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INTRODUCTION

**Memorials No More**

How grudging memory is, and how bitterly  
she clutches the raw material of her daily work.

—Lawrence Durrell, *Justine*, 1957

Memorials are typically understood as sacred sites, hallowed ground marked with honorific structures, statues, sculptures, plaques, and other objects that make up an iconography of and setting for mourning, or, more broadly, for commemoration.<sup>1</sup> They are just as commonly seen as political places where groups of citizens battle over the meaning of events.<sup>2</sup> Yet they are also enveloped by the quotidian. Birds leave gifts on soldiers' heads; teens cavort on their steps; rush hour commuters skirt them like any obstacle separating them from their appointments. Frank O'Hara's poem "Music" (1954) bares this reality: "If I rest for a moment near The Equestrian / pausing for a liver sausage sandwich in the Mayflower Shoppe, / that angel seems to be leading the horse into Bergdorf's / and I am naked as a table cloth, my nerves humming" (figs. 1.1 and 1.2). It is neither the anonymity of the equestrian nor the surging angel that sets the narrator's nerves atwitter. These remain generic, deprived of proper name, in spite of the fame of both subject (General Sherman) and sculptor (Augustus Saint-Gaudens). But the Mayflower Shoppe and Bergdorf's! These O'Hara names. It is the urban scene that grabs him; the memorial is mere foil. It is a scene, moreover, of bathos born of contrast, of solemn high culture brought low, and adoringly so, by commerce, while the narrator eats the most common of fast foods at the feet of an eternal golden



**Figure 1.1.** The proverbial bird on the great man's head. Tom Bachtell, Cartoon of Sherman Monument. Courtesy of Tom Bachtell.

angel. What city dwellers have not, amid the bustle of urban life, taken respite or fortified themselves at a memorial and not bothered to query its identity? Indeed, memorials seem to borrow space from the city, perhaps most conspicuously in those places where market forces create such poignant contrasts. This puts them in constant tension with those same forces.

Most memorials, most of the time, are “turned on” only on special days, such as Memorial Day in the United States, Remembrance Day in the UK, Martyrs’ Day in India, or National Day in China. At these moments, they become part of commemorative activity. They are borrowed back from their context, from the everyday, for a higher purpose. The rest of the time they are “turned off.” They take their rest as ordinary objects, urban ornament, street furniture.<sup>3</sup> This book is about how memorials are turned on and off, how they move between being moribund and volatile. It explores the way they make way for the daily pulses of urban movement or how commerce and traffic corral them into corners where they can grow old harmlessly. Even the most familiar memorials, ones used repeatedly or ritualistically to cultivate a sense of collective recall, constantly confront the



**Figure 1.2.** By wrapping the pedestal in a generous bench, architect Charles Follen McKim invited people to borrow the memorial for rest, people watching, or waiting to be shipped overseas to fight in a new war in 1942. Augustus Saint-Gaudens, Sherman Monument, 1903, New York City. Photograph by Marjory Collins. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

everyday, if not also obsolescence. It is more than a matter of curiosity that memorials that were brought into existence at great effort and expense and that serve or once served as sites of heightened social, political, or spiritual importance are simultaneously ordinary, background, banal. Some of them never get turned on again, victims of benign neglect. Others suffer from outright iconoclasm. Empty socles or bases are common sights, especially in Eastern Europe, where erasure is a political art. Memorials whose people have moved

on languish unattended. Some memorials disappear entirely and not always as part of political struggle. The Partisans, a Polish Cavalry memorial in Boston Common composed of four exhausted horses bearing beaten soldiers, was removed in 2006. It struck a dissonant note, yet the nearby Ether Monument, with its vaguely medieval Moorish doctor anaesthetizing a patient, remains. Recently, Confederate monuments throughout the United States have been taken down in more assertive political acts or counterinterventions. Time will tell if some of these former Confederate sites become activated, rather than defused, by removal. A missing memorial can be surprisingly potent. It is obvious that memorials are far from familiar, straightforward sites of memory.

