DREAMING OF DISASTER: DISPLACEMENTS OF PUBLIC MEMORY AND

HURRICANE KATRINA

by

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(Under the Direction of Barbara A. Biesecker)

ABSTRACT

This dissertation provides a retheorization of the rhetoric of public memory through the Freudian concept of displacement in the specific context of Hurricane Katrina. In analyzing the history of New Orleans's fatalistic anxiety over its own destruction, the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina itself and failures of the Bush Administration's response, and the working-through of Katrina's memory during Hurricane Sandy in 2012, I argue that reading public memory in the absence of traditional practices of memorialization requires scholars to interpret memory-work. Analogous to Freudian dream-work, memory-work is a description of the collective psychic logic by which traditional objects of memory are produced and trauma is managed. Each chapter attends to a different form of displacement and the rhetorical means by which they are achieved. In so doing, I reimagine memory as the dialectical relationship of remembering and forgetting, which necessitates a different set of theories and methods capable of describing its rhetoricity.

INDEX WORDS: Rhetoric, Public memory, Psychoanalysis, Displacement, Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans, Sigmund Freud, Julia Kristeva, Jacques Lacan

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INTRODUCTION: DISPLACEMENT AND PUBLIC MEMORY-WORK

During a ceremony in New Orleans two years after Hurricane Katrina made

landfall on the last days of August 2005, then-Mayor C. Ray Nagin announced that $1.2

million would be allocated towards building a proper site of remembrance for the victims.

This event was billed perhaps prematurely as "breaking ground on a permanent memorial

that [would] also contain the remnants of several dozen unclaimed bodies."[1] Nagin's

ceremonial address was delivered inside Charity Hospital Cemetery, soon to be known as

Charity Hospital & Katrina Memorial Cemetery or, simply, the Hurricane Katrina

Memorial. The site is historically known as "a last resting place for unclaimed dead."[2]

Formally dubbed "Potter's Field" at the time of its establishment in 1848, the biblically

christened site was deemed a suitable resting place for unidentifiable bodies, and later

included those who had died of rampant contagious diseases. "In the 1800s," writes John

Salvaggio, "all unclaimed bodies of the dead in New Orleans were buried there, but by

the mid-1900s it was used only for the unclaimed bodies of patients who had died in

Charity Hospital."[3] The city removed many of those remains during the construction of

the memorial, only to entomb new ones in their place.

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[1] Adam Nossiter, "Commemorations for a City 2 Years After Storm," *The New York Times*, August 30, 2007, sec. National / U.S., http://www.nytimes.com/2007/08/30/us/nationalspecial/30katrina.html
[2] Doug MacCash, "New Orleans Katrina Memorial Is Almost Perfect," *NOLA.com*, accessed February 17, 2015, http://blog.nola.com/dougmaccash/2007/09/new_orleans_katrina_memorial.html
[3] John E. Salvaggio, *New Orleans' Charity Hospital: A Story of Physicians, Politics, and Poverty* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1992), 50.

As what Michael Bibler calls the "Necropolis of the South," New Orleans is a place of tourism founded not only on the relaxed comportment that its slogan implies—*laissez les bons temps rouler*, let the good times roll—but also on its reputation as a city of the dead, a place where tourists take haunted tours, visit cemeteries, and, in more recent years, take bus tours of Katrina's wreckage.[4] It is a place of great celebration and great tragedy, where jazz-filled funeral rituals regularly move along its historic streets. In other words, New Orleans is a city whose relationship to death and remembrance is both unique and frequently acknowledged. As such, it is also a place where places of public memory are manifold and integrated into both the architecture and economy in significant ways. Charity Hospital Cemetery, in particular, appears at first glance a most fitting location for commemorating these victims of Katrina: it is a place whose history makes it singularly capable of memorializing the unattached.

On one level, the memorial painfully reenacts the systemic, violent exclusions that led to many of Katrina's gravest social consequences. It capitalizes on the synecdochal premise of the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier at Arlington, but is itself located within a resolutely ambivalent memorial space. The bodies of the unknown and unidentified stand in for all of the victims of the storm, just as the Unknown soldier stands in for all service members whose remains cannot be identified. At the Katrina Memorial, the slippage between "unidentified" and "unclaimed" allows those interred to represent the loss of life and livelihood in the city writ large. As a veritable Tomb of the Unknown Hurricane Victim, the city claims these bodies as its own, immortal in memory

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[4] Michael P. Bibler, "Always the Tragic Jezebel: New Orleans, Katrina, and the Layered Discourse of a Doomed Southern City," *Southern Cultures* 14, no. 2 (2008): 9.

because singular in function, though not in name.[5] Take, for instance, a few excerpts from various speeches delivered throughout the third-year anniversary ceremony as city and community leaders finally consecrated the entombment of these unclaimed dead:

> Though nameless, they mean something. Though nameless, their family members love them. Though nameless, we love them because they are part of us.
>
> We gather on this occasion to consecrate, and to lay claim to our unknown dead, and to honor their spirit.
>
> They may be unnamed, but they are not unclaimed. We claim them, as ours. Let us make them proud, because *that* is how they can rest in the peace they have so utterly deserved. And the unnamed men and women in this sacred space are gonna help lead us to a New Orleans that should have always been.[6]

Though the names of the bodies are forgotten, the bodies themselves are nevertheless remembered. Moreover, these dead make painfully visible a defining feature of New Orleans's history, namely, that the city has always been a place of racial and economic tragedy, and that the existence of unclaimed bodies signals a problem that transcends each body's singularity. Remembrance of the victims presumes to bring the city closer to its ideal—except in practice, these bodies are once more marked as unnamed and relegated to a site of forgetting (a potter's field) historically designed just for them. Understanding the memorial in this way comports with the general consensus—both scholarly and public—regarding Katrina's memory: race-, class-, and gender-based political economic systems, from economic and racial segregation to infrastructural

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[5] The Tomb of the Unknown Soldier has, in fact, been invoked: MacCash, "New Orleans Katrina Memorial Is Almost Perfect."
[6] "Hurricane Katrina Wreath-Laying Ceremony," *WDSU*, accessed February 17, 2015, http://www.wdsu.com/news/local-news/new-orleans/hurricane-katrina-wreathlaying-ceremony/27801328

failures, produced a disaster far more destructive and insidious than any single storm could have. As Michael Dyson notes regarding Katrina, the country was "immediately confronted with [an] unsavory truth: it is the *exposure* of the extremes, not their existence, that stumps our sense of decency."[7] Any attempt at memorialization cannot avoid ferrying this load.

