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How a Moment of Pain Becomes a Cenotaph of Hope

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Introduction

My paper investigates the agency of *Landmark for Peace*, a memorial sculpture located in Indianapolis and how it creates a sense of “belonging” in those who visit it. This cenotaph, a word defined as a memorial or marker in honor of a person whose remains are elsewhere, marks the place where Senator Robert F. Kennedy gave a heartfelt speech, an hour after Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.’s assassination in 1968. The sculpture not only commemorates the location of this speech but also memorializes King and Kennedy, who were both slain in 1968. This sculpture is associated with the hope, peace, justice, and non-violence exemplified by these men.

Social anthropologist, Alfred Gell theorized that art has agency; that it can “do” something to transform its viewers (Gell 1998:6). Similarly, I hypothesized that *Landmark for Peace* creates “belonging” in the lives of those interacting with it. Viewers, impacted by what it represents, will embrace the convictions of King and Kennedy, resulting in changed lives. This has the potential to become what Pierre Bourdieu terms *habitus*, or a pattern of unconscious choices. As these choices become second nature, they result in what I term “demonstrative belonging.”

My Methodology

To define “belonging” I used textual analysis of scholarly writing, specifically the research of sociologist Ann-Marie Fortier. For historical context, I used newspapers and news clips from 1968 and 1994, interviews with the artists and community members. I compiled a working definition of belonging and formulated a survey for visitors to the sculpture asking two key questions: does this memorial sculpture cause you to desire a “belonging” to the same ideal as Kennedy and King? and can you give me examples of how this belonging is demonstrated in your everyday life? This data, gathered during an onsite visit to the memorial confirmed my premise, that this sculpture fosters what I term “demonstrative belonging.”

Why is this significant? Why apply ideas of “belonging” to art history? Some artworks speak louder than others; some stories need to be told in a bold visual manner - one that can move the public to consider the message of the work. Art may have a role to play in global politics and society by influencing “communities of belonging,” especially as people embrace ideas of non-violence. My research concerns the belonging related to choices, ideas, beliefs, and values affected by this memorial sculpture, and how it is demonstrated in the lives of individuals. Addressing the agency of *Landmark for Peace*, first requires some historical context and textual analysis.

Historical Context

America’s social and political climate during the late 1960’s, was tumultuous: struggles for civil rights, fierce opposition to the Viet Nam war, the bondage of poverty, and a younger generation that challenged every belief that their predecessors held. Courageous leaders arose in America during this time, to challenge the status quo and demand change.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. (1929-1968) was a civil rights activist in the United States during this time. He supported the non-violent struggle for equal rights “based on a vision of love and human justice without the boundaries of race, class, or nation.” He was a Baptist

minister who taught that peaceful resistance was *the* preferable means of protest. He found himself arrested, threatened, and beaten but never succumbed to violence against his opponents. His followers were his “beloved community.” This community continues growing, as people comprehend his “dream” and act on it.

In 1968 New York Senator Robert F. Kennedy (1925-1968), younger brother of the late U.S. President John F. Kennedy (1917-1963) was campaigning for the Democratic nomination for president. He felt obliged to do all he could to help the United States. He and King had similar goals for the nation; primarily, equality and civil rights for all.

April 4, 1968 will forever tie these men together and is the basis for *Landmark for Peace*. On this date, Sen. Kennedy was campaigning in Indiana (Image 1) He arrived in Indianapolis to give a political speech but actually gave the “best speech of his life” (Halberstam 1969: 85). An hour before Kennedy’s speech, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. This information was relayed to Kennedy and those around him feared for his safety and tried to discourage him from speaking. Kennedy was not afraid and felt compelled to go speak in the park; though his topic shifted from politics to a message of compassion. This moment of pain across America needed more than a political speech.

That evening, before a largely African American crowd, Kennedy shared the news about King’s death. A collective gasp emerged from the crowd, many had not heard this devastating news, and many began to weep. But some had already heard the report and had come to the park with weapons!

Kennedy shared his heart with the people; he told the audience they, “could be filled with bitterness and hatred, and a desire for revenge...or we can make an effort, as Martin Luther King did, to understand and to comprehend, and to replace that violence with...compassion and love.” (Kennedy 1968) He implored them to remain calm and to pray for King’s family and for the country.

Over 100 cities in America saw violent riots following King’s assassination, but Indianapolis “remained calm” as Kennedy had requested. Some call this a miracle. The sad epilogue is, that two months later, Kennedy was also assassinated in Los Angeles, CA.