In fact, it is their memorial function that makes them peculiar. Memory, whatever the term may mean in this collective, public sense, is the interloper, the foreign substance, in modern cities in modern times. Memory is the uninvited guest as we wolf down fast food, throw ourselves into the flow of work and consumption, or take our keen distance, like O'Hara's narrator, an American descendent of Baudelaire's *flâneur*. Both the monument and the *flâneur* are fixtures of modern public space, but they are opposing sides of the modern Janus. Memory is the strange survivor of an enchanted era of mystery, superstition, and ghosts in an era of secular rationality.<sup>4</sup> Memorials sit in shocking contrast to modern gridirons, streetcars, highways, skyscrapers, electric lines, billboards, T-shirts, knick-knacks, and the human tempest that blows through it all.

If anything, the contrast has become sharper since O'Hara wrote. To take one extreme example, Miami's Holocaust Memorial (1990) manifests how startling this change can be (fig. 1.3). If Peace guiding a horse on Fifth Avenue in Manhattan has become an urban non sequitur, what is a colossal fragment of a ghastly arm encrusted with emaciated bodies doing in Miami Beach, just blocks from South Beach?<sup>5</sup> Yes, both are offered context by their plazas and parklike settings, which spirit them away (just barely) from the urban throng. But this requisite spatial gesture only sharpens the



**Figure 1.3.** The Shoa as dark kitsch. Ken Treister, Holocaust Memorial, 1990, Miami Beach, Florida. Photograph by the author.

contrast. Cars whiz down Meridian and Dade Boulevards on their way to the Miami Beach Convention Center, the Chamber of Commerce, Macy's, Walgreens, Chase Bank, and Publix Super Market, all within blocks of — what would O'Hara have called it? — The Arm. One cannot take distance from this Holocaust Memorial. Its histrionics are an attempt to overcome the anonymity to which many memorials succumb, to overcome the Holocaust as an unrepresentable event. The forty-two-foot arm — scaled down from seventy-two feet! — bids never to lapse into urban ornament, to be turned off. It attempts to defy the everyday. But this is as quixotic as resisting time. Should the city overtake it in some unfortunate way or sea levels rise to claim it in what insurance policies call an act of God, might it, like the Polish Cavalry Memorial, be relocated to a less assertive spot? What if the memorial loses its community, or — and I'm being hopeful rather than provocative — the narratives of trauma and victimhood that have been central to Jewish identity atrophy?

The malleability of memorials is surprising only because people create most of them with great expectations for their duration or permanence. Here again they stand in opposition to an age of obsolescence.<sup>6</sup> The tension between the desire for permanence and their actual ephemerality is betrayed everywhere by erosion, physical displacement, acts of iconoclasm, and neglect. To encounter most memorials is to meet this apparent contradiction. They change with the simplest change of intention. They appear one way when people want to see them, and they can disappear when they do not. Or worse, they obstruct the flow of daily life, something to which so many memorials stranded in traffic roundabouts attest. The harried Royal Fusilier spends his days making vain attempts to cross Holborn Road in London (fig. I.4). He stands as a warning to pedestrians who would try the same. Although some patient photographers have made it to the median and waited out the traffic to capture him, this is a most unlikely view (fig. I.5). Most memorials are not prepared for this sort of everyday encounter. They suffer through the mundane, awaiting their moment in the sun when a special day wakes them up