Significantly enough, not knowing the names of Katrina's victims was hardly the central issue here. To the contrary, Frank Minyard, longtime Orleans Parish coroner and conceiver of the memorial, actually knew some of the names of those eventually interred at the site; he only lacked permission to use them.[8] Even more, there was concern that officially naming these dead as victims of the hurricane (and not of the subsequent flooding, exposure, lack of medical access, and/or the acute effects of stress) would compromise the legal categories that insurance companies exploit in (not) compensating victims of the storm's immediate and long term effects, up to and including life insurance policies.[9] Little if any ado was made about unnaming the named; the anxiety over the name, typically a flash point of controversy in public commemoration, was not at play.

However rich a resource the memorial and its rituals may first appear for explaining the production and function of Katrina's memory for the United States, such a project is a failed one from the start. As noted above, only shortly after the two-year ceremony, it was announced that ground had been broken on the memorial. However, it was not long before the Hurricane Katrina Memorial appeared to be forgotten altogether.

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[7] Michael Eric Dyson, *Come Hell or High Water: Hurricane Katrina and the Color of Disaster* (New York: Basic Books, 2006), 2-3, italics added.
[8] MacCash, "New Orleans Katrina Memorial Is Almost Perfect."
[9] CBSNews/AP, August 28, 2008, "Katrina Victims Are Buried, 3 Years After," accessed February 17, 2015, http://www.cbsnews.com/news/katrina-victims-are-buried-3-years-after/

Funding was not at issue: the money had been secured through the city and private donors, and long-term maintenance costs had been secured.[10] Nor was there any heated public debate over design, location, or whether to name the known victims that may have stalled the process. In short, the coroner's office's long delay in completing the memorial, and the lack of widespread outcry at this fact, signals something elegantly simple: the public memorialization of Katrina's victims was, for many, not urgent. In the end, because "a group of funeral home owners . . . took it upon themselves to inter the remains because they felt the city and coroner's office were too slow to do so," the city raced frantically to finish construction prior to what would be an inspired third-year anniversary ceremony.[11]

This timeline stands in stark contrast to other memorialization practices for major national tragedies. In the early 1980s, for instance, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. became a subject of national controversy. Because of its unconventional design, a black granite wall cut into the earth and engraved with the names of fallen soldiers, the public outcry was so great that the federal Commission of Fine Arts added a large flagpole and a sculpture of three soldiers. While the artist of the original design, Maya Lin, imagined it as a cut into the earth, "an initial violence and pain that in time would heal,"[12] detractors thought the wall looked like a trench and was ultimately a "symbol of shame or dishonor for veterans."[13] The addition of the flagpole and statue, they argued, more properly valorized the sacrifice of the fallen soldiers. As

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[10] CBSNews/AP, "Katrina Victims."
[11] CBSNews/AP, "Katrina Victims."
[12] Maya Lin, "Making the Memorial," *The New York Review of Books*, November 2, 2000, http://www.nybooks.com/articles/2000/11/02/making-the-memorial/
[13] Carole Blair, Marsha S. Jeppeson, and Enrico Pucci, Jr., "Public Memorializing in Postmodernity: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial as Prototype," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 77, no. 3 (1991): 276.

Carole Blair, Marsha Jeppeson, and Enrico Pucci, Jr. argue, the debate over the memorial was nothing less than a political debate over the meaning of the Vietnam War itself, the final combination of memorial objects that "inscribe a history, forming a space of cooperative conflict and commenting on each other's statement about the war."[14] Likewise, the design for the National September 11 Memorial & Museum "needed to take into account the various opinions and agendas of more than 30 consulting parties, including government agencies, preservationists, and groups that represented the surrounding community and survivors and victims of the attacks."[15] Moreover, the decision to sell merchandise and charge entrance fees to the museum,[16] the proposal to list the names of the victims level with the ground,[17] and the omission of the history of Little Syria that formerly occupied the space where the Twin Towers later stood[18] were all topics of public debate. Among the more heated topics was the plan to inter the unidentified remains of 9/11 victims underneath the museum. One victim's family member, arguing on behalf of protesters at the ceremony for the remains' return to the site, said, "We would like to see remains moved above ground in a repository akin to the tomb of the unknowns. . . . On the plaza, to add a little respect and dignity."[19] While the loss of life in both the Vietnam War and 9/11 outstrips Katrina, official estimates put

[14] Blair, Jeppeson, and Pucci, Jr., "Public Memorializing in Postmodernity," 276.

[15] John Caulfield, "9/11 Museum Triumphs over Controversy," *Building Design & Construction*, April 9, 2015, https://www.bdcnetwork.com/911-museum-triumphs-over-controversy

[16] Gio Benitez, "Why Victims' Families Are Furious about 9/11 Memorial Museum," ABC News, May 19, 2014, http://abcnews.go.com/US/victims-families-furious-911-memorial-museum/story?id=23774869

[17] David Dunlap, "Display of Names at Trade Center Memorial is a Painstaking Process," *The New York Times*, March 23, 2009, http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/24/nyregion/24names.html

[18] David Dunlap, "Little Syria (Now Tiny Syria) Finds New Advocates, *The New York Times*, January 1, 2012, https://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/01/01/little-syria-now-tiny-syria-finds-new-advocates/

[19] Joseph Stepansky, Erik Badia, and Larry McShane, "Some Family Members Denounce Return of 9/11 Remains to World Trade Center, Others Call It 'Disrespectful.'" *New York Daily News*, May 11, 2014, http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/unidentified-remains-9-11-transfered-new-york-world-trade-center-article-1.1787160

Katrina's death toll at 1,833 and its cost at $108 billion.[20] Katrina was a staggering

national tragedy from which President Bush's presidency would never quite recover. Yet,

the nation saw almost no public deliberation about how best to memorialize it. Even after

the memorial was constructed, just prior to the ten-year anniversary of the storm, ABC's

local New Orleans news station published a spotlight on "The Katrina Memorial You

Don't Know About," that characterizes it as a "place where the dead seem to have been

forgotten."