History of the Cenotaph

Flashing forward to 1994, the Pacers Foundation of Indiana, wanted to somehow memorialize King, Kennedy, and the speech in the park. They held a competition to design a memorial. Over thirty entries were submitted. In a wise move, neighboring community members were included in the final selection. A man from Franklin, Indiana named Greg Perry won the competition.

This cenotaph recognizes the night that Indianapolis made a collective choice to belong to peace. Every April 4th, a ceremony is held in this park at 17th and Broadway where the community remembers through speeches and prayers, poetry, art, and music. Outstanding people and organizations are given awards. Belonging is demonstrated in many ways at this event.



Images 1 and 2. *Landmark for Peace Memorial*, bronze and Cor-Ten steel.
Kennedy-King Park, Indianapolis, IN.

How Art Creates Belonging

In my research, I examined theories about how art communicates to others. I considered differing concepts of belonging. I define the work of this sculpture through contemporary theories of agency, performativity, and belonging.

Alfred Gell expounds upon the agency of art, stating that art is “intended to change the world rather than [just] encode symbolic propositions about it.” (Gell 1998:6). Thus, a sculpture can create belonging that is demonstrated in people’s lives; possibly in a manner that could actually change the world.

Art historian Wolfgang Kemp theorizes about reception aesthetics, stating that art has a particular viewer in mind and is structured to inter-relate with the viewer using ‘focalizers’ (Kemp 1998:187). In this cenotaph, the primary focalizers are the faces and hands of King and Kennedy. The surrounding setting places emphasis on the sculpture - a brick pathway intersects the two pieces of the work, allowing visitors to walk between the two figures and look heavenward to view their features. The imagery is powerful.

This memorial intersects with its viewers as they bring their experiences to it, reflect on it, and let it speak to them. I believe that *Landmark for Peace*, draws the visitor into a deeper “belonging,” with a commitment to the knowledge that injustice must be confronted in a non-violent and peaceful manner.

What is Belonging?

Many types of belonging are part of the academic discourse today that include ideas outside of a standard belonging to a nation or a race. The scholarship I encountered helped develop my ideas about “demonstrative belonging.”

Kathryn Mee and Sarah Wright state, “Incorporating belonging into the landscape writes people into the story of a place.” (Mee 2009:776). The memorial belongs to the location at 17th and Broadway and the people associated with its history. They also note that, “belonging is implied by ideas of formal and informal citizenship and civic activity.” (Mee 2009: 772). I believe this “formal and informal citizenship” is where belonging exists. The ideas are reflected in the work of art, as the two men express their unity. Civic activity is one way belonging is demonstrated. *Geographies of Belonging*

Vanessa May writes, in choosing to *belong*, people “adopt new ways of behaving and thinking, contributing to further social transformation.” (May 2011:374). This describes a

dynamic form of habitus; if true, it could lead to the fulfillment of Dr. King's dream, a society of equality, brotherhood, freedom and justice, without oppression and racism.

Self, Belonging and Social Change

Nira Yuval-Davis in *Belonging and the Politics of Belonging* declares that belonging is about emotional attachments (Yuval-Davis 2006:197). Without emotional attachment, belonging might be only "surface" and never demonstrated. If the agency of this cenotaph is to be effective, an emotional "buy in" to Kennedy and King's views of compassion, peace, and non-violence is imperative. Many of the people I spoke with described an emotional attachment.

Foremost, in my ideas of demonstrative belonging, I incorporated the ideas of Anne-Marie Fortier. In her research with Italian immigrants in Britain, she describes belongings applicable to the *Landmark for Peace*. To Fortier, belong is demonstrated in everyday life. She defines belonging in two groups, possessions and inclusion. The belonging I am concerned with is inclusion, or the fitting into a group.

Fortier's writing illustrates belongings based on values. Similarly, my paper focuses on values-based belonging that is aided by an object, but is not bound by location. Yes, *Landmark for Peace* is place-based, but the message is not place-bound.

Fortier looked for ways that, "...ethnicity and gender... circulate, articulate, are embedded and simultaneously produced...in representations of collective identity." (Fortier 1999:42) In other words, she sought to determine how those who belonging perform – or demonstrate their belonging.