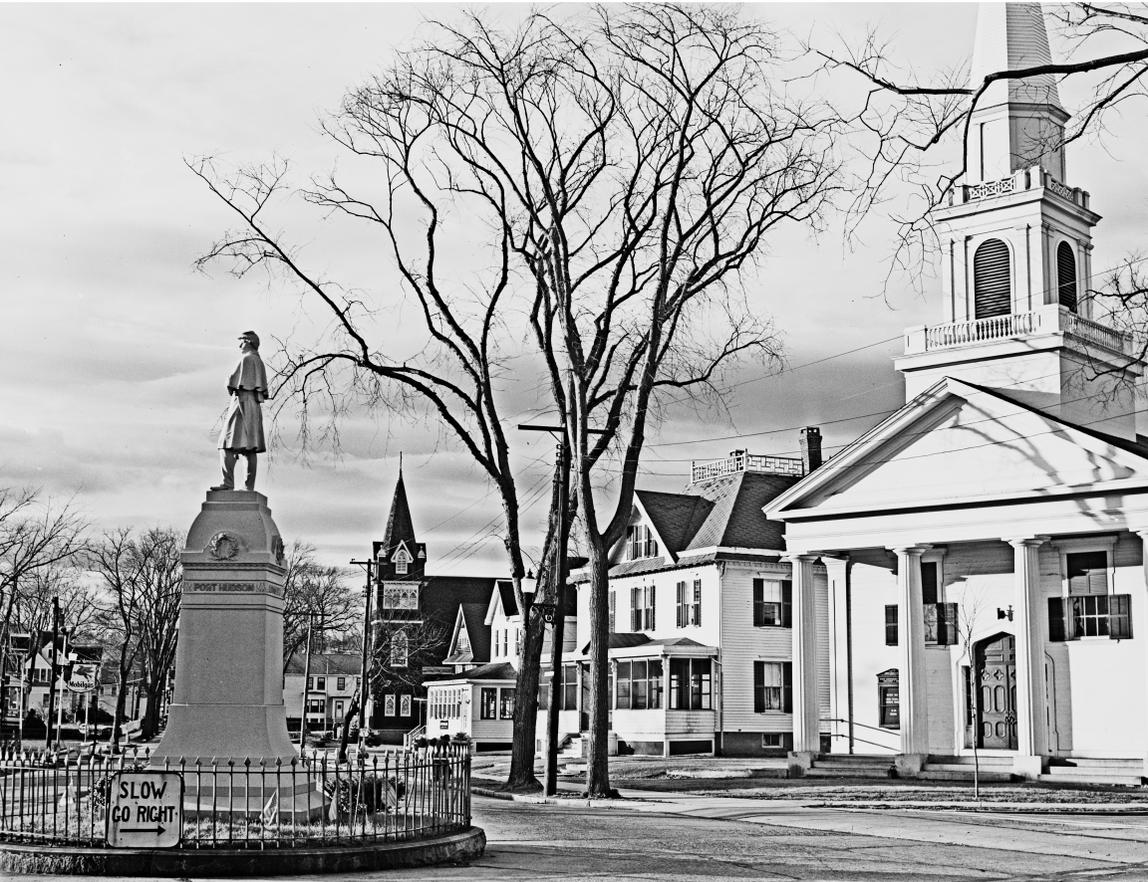
**Figure 1.4.** A Royal Fusilier stuck in traffic forever, nearly camouflaged by the Victorian red brick and terracotta of the former Prudential Insurance Building. Albert Toft, Royal Fusiliers War Memorial, 1922, London. Photograph by the author.

**Figure 1.5.** The Royal Fusilier as seen by a patient photographer. Albert Toft, Royal Fusiliers War Memorial, 1922, London. Photograph by Mike Peel.

or wakes us up to them. Most are calendrically activated, but when calendars drop them, they become marooned, disconnected from the vitalizing energy of commemorative practice. Already many World War I memorials have fallen victim to neglect, even if they were briefly awakened during the recent centennial of the war. One can well imagine a time when the rawest memorials of the present moment go emotionally slack or become politically irrelevant.<sup>7</sup>

To be turned on, memorials such as the Royal Fusiliers memorial or Edwin Lutyens's much more famous but similarly situated Cenotaph in London not only requisition time in the form of Remembrance Day, but sometimes also space by shutting down streets. They rightly appear to be disruptions of the everyday. And this gives the game away. Memorials such as these, perhaps because they must at times be disruptions, find themselves awkwardly stuck in the urban fabric. Is this ensnarement of memorials in the everyday truly inadvertent, or does it serve other functions? How much more interesting if their common life is not coincidental but part of what makes ordinary environments ordinary, or extraordinary interventions extraordinary — part of the creation and maintenance of these otherwise fragile states. Their appearance in a mass society beginning about two hundred and fifty years ago and our diminishing sense of what to do with them as they age or proliferate has intensified this double life.