  If traditional sites of public memory are not fulfilling their functions, then where

is the memory of Hurricane Katrina being produced? Might it be the case that collective

memory is sometimes produced in "places" other than the usual sites? The purpose of

this dissertation is to argue that that is precisely the case and, furthermore, that the trouble

in analyzing the public memory of Katrina in typical ways signals the need for systematic

attention within rhetorical memory studies to the displacements of public memory writ

large. Indeed, over the course of this dissertation I will look at "places" of public

memory that are out of place. Specifically, I will read the displacements of Katrina's

memory in order not simply to enlarge the object domain of public memory studies but,

more importantly, also to begin defining the ways in which rhetorical displacement

functions both to shape public memory and even overdetermine the very objects of

memory that make up the dominant archive of public memory studies.

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[20] "Hurricane Katrina Statistics Fast Facts," *CNN*, August 28, 2017,
https://www.cnn.com/2013/08/23/us/hurricane-katrina-statistics-fast-facts/index.html

Reading Memory-Work

The overwhelming majority of objects of analysis within public memory scholarship have at least one thing in common: they are objects of public memory that are self-referentially identified as such. That is, they are designed specifically to appeal to memory. Pierre Nora's landmark volumes on French national memory, originally published in French under the title *Les Lieux de Mémoire* and translated into English as *Realms of Memory*, began as the attempt to tell the history of France through its memory objects: memorials, commemorative rituals, slogans, museums, and others. As he notes in the preface to the first volume, "[o]nly certain works of history are *lieux de mémoire*, namely, those that reshape memory in some fundamental way or that epitomize a revision of memory for pedagogical purposes."[21] This is the rationale for the object domain of the first two volumes. By the third and final volume, however, the term *lieux* came to encompass a breadth of objects of analysis that reflected the ambiguity of the word in French and included not only manifest memory objects, but also "latent or hidden aspects of national memory."[22] The domain expanded to include philosophers, historical figures, and even the French language itself. Here, too, however, each of the analyses tend to highlight encomia, commemoration, physical sites of memory, and other rhetorical forms that we would recognize straightaway as self-referentially memory objects. All the volumes together, then, reflect the attempt to tell France's history through its memory objects. Underlying this method is the assumption that memory objects reveal underlying assumptions about French nationalism within any given era.

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[21] Pierre Nora, ed., *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, vol. I: Conflicts and Divisions (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 17.
[22] Nora, *Realms of Memory*, xvii-xviii.

Central to his distinction between memory and history, then, is the observation that memory is a thing of the present, rather than the past: "Memory is always a phenomenon of the present, a bond tying us to the eternal present; history is a representation of the past."[23] While the strict epistemological division between history and memory is one that scholars have since challenged,[24] literature on public memory typically retains that memory objects function within the present and are invented "in order to assign a meaning to the past that accorded with their [creators'] contemporary concerns."[25] The negotiation between past and present that this outlook implies, according to Kendall Phillips, has both challenged the authority "of a fixed, singular history" and "highlights the extent to which these constituted and constituting memories are open to contest, revision, and rejection."[26] For these scholars, the malleability of memory positions it as a privileged object domain the study of which is paramount to describing the rhetoric and politics, not of the past, but the present's past.

This malleability, however, has engendered the anxiety of "misremembering" at least as far back as Aristotle and Plato. In his short treatise, "On Memory and Reminiscence," Aristotle lays out what is basically a Platonic conception of the difference between memory (*mneme*) and recollection (*anamnesis*). For him, memory

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[23] Nora, *Realms of Memory*, 3.

[24] See, for instance: Joseph L. Llobera, "Halbwachs, Nora and 'History' Versus 'Collective Memory': A Research Note," *Durkheimian Studies* 1 (1995): 42; and Paul Ricoeur, *Memory, History, Forgetting* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press: 2004), 91.

[25] Patrick H. Hutton, *History as an Art of Memory* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1993), 10.

[26] Kendall R. Phillips, "Introduction," in *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall R. Phillips (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 2. This tension between history and memory has also spawned what might be seen as hybrid approaches, like Thomas Dunn's, that have an "openness to admitting anachronism while *simultaneously* seeking resonances between the past and our contemporary moment." Thomas R. Dunn, "'The Quare in the Square': Queer Memory, Sensibilities, and Oscar Wilde," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 100, no. 2 (2014): 219.

"involves a presentation: hence we may conclude that it belongs to the faculty of intelligence only incidentally, while directly and essentially it belongs to the primary faculty of sense-perception."[27] Insofar as memory relies on presentation and image, not only is it an "emotional state" for Aristotle, as Phillips has observed,[28] but it is also the case that one can misremember because of this fact. In illustrating this principle, Aristotle references people like Antipheron of Oreus who, "suffering from mental derangement . . . were accustomed to speak of their mere phantasms as facts of their past experience, and as if remembering them. This takes place whenever one contemplates what is not a likeness as if it were a likeness."[29] Whereas recollection is a systematic, disciplined ordering of memory grounded in rigorous intellectual activity, memory is an "affection" that holds no inherent relation to truth—indeed, for him, this is precisely why animals can have memory but not recollection.[30] For Phillips, the separation of memory and recollection signals an animating anxiety within contemporary public memory studies: "the failure of our memory through the process of misremembering or misrecognition."[31] He notes, "Plato's concern for misremembering is driven not so much by a pure concern for the epistemological or phenomenological foundations of memory as it is by a broader concern for our capacity for false beliefs."[32] And while Aristotle turns to an example of a person with "mental derangement" to describe false memory, the structure of his argument holds that this happens to everyone to some degree, not merely the mentally

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[27] Aristotle, "De Memoria et Reminiscentia," in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 608.
[28] Kendall R. Phillips, "The Failure of Memory: Reflections on Rhetoric and Public Remembrance," *Western Journal of Communication* 74, no. 2 (2010): 214.
[29] Aristotle, "De Memoria," 610-11.
[30] Aristotle, "De Memoria," 608.
[31] Phillips, "The Failure of Memory," 210.
[32] Phillips, "The Failure of Memory," 210.

deranged. This is the fallibility of the relationship between sense-perception and recollection.

Yet, for rhetorical studies, misremembering, misrecognition, and forgetting are often taken as that which is most instructive about memory and has enabled scholars to describe the ways in which memorial cultural objects and rituals routinely function in ways not overtly expressed in the content or form of the object. Rhetoric's attention to form, trope, affect, argument, and identification in the production of social and national collective identities casts public memory objects as the means by which the historical significance of a particular event is constituted in the present. This approach sees public practices of remembering and forgetting not simply as reflections or representations of present-day ideologies, desires, affiliations, anxieties, and/or investments, but also as performances that reproduce them. For rhetoricians, objects of public memory have signaled more than simply the management of the past through the lens of the present or the distortion and appropriation of history for the present; they are constant reaffirmations of the present through the repeated constitution of the present's past.