She found that "the shared performance of patterns of behavior not only produce a communal appreciation of belonging, but it simultaneously produces kinds of subjects which cannot be dissociated from the collective project." (Fortier 1991:48) In regards to *Landmark for Peace*, the "shared behavior" is the human association with the monument. It not only produces an appreciation or desire to belong, it simultaneously produces subjects whose belonging is demonstrated through collective actions. These collective actions might include the annual ceremonies, educational work, or creative uses of the park that promote belonging to others. When belonging is demonstrated on a regular basis, habitus takes hold, where the actions and responses become unconscious.

Habitus and *Landmark for Peace*

When a type of behavior becomes second nature, "social habitus" results. As people become deeply immersed in the dreams, visions, and goals represented by this sculpture, changes occur.

Pierre Bourdieu's concept of habitus is "a system of acquired dispositions functioning on the practical level as categories of perception and assessment...as well as being the organizing principles of action." (Bourdieu 1990:13). These actions appear natural but are actually learned. He codifies habitus into "structured structures that function as structuring structures." (Bourdieu 1977:72). I interpret this to mean that structures *or organized systems* that are structured *or built up in a certain way* function as structuring *or influencing factors that organize structures or systems*. In other words, habitus is when systems that have been built in a certain manner function in a way that creates additional systems. So, applying habitus to belonging and *Landmark for Peace*: the structure of belonging is structured by the ideas communicated by the memorial, which in turn function through demonstration that reproduces belonging in society.

This sculpture, associated with this particular event, has the power to develop a habitus of hope, peace, justice, and non-violence in those who will let it.

Landmark for Peace

Looking at this sculpture, we see the two men reaching out towards one another. We see the “shadows” of these men reaching down to us. We see the hands expressing a desire to connect. Kennedy’s hand reaches towards King in the gesture of a handshake. King’s hand is reaching out to Kennedy but also turned upward, in a gesture that could suggest dependence on God. The fact that the hands do not touch reflects what the designer Perry wanted to convey, the idea of an ongoing work. His title of the memorial was, *Still, They Reach*. (Perry 2010).

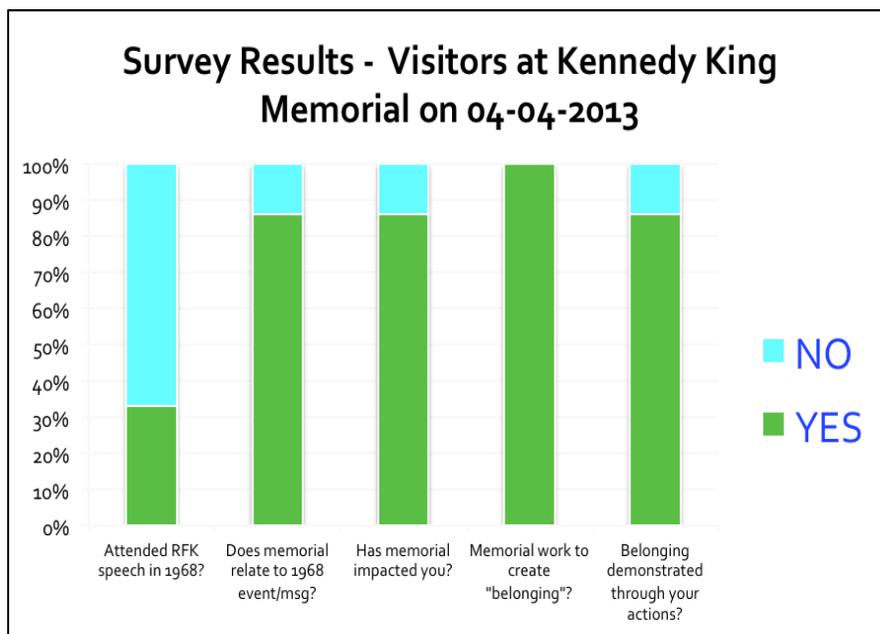
The dream is carried on as King’s behavior is reified today. He was always civil; he chose peace and non-violence over hostility and aggression; he treated others fairly when facing opposition or not; he never gave up on his dreams.

The issues we face in the Twenty-first Century are different: terrorism, economic hardship, climate change, human trafficking, lack of healthcare, and others. The temptation to react with hate and violence is always an option, but similar to the problems in 1968, injustice must be confronted in a civil manner. Surely this is possible today.