In spite of claiming a sacred spot for themselves, a place apart, many memorials have been placed at crossroads or junctures, on medians, in plazas, by the roadside, sites where the urban fabric changes its texture. The comical image of memorials trapped in traffic circles has become a transatlantic cliché. The Arc de Triomphe in Paris may be the most famous example, with the French Tomb of the Unknown Soldier added under its vault after World War I. The position of the Soldiers Monument in Mystic, Connecticut, is echoed in memorials in the United States and Europe from the nineteenth century through the present (fig. I.6). The well-intentioned sign on Mystic's railing suggests an ill-fated collision, if not also the



**Figure 1.6.** Another soldier stuck in traffic. Soldiers Monument, 1883, Mystic, Connecticut  
Photograph by Jack Delano. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

unsettled conventions of automobile traffic and signage in 1940. Sherman and the angel, another Civil War monument, began life in a traffic circle when horses were still the most common mode of transportation.

In the history of cities, these are the places that have attracted commerce. The urban historian Robert Lopez linked the crossroads to the quickening of pace that led to the beginnings of urban culture.<sup>8</sup> This overlapping placement of memorials and more quotidian doings could scarcely be accidental. It has something to do with the transactional nature shared by commerce and commemoration. In their most spontaneous manifestations, commerce and commemoration are similar and require similar spaces: a public place for the gathering of people, for a voice to reach the crowd, for exchange to take place, and where impromptu social processes can be given more permanent form. Many of the more sequestered places where memorials can be found, in parks and cemeteries, for instance, respond to similar urban forces.

### ***A Word on the Words***

Arthur Danto believes that “we erect monuments so that we shall always remember and build memorials so that we shall never forget.”<sup>9</sup> This is too clever to be true. To be sure, monuments have been erected with heroic, aspirational, or celebratory ambitions, while memorials have traditionally been conceived and built to mark death, tragedy, and darker modes of remembrance. Writers have sometimes maintained these distinctions, and with good reason. They often reflect the intentions of the makers, if not the public life of these distinct offerings. Yet the two words are unstable and have been used interchangeably since modern memorials and monuments first appeared. Just like the things they describe, these words blur into one another, as the well-rehearsed etymology makes clear. Monument, from the Latin *monere*, means to remind or remember, while memorial, from the Latin *memoria*, also goes straight to remembrance. *The Oxford English Dictionary* uses “memorial” to define “monument” and

vice versa, while both are linked to commemoration. So it is with the physical objects the two words describe. Scratch a monument, find a memorial. Mystic's soldier is called a monument, but it is undeniably a memorial, having been erected to "the brave sons of Mystic who offered their lives to their country in the war of the rebellion, 1861-1865." It doesn't waver so much as act doubly. It is both. In a more cynical frame of mind, Françoise Choay writes that monuments so "pursue . . . a derisory career" that "it has become necessary to add the qualifier 'commemorative'" to them.<sup>10</sup>

The two words are knotted together. Instead of teasing out the monument and memorial strands, my interest is in the knot itself. As James E. Young writes, "the monument itself tends to be replaced by the *memorial*. It is less a monument than site of memory, through which one seeks to keep a memory alive, to maintain it as a living memory and to pass it down."<sup>11</sup> This confusion is native to memorialization. Young continues, "the traditional monument . . . can also be used as a mourning site for lost loved ones, just as memorials have marked past victories. A statue can be a monument to heroism and a memorial to tragic loss; an obelisk can memorialize a nation's birth and monumentalize leaders fallen before their prime."<sup>12</sup> I would go further. Memorials and monuments are shape shifters. They can be disarmingly unsettled. For all of their seemingly stubborn materiality and "land-anchored permanence,"<sup>13</sup> they are surprisingly fickle figures in the landscape. They slide effortlessly between solemnity and anonymity, memory worship and amnesia, arresting monumentality and impediment to traffic. They are all of these things, sometimes by turn, or, depending on one's perspective or needs, all at once. The way "memorial" and "monument" have shifted in what they signify — the way writers slip between the two words — gets right to this restless quality that I believe is central to their meaning.<sup>14</sup> No definition of either will be found in these pages. To stiffen their meaning runs counter to their everyday life.