The instability in the relationship of public memory objects and the past has prompted the theorization of not only the specific truths that such objects espouse, but also of the emergence of particular objects of memory themselves. Why do certain memory objects appear and not others? In their comprehensive synthesis and critique of public memory studies within rhetorical studies, Blair, Dickinson, and Ott offer one answer, noting that "groups talk about some events of their histories more than others, glamorize some individuals more than others, and present some actions but not others as

'instructive' for the future."[33] Their answer to the above question—Why this memory object and not another?—involves a methodological turn to Michel Foucault's early work on what he calls "rarity."[34] Out of the plethora the possible things that can be said within any historical context, certain things end up being said and not others. It is therefore the task of analysis to determine the "law of that poverty," the laws within any discursive field that rarify the discourses found in it.[35] In so doing, the memory scholar's task is in part to outline the rationality within which memory objects emerge, the intelligibility of the forms that memory objects take, the events they ask us to remember, the ways in which we are to remember them, and the forms of belonging that accompany these narrative appeals. In short, it is to combat the risks of both anachronism and Platonic/Aristotelian idealism head on by describing the discursive contexts within which memory objects emerge and within which their epideictic appeals become meaningful.

Part and parcel of the Foucaultian answer to how memory objects emerge is the precept of immanence, that they emerge in society from within systems of power and knowledge and not due to some transcendent structure. As such, scholarly inquiry into that which does not appear within these systems of relation makes the grave mistake of positing a transcendent structural plane. Foucault argues that the "why this and not something else" question must not be mistaken with the presumption of latent, unrealized discourse: "we are not linking these 'exclusions' to a repression; we do not presuppose that beneath manifest statements something remains hidden and subjacent. . . . The

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[33] Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott, "Introduction: Rhetoric/Memory/Place," in *Places of Public Memory: The Rhetoric of Museums and Memorials*, eds. Greg Dickinson, Carole Blair, and Brian L. Ott (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2010), 7.
[34] Blair, Dickinson, and Ott, "Introduction: Rhetoric/Memory/Place," 27-28.
[35] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge & the Discourse on Language*, trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Pantheon, 1972), 120.

enunciative domain is identical with its own surface."[36] This repudiation of Freud and

structuralism writ large rejects the idea of an unsaid underbelly of discourse, an

architectonic of repressed truths that would act as a constitutive condition outside the

field of discourse. Joan Copjec summarizes:

> He correctly and strongly believes that the principle of a regime's institution
>
> cannot be conceived as a *meta*principle, that is, as a logical observation that is
>
> simply added to all the other observations one may make about a particular
>
> regime in order to organize, embrace, or comprehend them. The principle of
>
> construction or staging cannot occupy a different, a superior, position with respect
>
> to the regime it stages.[37]

Thus, for public memory, it would seem folly to pursue the displacements that I argue

account for both the emergence of public memory's objects and of their attendant

functions, for in so doing it would seem to imply the existence of just such a

metaprinciple.

Copjec turns Foucault's framework back on itself, however, to suggest that, not

only is he unable to complete the task of defining "the *constitution* of domains of objects

and knowledges" without some sort of "a principle or a subject that 'transcends' the

regime of power he analyzes"[38]; more importantly, it unwittingly installs the

acknowledgement that "the whole of society will never reveal itself in an analytical

moment . . . no diagram will ever be able to display it fully."[39] In other words, because

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[36] Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 119; it should also be noted here that "enunciation for Foucault is of a different order than for Lacan, whose usage of the term is detailed in the paragraphs that follow.

[37] Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists* (London: Verso, 2015/1994), 7, italics in original.

[38] Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 6-7, italics in original.

[39] Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 8.

Foucault will not admit into his analytical framework anything outside a given regime of power, he gives up in advance the possibility of describing the conditions of emergence for said regime. Her Lacanian corrective to this is to say that, in fact, "what we do when we recognize the impossibility of metalanguage is to split society between its appearance—the positive relations and facts we observe in it—and its being, that is to say, its generative principle, which cannot appear among these relations."[40] The inevitability that language can never speak of itself fully ensures this split and provides the claim, not that society can never transcend its own discourse but, rather, "that society *never stops realizing* itself, that it *continues* to be formed over time."[41]

The same can be said of memory: because of the impossibility of pure recollection, which Aristotle so vehemently sought to achieve, memory never stops realizing itself and continues to be formed over time. Misremembering and misrecognition, then, as Aristotle knew when he located the mental disturbation always threatening recollection, are fundamental not only to the content of memory but also the very objects it "chooses." Thus, rarity—why this memory object and not another—is not what is at stake here. Rather, what is most central to an analysis of public memory's displacements is that generative principle which has the authority to institute an ever-changing domain of objects that "count." By extension, this leaves open the possibility that the truths that public memory provides, the meaning and significance of past events, may well also generate (in) *lieux de non mémoire*, realms outside of the intelligible discourses of public memory.

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[40] Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 9.
[41] Copjec, *Read My Desire*, 9, italics in original.

To carry out a reading based on this premise, it will be necessary first to outline the distinction between the subject of dreams and the unconscious as Freud articulates them. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud begins the all-important chapter on dream-work with an observation:

> Every attempt that has hitherto been made to solve the problem of dreams has dealt directly with their manifest content as it is presented in our memory. All such attempts have endeavored to arrive at an interpretation of dreams from their *manifest* content or (if no interpretation was attempted) to form a judgment as to their nature on the basis of that same content.[42]

Dream interpretation had historically centered on the actual content of dreams, attempting to interpret the meaning and function of dreams based on the images, narratives, people, etc., within them. In opposition to this approach, he suggests that the key to the interpretation of dreams lies in the interpretation of the dream-work involved in *generating* the manifest dream-content, or what actually makes it into a dream. This dream-work has two fundamental forms: displacement and condensation. These are names for the dream-work, or the psychic activity of transposition, that determines the content of dreams on the basis of the structure of the unconscious. Displacement does so by "strip[ping] the elements which have a high psychical value of their intensity, and . . . creat[ing] from elements of low psychical value new values."[43] Condensation involves a "mass of dream-thoughts being submitted to a sort of manipulative process in which those elements which have the most numerous and strongest supports acquire the right of

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[42] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Stranchey (New York: Basic Books, 1955), 295, emphasis in original.
[43] Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 324.