Visiting the Memorial and Asking Questions

To test the assumptions I was formulating, I went to the memorial to conduct research on-site. I prepared a short survey, got the approval of my institution to conduct it on “live subjects,” and headed out on a 13-hour drive to Indianapolis. I arrived just before the festivities started. I listened to the political and religious speakers. Many commented on the sculpture. The city’s Deputy Mayor, Olgen Williams, stated that, “as we see this sculpture of them reaching out together [we] realize that [we] can continue the legacy of peace by reaching out to one another.” (Williams 2013).

Before and after the ceremony, I conducted my survey. A dozen respondents, both male and female from multiple races, answered my questions. The graph below shows results of the survey and the survey questions are in Appendix A.



Some had been in the park the evening of Kennedy's speech. Some were regular visitors to the park. Some were there for the first time. The majority of them agreed that the sculpture was didactic, teaching and communicating a message, and that one could "belong" to similar thoughts, actions, and beliefs as Kennedy and King. Most of them felt that they did belong to this. Responses confirmed what I had been looking for, a demonstrated belonging based on the ideas represented by *Landmark for Peace*. Some of these answers were:

"I continue to get through life, and when it is a struggle, I have hope." His belonging to hope fostered by King's example.

"I stand up for minorities. I am involved in a social justice group."
This person belongs in a personal and communal manner.

"I come to the park 2-3 times a month. I participate in community projects."
This individual had an emotional connection to the memorial which was exhibited by his visits.

"I teach in the Broadway community and try to build a better society."
Building a better society through education in this neighborhood is important to King's dream.

"I inspire the younger generation with this message of freedom, peace, equality and hope."
Continuing to share the message with youth will assure continued belonging.

"I strive to bring more people to know how we can resolve conflict in a peaceful way."
This was the message that the creators of the memorial wanted to see, a continuation of King's legacy.

One woman I spoke with said, "Things are better today. People of different races are becoming more sensitive and sharing the neighborhood in peace." Another man told me, "The park and memorial has really helped the neighborhood."

Conclusion

A powerful image is created by the *Landmark for Peace* sculpture. This visual manifestation of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Sen. Robert F. Kennedy has agency, passing on the conviction that non-violence and peace are the superlative means of accomplishing change in society. Based on a sampling of visitor's reactions to the cenotaph, one can, and often does, mentally accede to a similar hope and conviction, conceptually joining others who agree. This agreement and joining constitutes belonging. Reflection on the sculpture, and the historic examples of King and Kennedy, results in actions that demonstrate traits of such belonging. This demonstrative belonging fostered by *Landmark for Peace* has the power to impact others with the same hope. The results of the pain and choices of a city in 1968 inspired a work of art that elicits hope in 2013, and will continue to do so into the future, as those that "belong" actively carry that hope, peace, justice, and non-violence into the lives of others.

Appendix A

Data collection instruments: two sets of four survey questions.

(1) Questions for those who attended the event in 1968 that is commemorated by the memorial.

(2) Questions for those that are present at the celebration but were not at the original event.

Questions Set (1)

1. How does this memorial relate to the actual event?
2. What do you recall about this event? The mood, the people who were there, the outcome?
3. What was, and continues to be, its impact on you?
4. Do you have a non-violence and peacekeeping mindset as a result of the event and/or memorial? Please share examples of how you demonstrate this sense of belonging.

Questions Set (2):

1. What do you see as the story tied to this memorial?
2. Does the memorial support your understanding of what happened?
3. What is its impact on you?
4. Do you feel like you “belong” to a movement of non-violence and peacekeeping as a result of the visiting this memorial? Elaborate with examples.

Interview scripts:

I am a librarian from the University of North Texas. I am conducting research for an academic paper about this memorial, what it represents to you, and whether it affects your behavior. Can I ask you a few questions about its impact?

Before I start, I need you to sign an “Informed Consent Form” required by the UNT Institutional Review Board (IRB). This form lets you know your rights, risks, and benefits as a participant in my research. Are you willing to do this?

Please sign here and here. Here is your copy.

To begin, let me ask, did you attend the event that this memorial commemorates on April 4, 1968?

Intervention protocols:

If a participant is uncomfortable (due to sorrow, can't remember, etc.) I will steer the conversation to another question, focusing on positive outcomes of King, Kennedy, the memorial, the park, etc.

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Images Used

Image 1. Sarah Stierch Consulting. *Landmark for Peace Memorial*. 2010. Used with Permission.

Image 2. Greg Perry. *Kennedy King Memorial*. Photograph, 2010. Used with Permission.