Their context betrays to what extent memorials, monuments, and statuary blur. A Holocaust memorial, an independence monument,



**Figure 1.7.** Without parental constraints, few children would pass up the chance to climb on Martin Puryear's Slavery Memorial on Front Green, 2014, Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island. Photograph by Carol Highsmith. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

and a statue of Bismarck follow many of the same conventions of placement, contend with similar urban processes, and are acted upon by people in many of the same ways. This holds true even for the most sober commemorative interventions. The reason that Brown University had to add a sign telling people to refrain from climbing on its Slavery Memorial is obvious: it looks like so many pieces of public art that invite the public to do just that (fig. 1.7). As metonymically hackneyed and heavy-handed as the broken chain is, it offers an ideal hand grip for children to test their bodies against the slope. And who could blame them? To a child, it is visually and kinetically like the Half Balls mass marketed by the playground equipment company Goric or the boulders that are frequently placed in playgrounds. It is an invitation to climb.

As early as the revolutionary period, debates over commemoration make clear just how fuzzy these categories have been. Monuments and memorials have often been melted into larger concerns about beautification or drawn into wider urban issues. When Paris erected a statue of the revolutionary Marat in the Parc de Montsouris in 1887, the city argued that if placed in a park, it would not be a monument, but merely a decorative element. Serge Michalski calls this argument “grossly improbable,” and given that the monument depicted Marat in the bath that was the scene of his political martyrdom, it is — and yet the city’s argument aligns with similar attitudes in other countries.<sup>15</sup> Memorials and statuary of all types have been subjected to the same aesthetic and spatial logic, a mentality that continues to this day. For instance, the Holocaust Memorial boulder in Hyde Park (1983) echoes the nearby standing stone, turning them both into garden shams (fig. 1.8). Just five years earlier, another boulder, the Norwegian War Memorial, was installed nearby (fig. 1.9). Three decisively different hunks of rock, one setting. And that’s just the beginning. In one brisk walk, one can see all three and Wellington in the form of a colossal Achilles, the church-scaled Gothic eye-catcher of the Albert Memorial, St. George Killing the Dragon (the Cavalry Memorial to World War I), and the Diana Fountain. How is



**Figure 1.8.** A standing stone, hiding behind the trees and roadway in the background of this photo, trolls the Richard Seifert and Derek Lovejoy and Partners, Holocaust Memorial, 1983, Hyde Park, London. Photograph by the author.



**Figure 1.9.** False equivalency? Norwegian War Memorial, 1978, Hyde Park, London. Photograph by the author.

anyone to make sense of it all? Nomenclature and formal conventions get us only so far.

Nor will definitions of memory — what a bugbear that term! — appear in this book. Smart scholars have worked the word to exhaustion. Pierre Nora, Kerwin Klein, Paul Ricoeur, Frances A. Yates, and others have shaped my thinking, but memory is one of the marginalia of this book, rather like what a Civil War memorial in a traffic circle is to a driver trying to get out of town.<sup>16</sup> It could be a useful landmark, a directional symbol, or a damnable obstruction, but probably not an occasion for commemoration or political action. *Caveat vector*. The use of memory in the chapter titles, then, is rhetorical. I do not believe, for instance, that people *place* memory in any literal sense or that assemblages of memorials reflect a density of memory in the city. It is true that many memorials provide a place for commemoration, and I do not wish to diminish this vital function. But that is a small part of their role.

Another word that plays a central role in this book, “everyday,” is as complicated as “memory,” and curiously interwoven with it. Scholars have produced a mountain of literature on the idea of the everyday and its cognates. In architecture alone, the bibliography is formidable.<sup>17</sup> Nearly every aspect of the built environment has been reconsidered through it, typically set against an ill-defined antagonist waggishly called the “not-everyday” by sociologist Norbert Elias.<sup>18</sup> A persistent binary between the vernacular, ordinary, or everyday and the official, extraordinary, or not-everyday is embedded in thinking about the built environment. Chapter 1 attempts to break down the binary, while much of the rest of the book attempts to bring the insights of scholars of the everyday to the study of memorials in the pursuit of a more fluid sense of these terms.