entry into the dream-content."[44] That is, those dream-thoughts with the greatest psychic

intensity are condensed repeatedly and multiply into associated, but screened, dream-

content (this is his definition of "over-determination"[45]). In fact, the modern dismissal of

unconscious processes in favor of positive content, Julia Kristeva argues, is motivated by

a (deliberate?) ignorance of the scope of Freudian philosophy: "These destroyers of Freud

ignore that, far from reducing psychic life to the organs that perform the sexual act,

psychoanalysis understands if and how excitation, pain or pleasure, is integrated in the

complex architecture of sensations, speech [*paroles*], thoughts, schemas [*projets*]."[46]

    As Christian Lundberg notes, Lacan takes up this division by translating

displacement and condensation into the rhetorical tropes of metonymy and metaphor,

respectively, thus securing for rhetorical studies a warrant for theorizing the rhetoricity of

the unconscious: "[t]he logic that inheres in dream work is the same logic that

underwrites the function of speech generally."[47] It is this shared logic that prompts Lacan

to endorse a theory of language grounded in the subject of enunciation, or the subject of

the unconscious.[48] The latter may be thought of as the commonplace first person singular,

the "I" grammatically positioned as the subject in a sentence or, in the case of public

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[44] Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 302.

[45] Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 301.

[46] "Ces pourfendeurs de Freud ignorant que, loin de réduire la vie psychique aux organes qui accomplissent l'acte sexuel, la psychanalyse entend si et comment l'excitation, la douleur ou le plaisir s'intègrent dans l'architecture complexe des sensations, paroles, pensées, projets." Julia Kristeva, *Pulsions Du Temps* (Paris: Fayard, 2013), 146, my translation.

[47] Christian Lundberg, *Lacan in Public: Psychoanalysis and the Science of Rhetoric* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2012), 69-70.

[48] Although dreams and speech may share tropologies, however heterogeneous descriptions of such a tropology may be, the idea of a collective unconscious is somewhat riskier to posit. Freud seems to dismiss the idea of it—but only under the pretense that the content of the unconscious is collective to begin with: "In what psychological form the past existed during its period of darkness we cannot as yet tell. It is not east to translate the concepts of individual psychology into mass psychology, and I do not think that much is to be gained by introducing the concept of a 'collective' unconscious—the content of the unconscious is collective anyhow, a general possession of mankind." Sigmund Freud, *Moses and Monotheism*, trans. Katherine Jones (New York: Vintage Books, 1939), 170.

memory, as the first person plural "we" implied in consubstantiality. This is the subject of the ego or consciousness, the positive "we" produced, for instance, in collective memory objects that constitute publics or peoples. Enunciation, on the other hand, concerns the unconscious, which I take to be the rhetorical site of the (re)production of memory.

Distinguishing between the subject of the statement and the subject of enunciation is not only a theoretical shift, but also a methodological one. Lacan sums up the difference: "We can try here, in a concern for method, to depart from the strictly linguistic definition of *I* as signifier, where it is nothing but the shifter or indicative that in the subject of the statement designates the subject insofar as it is currently speaking. . . . That is to say, it designates the enunciating subject, but does not signify it."[49] Whereas the subject of the statement is what we would typically recognize as one's conscious identity, the subject of enunciation is that which statements mark out; it is the subject of the unconscious. To follow Lacan is therefore to presume that the "I" of the subject "is born somewhere other than the place where the discourse is enunciated."[50] A fuller theoretical account of this will unfold in the chapters to follow, wherein the same premise is assumed in analyzing public memory: the presumption that the contents of public memory, i.e., its objects, are born somewhere other than in self-reference.

Psychoanalytic scholarship in public memory studies has to a degree already taken up Barbara Biesecker's charge to reroute the analysis of rhetoric through a Lacanian psychoanalytic apparatus. Her own work regarding WWII memorials, for instance, argues that the reemergence of WWII as particularly resonant object of memory

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[49] Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006), 677, translation modified.
[50] Lacan, *Écrits*, 758.

coincides (not accidentally) with the transition from one era into another, from one relationship of the subject to itself and another. Likewise, Claire Sisco King's allegorical reading of *Poseidon*, to which I return more fully below, posits the film as a form of screen memory, or memory-work that "screens off" certain traumatic histories, for the emasculating trauma of 9/11.[51] Finally, Joshua Gunn's engagement with the Huey Long monument in Baton Rouge considers its uncanniness in the context of Long's demagoguery, which he argues is situated in the dialectic between obsessional neurosis and hysteria.[52] These essays and others take as their starting point enunciation itself, the specific contexts in which public memory of some event must be worked through for reasons seemingly independent of the form and content of the objects themselves. In accordance with this approach, it is only with a primary focus on enunciative displacements, that is, the way that objects of public memory are themselves displacements, that attention to the content of these objects begins to elucidate the collective subject that they are said to produce.

Yet, the object domain of rhetoricians theorizing public memory through a psychoanalytic framework remains basically consistent with the field of public memory studies as a whole. Even among those scholars who read memory as an enunciative practice, the assumption that traditional *lieux de mémoire* constitute the arena wherein public memory is constituted insists: museums, monuments, memorials, commemorative events, historical sites, and so on. As such, public memory's object domain has in many ways determined the limits of the theorization of its rhetorical function because it is

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[51] Claire Sisco King, "Rogue Waves, Remakes, and Resurrections: Allegorical Displacement and Screen Memory in Poseidon," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 94, no. 4 (2008): 430–54.
[52] Joshua Gunn, "Hystericizing Huey: Emotional Appeals, Desire, and the Psychodynamics of Demagoguery," *Western Journal of Communication* 71, no. 1 (2007): 1-27.

presumed from the start that these are the primary—sometimes even the exclusive—sites for the production of memory.[53]

In suggesting that rhetorical scholars theorizing public memory as a whole have tended to limit their object domain to the manifest content of public memory, and in reappropriating Freud's work on dreams as grounds for this claim, this dissertation explores the rhetorical means by which what I call "memory-work" operates in public, political discourse through a dialectic of remembering and forgetting. Memory-work is analogous to dream-work in that it describes the processes by which traumatic past events are refigured into objects of public memory, acknowledged as such or not. This inquiry moves well outside specific attention to remembering and forgetting, so central to most approaches, and towards their dialectical relationship, which is constitutive of memory as such.

