Americans' ability to move on from tragedy by getting back to their everyday lives regardless of social or political change. Whether the fragmented, online vernacular nature will stand the test of time is difficult to predict. Rather, for now, what can be said is that this public building (and its subsequent images) exists as a "part of the texture of larger landscapes" which interpellates the spectator into particular subject positions and memories in relation to gun violence (Dickinson, Ott, & Aoki, 2006, p. 29). Therefore, current articulations from official positions continue to frame the linguistic and argumentative possibilities for the moral vernacular.

Postscript

Since originally writing this essay, the shooting at a church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, and the shooting spree that brought a gunman to a school in Rancho Tehama, California, present two moments in which we witness a public official for the former case shifting focus from common-sense gun reform to mental health - which influences how vernacular discourses pick up similar logics in the later shooting. Speaking to the shooting in Sutherland Springs, President Donald Trump's demonstrates the strategic moves politicians specifically make to focus the public conversation on mental health rather than gun legislation: "Mental health is your problem here…This isn't a guns situation" (quoted in Diamond, 2017). Talking to reporters about her brother's actions, sister of Rancho Tehama gunman reflected: "There are certain people that do not need guns, and my brother was clearly one of them" (quoted in St. John, Shyong, Cosgrove, Serna, & Vives, 2017). Simply put, more recent politics continue to dictate that, following a mass shooting, the public must either focus on mental health or gun control. As illustrated by President Trump's statement, the former continues to be privileged by official discourses. Since thin moral vernaculars can co-opt official arguments and premises, it should come as no surprise that non-official positionalities echo the messages of officials. Rhetorical scholars need to continue mapping these arguments to search for new avenues for how both official and vernacular subjectivities can situate themselves and their arguments to account for both gun control and raising awareness on mental illness. In the end, both concerns have real consequences that demand rhetorical consideration and intervention.

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