There are, in fact, at least three different, if intermeshed, “everydays” that appear in the book. The first is made up of the objects (hot dogs), settings (streets), and social practices (eating or tourism) that constitute daily life and its material culture or urban dimension. In this usage, “everyday” is roughly analogous to “ordinary,” “common,”

“vernacular,” and “informal.” The second use is loosely a field of inquiry that studies this first everyday, with distinct manifestations in architecture, landscape studies, anthropology, geography, American Studies, history, and other disciplines. These first two everyday are expressed most often in opposition to the “not-everyday.” A third way “everyday” appears here refers to the way the everyday and the not-everyday (note the definite articles) blur in space and time. This usage resists the opposition of the other everyday because this everyday sees the quotidian and the frequent eruptions through its surface as part of an ever-shifting dynamic over time. In fact, this is the reality of everyday life, where exceptional objects, settings, and social practices are constantly churned into the humus of the ordinary, reconstituted, and broken down again. Frank O’Hara’s poem observes this everyday in a very particular time and place. It pairs elements of the first everyday (a sausage) with the not-everyday (a golden angel) and insists on making them roommates in modern, urban life. As an artifact of the 1950s, it is no longer experientially available to us, much like the original meaning of a golden equestrian statue elevated above the horse and buggies of turn-of-the century New York City. The everyday is historical.

Memorials are assumed to be not-everyday for obvious reasons. They are intended as extraordinary and often used for extraordinary events. As expensive objects created by exceptional acts, often designed by high-profile artists or architects and placed in uncommon settings, they smack of high culture, if not elitism. The forms they have taken reinforce this reading: obelisks, columns, arches, and larger-than-life figures drawn from high art, forged in bronze or cut from granite, engraved with high-minded sentiments, and lifted above the fray. Henri Lefebvre, one of the pivotal thinkers about the everyday, calls such monuments “repressive” acts of spatial colonization.<sup>19</sup> There are exceptions. Impromptu memorials and counter-memorials refuse many of the trappings of traditional memorials. But most conventional memorials, even the most understated ones, strive to escape the everyday, while the commemorative practices

that surround them do so explicitly by falling on holidays that check daily routines.

However, I believe that Lefebvre's judgment requires reconsideration. Memorials may be extraordinary interventions erected for formal rituals held on special days, but most of them speak from or to the vulgate of the built environment, as O'Hara's poem reminds us. The fluidity of memorials is often overlooked because of the entrenched binary between the everyday and not-everyday. Pierre Nora, a pivotal figure in memory studies whose ideas will be discussed at length in the next chapter, calls memory "unself-conscious . . . spontaneously actualizing." "Memory is life," he writes. It is a "bond tying us to the eternal present."<sup>20</sup> For Nora and others, memory is habitual, part of folk culture. It just happens. By contrast, the artificiality of modern institutions, including history itself, has eradicated memory. This binary continues in the persistent distinction between official and vernacular memory.<sup>21</sup> As useful as these terms have been, all too often, the reality on the ground is a complicated morass of memorial efforts morphing under the pressure of modern life. Many of the most formal commemorative landscapes were shaped piecemeal through improvisations and compromises over time, sometimes solidifying into an official vernacular.

To be sure, memorials seem to be rooted, permanent, far too premeditated to be everyday. They are quintessentially artificial, constructs of committees, political haggling, or in more dictatorial modes, fiat. From conception to completion, they are anything but rote, habitual, or ordinary, even as they often succumb to tired conventions, hackneyed habits of placement, and everyday use. Yet they often end up as incidental, afterthoughts in the rumblings of urban life. Hence the thousands of memorials in traffic circles and medians, "all too often accept[ing] wildly unsuitable accommodation."<sup>22</sup> It stands to reason that memorials live a double life, the one stubbornly not-everyday, the other on the down low in the everyday. Memory does the same. It is entirely ordinary. People constantly work with memory in the most mundane circumstances of our lives.