How so, if Bradford Vivian is correct in asserting that "[o]ne may cogently describe the *raison d'être* of psychoanalysis—to uncover and explain the secrets of the unconscious—as a project against forgetting. . . . Forgetting is psychologically unhealthy: it leads to repression, which leads in turn to debilitating neuroses or psychoses"?[54] Vivian's project presents a formidable challenge to the remembering-centered tendency of public memory studies and argues that calls to forget also serve public, political

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[53] This sort of memory critique remains valuable, of course, but also remains limited to theorizing the rhetoric of what Julia Kristeva has called the sacred and, thus, enact a "theologization of the thetic"—in other words, a continued faith in the analysis of memory's positivities. See: Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974), 78.
[54] Bradford Vivian, *Public Forgetting: The Rhetoric and Politics of Beginning Again* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2010), 29.

functions in the constitution of memory, and therefore rightly places Freud's work within a larger modernist project invested in remembering.[55]

Psychoanalysis as both a method of treatment and a critical heuristic, however, incorporates forgetting conceptually as a necessary function of the psyche. Indeed, if we understand forgetting to be descriptive of all the ways of not remembering, then Freud can be said to have multiplied the field of forgetting into all the defenses, not merely to goad the patient towards remembrance, but also to describe the manner in which subjects manage the traumas of their histories. Grounding this dissertation in of one of these broad forms of forgetting, displacement, is therefore not meant as a project against forgetting *tout court* as much as it is a criticism of the rhetorical function of certain configurations of forgetting and remembering. Memory-work is descriptive of nothing but this relationship.

To take one example from rhetorical studies as a launching-off point, Claire Sisco King's analysis of *Poseidon* as an allegorical repetition of the trauma of 9/11 in many ways embodies a reading of memory-work at the level of enunciation. She contends that, according to Freud, past trauma must be repeated again and again in the hopes of mastery of said trauma, and such repetition is screened off by way of allegory:

> [A]s much as the urge to replicate the past might expose wounds felt by the national collective, these acts of repetition may also indicate attempts to repair or reverse such damage by rewriting traumatic history. And more, the compulsion to

replay and revise traumatic events can be animated allegorically in texts that otherwise fail to address the traumatizing violent scene in direct or explicit terms.[56]

In reading the 2006 film *Poseidon*, she demonstrates that the traumas of 9/11 were repeated, or renarrativized, in the film in order to resolve post-9/11 trauma that threatened masculinist figurations of national identity in the United States. The allegorical framing aligns the film sufficiently with the events of 9/11 that it functions as a repetition, but revises the narrative in a number of ways, promising "protection from trauma's painful and intrusive return."[57] The revisions of the film, she argues, allow it to appear to say nothing, and therein lies the displacement: "For Freud, screen memories are inconsequential, or 'trivial,' memories that displace 'objectionable' ones in acts of forgetful (mis)remembering meant to offer a defense against, or avoidance of, a traumatic past."[58] For her, it is the very displacement of the traumatic scene (9/11) that allows these memories to be repeated allegorically, for they flare up as something else (not 9/11) whose narrative logic is mostly the same, but whose content has been screened as if in a dream.[59] King's insight is crucial and, on my view, its real force has yet to be realized in rhetorical studies of public memory.

It is in part from here that this dissertation departs, not simply to account for the public memory of an event where memorialization has largely failed, but also to begin rethinking the object domain of memory studies as a whole. Hurricane Katrina is a useful

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[56] King, "Rogue Waves," 431.
[57] King, "Rogue Waves," 446.
[58] King, "Rogue Waves," 448.
[59] See also, Marita Sturken, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1997), 44-84. Sturken's principal focus in this chapter is on memorialization practices and remembering at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. and concerns the careful screening of the traumas of Vietnam.

and unique topic because of this failure in the face of its most central traumas: the exposure of the effects of racial, economic, geographical, and environmental politics. For these reasons, my aim here is to explore the work of displacement in more than just its rehabilitative forms. The diversity of Freud's theories of the unconscious beckon the analysis of the ways in which the traumas of Katrina were displaced, not only years after the storm, but also before and during. Taken all together, this project is an attempt to define the rhetoric of Katrina's displacements in its diverse contexts, and therefore to retheorize the study of public memory and its objects.

The chapters that follow attempt just that. They progress chronologically, to the extent that analyses of memory and displacement can, at any rate, to trace the displaced *lieux* of Katrina's memory. Because public memory of Katrina was and is so seldomly performed in traditional ways, this task requires reading psychic mechanisms and rhetorical tropes of displacement as they played out in domains outside of traditional sites of public memory. These "sites" include news media, documentaries, speeches and other political discourse, legal discourse, technical reports, primary historical documents, and even histories and other scholarly analyses themselves.

In each chapter, I place into relation a set of psychic functions of displacement and the rhetorical means by which they are achieved. My reading strategy at some points follows Lacan's Freud and at others, Kristeva's. Kristeva's theories are often heavily indebted to Lacan's work (she regularly attended his seminars) but just as often challenge it. Instead of pitting one against the other or too easily aligning them, both of which are too often done in a variety of scholarly literatures, I plan to appropriate the work of each where they may responsibly help develop conceptual claims about rhetoric. These

choices reflect the attempt to think memory-work anew by approaching the question of memory from an opposite direction: rather than starting with memory objects and explaining how they function, my goal is to begin with memory's displacement in order to find its objects.

Chapter Overview

Chapter 2 reads pre-Katrina narratives of New Orleans's imminent destruction as an anxious melancholic rhetoric that prefigures post-Katrina's memory objects through rhetorical simulation. I tender a reading of two contemporary iterations of this narrative produced in years prior to Katrina: the hypothetical Hurricane Pam scenario, which staged a direct hit of a hypothetical, slow-moving Category 3 hurricane to identify response capabilities—as well as the retrospective reconsideration of the exercise post-Katrina; and a special report produced by *The Times-Picayune* that describes what The Big One might look like, which details the various infrastructural failures that could be expected, the consequences of both the storm itself and these failures, and the various development strategies that could reduce the devastation.

First, I examine the historical narratives that situate Katrina in relation to the politics of race, class, and (post)colonialism, and its geographical/environmental vulnerability. This recounting provides the historical context for understanding New Orleans's memory-work throughout the rest of the dissertation and simultaneously tenders a rhetorical reading of a portion of this history—namely, the anxious specter of The Big One and the perennial fascination with the New Orleans's destruction. This historical account establishes that, from the first years of its founding by French

colonists, New Orleans gained a reputation for its debauchery, disorderliness, and cultural impurity. At the same time, repeatedly thwarted efforts to tame the Mississippi River and the coastline have installed an acceptance of the possibility that New Orleans might someday experience The Big One: a singularly catastrophic hurricane that would decimate the city, killing tens of thousands and leveling the vast majority of its structures. I suggest that this anxiety is rooted in the lost ideal of Enlightenment-era colonial order, the loss of which prompted the French to proclaim the failure of the colony and the city from the start. Next, I analyze the two pre-Katrina narratives to identify their anxieties. Finally, at the end of the chapter, I (re)turn to two of these post-Katrina memory objects—the aforementioned Hurricane Katrina Memorial and the almost immediate proliferation of Hurricane Katrina bus tours—to demonstrate their incorporation of these displaced ideals and, as importantly, to suggest that one cannot understand the rhetorical function of these *lieux de mémoire* without attending to the memory-work that produces them. The narratives preceding the storm, I argue, effect a pre-mourning process figured through an anxious melancholic rhetoric that prefigures the emergence and form of post-Katrina memory objects, displacing the lost ideal of colonial order onto a collective subject that fully accepts the inevitability of mourning.

Chapter 3 attends to memory-work during the storm and subsequent flooding. The primary displacement of this chapter is the concept of matricide, enacted through repetition, reduplication, and silence. The analysis centers on an interview between a local radio station and then-New Orleans mayor C. Ray Nagin. Marked by passionate, angry outbursts and unmitigated, scathing critiques of the Bush administration's response to Hurricane Katrina, the interview went viral the next day across nearly all mainstream

national news coverage and the internet and, for a very short period of time, punctuated U.S. public narratives about the horrors that disproportionately poor, black New Orleans residents faced as a result of the administration's failures.

In theorizing the constitution of the object of rhetorical studies more broadly, I first outline a theory of *chōric* rhetoric read through Kristeva's dialectic of the semiotic and the symbolic, of sense and nonsense. In so doing, I outline a memory object domain characterized by its retroactive displacement from the final narrative of rhetorical effects. Second, in turning to my own object, I ask after the rhetorical transformation of national disaster response logics that precipitated an attendant shift in public memory during and immediately after Hurricane Katrina. Not more than a few days after Hurricane Katrina had passed and the extent of the flooding—and the consequent peril those unable or unwilling to evacuate faced—became evident to the public, the Bush administration came under heavy criticism for its handling of immediate relief efforts. The photo of Bush looking out of the window of Air Force One is typically cited as the emblem of this failure. On September 1, 2005, however, New Orleans mayor C. Ray Nagin gave a radio interview with local celebrity host Garland Robinette that made him instantly infamous and helped to institute a rapid response effort by the administration. I read this interview as *chōric* through three tropes: repetition, reduplication, and silence. Finally, I conclude that the politics of this displacement—what Miglena Nikolchina has called "matricide"[60]—should prompt scholars of rhetorical studies and public memory to consider the role of the *chōric* in the constitution of its objects. The core contention of the

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[60] Miglena Nikolchina, *Matricide in Language: Writing Theory in Kristeva and Woolf* (Other Press, 2004).

chapter is that the *chōric* function of Nagin's interview simultaneously spurred political change and displaced the appearance of having done so.

Chapter 4 then moves forward in time, to Hurricane Sandy in 2012. The central mechanism of displacement in this chapter is fetishistic disavowal, which is enacted formally through the rhetorical figure of *paralipsis*. In particular, the chapter examines the disavowal of the overwhelming conclusion that, in consequence, Hurricane Katrina was a human-made disaster. The object domain of this chapter consists primarily of news reports, legislation, speeches, and official government literature, all of which institute "effective federal response" as a fetish object within the public memory of Katrina.

I turn first to a theoretical elaboration of fetish and disavowal, which always show up alongside one another for Freud and Lacan. Following Lacan, a fetish object is a special kind of substitution wherein an object of desire creates the false impression that there was a time of privileged wholeness, that the subject is not in fact split from itself. What is special about the fetish object, moreover, is that the subject knows at some level that this substitution is false but acts as if it is not. I then turn to *paralipsis*, the trope of "not to mention." Whereas in a more traditional sense, *paralipsis* involves a speaker saying that she will not talk about something and, in so doing, talking about it, in enunciation it describes the "not-noticing" that characterizes the subject's relationship to the disavowed ideal—for Katrina, the knowledge that it was not first and foremost a natural disaster. As a result of the failure of both socioeconomic systems and inadequate infrastructure, much of what made Katrina so devastating in its consequences was not just New Orleans's geographic, infrastructural, and social vulnerability, and not just President Bush's failures of response, but also the neoliberal economic policies and governmental

restructuring that had systematically stripped federal resources away from disaster response and towards antiterrorism measures. Yet, as Hurricane Sandy bore down on the Northeast just before the presidential election, one major litmus test for Barack Obama's presidentiality became the success of the federal response to the storm. After briefly recounting part of this history of disaster response logic, I analyze three primary characteristics of Hurricane Sandy's effective response fetish object: the survivor, coordination, and the necessity of the federal government to "cut the red tape." The chapter's main contention is that "successful response" as a fetish object effected a *paraliptic* displacement to rework the memory of Katrina as having been primarily a natural disaster, ultimately disavowing the sense of broad national complicity in the conditions that produced its vulnerability.

In the final chapter, I return to the question of the production of memory's objects to summarize the theoretical insights I make in the preceding chapters. I suggest that following Nora's encouragement to place the emphasis on *memory* rather than *sites* broadens and redefines the object domain of public memory studies without adherence to the *a priori* constitution of its current domain. Doing so by utilizing the insights of Freud, Lacan, and Kristeva, moreover, provides a psychoanalytic framework equipped to read such a diverse and sometimes ridiculous-seeming set of objects in order to define the unifying logic that binds them. I then turn to the political critique that motivates the project: the dialectic of remembering and forgetting that constitutes the public memory of Katrina has allowed some of its most devastating effects to remain largely unaddressed. Parsing the memory-work of Katrina provides one means by which the structural

inequality—in all its manifestations—that turned a hurricane into a national tragedy can be named, critiqued, and hopefully fought against.