The ancients likened memory to a wax tablet, an everyday tool for recording whose underlying banality is brought home by its pliability and evanescence.<sup>23</sup> Yet memory is also extra-ordinary. The art of memory of which Frances Yates writes so vividly reveals how memory is intertwined with practices at once heightened, sacred, mystical, or in any case metaphysical, and at the same time commonplace.<sup>24</sup> The ancients practiced this mighty faculty to improve oratory, the best of them in a way that seemed nearly supernatural. Saint Augustine's "divine memory" borrowed from antiquity's belief that memory is a gift from the muses.<sup>25</sup> Early-modern memory theaters were like *Wunderkammern*, worldly cabinets of curiosity, predecessors to the encyclopedia. In containing all knowledge — all memory — they spoke to a kind of power or control applied on a cultural rather than individual level. This ordering of the past through the social technology of a memory theater presents an awareness of historical time that foreshadowed the stark break of the era of revolutions and the Enlightenment. Such historical consciousness would be institutionalized in museums, archives, and in the work of professional historians across the nineteenth century, but the memory theater's pretensions to organize all of the past into an accessible schema — a memory machine, of sorts — foreshadows how modern cities would march their pantheon of heroes into the public sphere. All of this reinforces the perception that memorials are not-everyday.

As it turns out, both memorials and memory try to have it both ways, or more to the point, people do what they will with them. Even the most strident attempts to exalt memory — the "gigantic generals . . . with impedimenta" — come to exist in multiple realms. People "thoughtlessly strike matches on sandstone portions of eminent divines," quipped the midcentury English architect Hugh Casson.<sup>26</sup> He urged people to pay attention to them "because they are hideous beyond description . . . comical, touching, heart-warming, puzzling, controversial."<sup>27</sup> Casson understood that memorials are props that help people negotiate the ever-shifting relationship between the everyday and the not-everyday. It might be said that this is part of

their purpose. Unlike park benches, kiosks, or fire plugs, to name other kinds of urban street furniture, memorials come imbued with contradictory potential. They are by turns invisible and monstrous, pregnant with the past and open to future memory. They landmark death and harbor potential for political action. They are often mistaken for being history incarnate and are destroyed to erase the same. They are tethered to a time line and mythic, outdated and alive to the moment.<sup>28</sup> These are modern contradictions, or at very least contradictions heightened since the political and economic revolutions initiated in the eighteenth century began warping time and space, inventing a new concept of the future, and historicizing the past.

For this reason, the chronology of this book repeatedly returns to this formative moment to situate memorials as characters in the narratives spawned of revolutionary change and the modern reverberations that continue to the present day. For the same reason, the account gravitates geographically to Europe and the United States. These are not just the places I know best, where I have been able to travel, and where I can work with the native languages. They are also where these changes first took hold and found commemorative expression, where convulsive, urban transformation first pressed memorials into this modern narrative role. Many of the conventions of memorialization explored in these pages will resonate with readers from around the world because the urbanization and memorialization of the period are inseparable from the story of colonialism. Memorials in Windhoek, Ho Chi Minh City, Oaxaca, Mumbai, Manilla, and many other former colonial cities land in traffic circles, medians, cemeteries, parks, and squares. All over the world, they are gathered into groups, relocated under distinctly noncommemorative pressures, neglected, abused, and seduced into surprisingly mundane predicaments. This is not to say that an equestrian statue in Windhoek means the same thing as one in Munich. In fact, they may be profoundly different and still reveal something similar about the relationship between everyday life and commemorative practices in modern urban life. For this reason, the geographical and historical

boundaries in this account are porous. Memorials across vast geographies over the last quarter millennium have been the public and pliable avatars of a multifarious modernity. I hope that readers better traveled than I will elaborate, confirm, and confound what they discover here. How memorials have been treated over time, where they have been placed, displaced, misplaced, and assembled, goes to the quick of modern consciousness.

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