CHAPTER 2

CONTINGENCIES OF FAILURE: READING KATRINA'S MEMORY THROUGH
THE ANXIOUS MELANCHOLIC RHETORIC OF "THE BIG ONE"

> *Preparing for a catastrophe—the phrase makes a*
> *mournful sound when said against the backdrop of*
> *the misery and destruction the world saw on*
> *television last year*
> -Joe Lieberman, January 14, 2006

Introduction

In June 2002, a widely distributed fictional account of what post-hurricane New

Orleans would look like painted a picture of massive flooding, tens of thousands of

deceased, infrastructure obliterated, and months upon months of efforts to "drain the

bowl" that is the city's geography. Using advanced computer modeling that updated

forty-year-old data, the narrative describes a near-apocalyptic scenario of a Category 4 or

5 hurricane in uncomfortably specific detail. It would be "at least four days after the

hurricane" before crews could begin to pump water out of the city, an endeavor further

complicated by the fact that existing pump infrastructure would most likely be useless

and broken by the storm. Replacement pumps would "take six months to pump out

Jefferson Parish" and even longer to drain the entire city. That timeframe would

compromise sanitary systems, the integrity of buildings and infrastructure, and likely

spark potential fires once electricity is restored. Refugee centers and temporary

residences at military bases would be established. Countless businesses and individuals

would permanently relocate. Although it is unlikely that the city would be abandoned

altogether, the narrative admits, it is hard to overestimate how devastatingly such a storm

would change New Orleans. The exigency for telling such a story is then revealed: "It's a matter of when, not if."[61]

Two years later, in July and August 2004, another similar story, but with exponentially more detail. "Hurricane Pam," a fictional, slow-moving Category 3 hurricane, makes a direct hit on New Orleans, "leaving in its wake 61,000 fatalities"[62] and nearly 400,000 non-fatal casualties despite the more than 1,000,000 evacuated residents. Projected realities include a "HAZMAT 'gumbo'" of toxic and possibly flammable hazardous chemicals,[63] millions lacking "power, water, and ice,"[64] transportation nightmares for 500,000 people needing rescue and/or relocation,[65] an unprecedented need for volunteers and donations,[66] vetting re-entry once safe,[67] the removal of "30 million total cubic yards of debris" (including coffins but not including human remains),[68] 250,000 displaced schoolchildren,[69] 500,000 people requiring post landfall shelter[70] and/or temporary housing,[71] and inadequate medical capabilities.[72] In other words, a natural disaster for which existing and projected capabilities were determined in advance to be not just inadequate, but catastrophically so.

The two scenarios, however different they are in their presentation, display a strikingly similar sense of anticipation. The first narrative was the product of a five-day

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[61] John McQuaid and Mark Schleifstein, "Special Report: Washing Away," *The Times-Picayune*, June 23-27, 2002, http://topics.nola.com/tag/washing%20away/

[62] Innovative Emergency Management, *Southeast Louisiana Catastrophic Hurricane Functional Plan*, August 6, 2004, 7.

[63] Innovative Emergency Management, *Southeast Louisiana*, 7.

[64] Innovative Emergency Management, *Southeast Louisiana*, 18.

[65] Innovative Emergency Management, *Southeast Louisiana*, 27.

[66] Innovative Emergency Management, *Southeast Louisiana*, 31.

[67] Innovative Emergency Management, *Southeast Louisiana*, 43.

[68] Innovative Emergency Management, *Southeast Louisiana*, 48.

[69] Innovative Emergency Management, *Southeast Louisiana*, 59.

[70] Innovative Emergency Management, *Southeast Louisiana*, 76.

[71] Innovative Emergency Management, *Southeast Louisiana*, 92.

[72] Innovative Emergency Management, *Southeast Louisiana*, 104-5.

special report entitled "Washing Away" published by the *Times-Picayune*, New Orleans's largest newspaper, based on new scientific analytics and projections that it had commissioned. Drawing on the history of natural disasters in the region and more recent natural disasters in other regions, as well as these projections, the report paints a picture of what would happen—indeed, what *will* happen, for it uses the simple future tense throughout—when "The Big One" hits. Its warnings are rooted most centrally in the deadly combination of a lagging disaster infrastructure and accelerating urban development. The second narrative is the Southeast Louisiana Catastrophic Hurricane (SLCH) Functional Plan generated by Innovative Emergency Management, Inc. (IEM) and was produced during the weeklong Southeast Louisiana Catastrophic Hurricane Exercise in July 2004. IEM was the primary contractor during the SLCH exercises tasked with running a simulation of a slow-moving Category 3 hurricane, which it named "Hurricane Pam."[73] IEM published its 121-page report roughly two weeks later, which detailed the expected effects of such a storm, what was required to respond to and manage those effects, and where capabilities across federal, state, and local levels were likely to fall short. Although the report takes a far less apocalyptic tone than the *Times-Picayune* special report, it nevertheless constructs an image of post-disaster Southeast Louisiana that is by implication just as catastrophic.

These are but two of the more recent and widely visible iterations of a longstanding regional trend towards narrativizing "The Big One," a singularly destructive hurricane so devastating to New Orleans and the surrounding areas that it takes tens or

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[73] Madhu Beriwal, *Preparing for a Catastrophe: The Hurricane Pam Exercise*, statement before the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee, January 24, 2006, https://www.hsgac.senate.gov/download/012406beriwa

hundreds of thousands of lives, spurs a mass migration of people and industry, swallows

the city whole, and/or turns it into something else entirely. "The Big One" is a phrase

associated with other assumedly imminent disasters throughout the world as well,

including a massive earthquake along the San Andreas fault, another earthquake farther

north along the Cascadian Subduction zone, particularly devastating tsunamis in

Southeast Asia, and the Yellowstone supervolcano eruption. These events and others are

similarly anticipated, endlessly rehearsed, and form the basis for an anticipatory

mourning of a tragedy that will at some point have happened. None of these other

narratives, however, have quite the futural mnemic force that New Orleans's Big One

does. But what place does such futurity have in analyses of public memory?

In attending to the question of displacement in public memory, the examination of

futurity or, more precisely, the future anteriority of events that "will have occurred," is

the starting point of my analyses in this dissertation. It is not merely a matter, then, of

beginning at the exact moment of Katrina, detailing the event itself and then the

rhetorical practices whereby the event is remembered in certain ways and forgotten in

others, and then deriving conclusions on the basis of what and how Katrina is and is not

memorialized in an archive which bears its name. Beginning an analysis of Katrina is

instead a matter of taking seriously Jacques Derrida's insistence that "the question of the

archive is not . . . a question of the past. It is not the question of a concept dealing with

the past that might *already* be at our disposal or not at our disposal. . . . It is a question of

the future, the question of the future itself, the question of a response, or of a promise and

of a responsibility for tomorrow."[74] While any particular material archive itself may be

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[74] Jacques Derrida, *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 36, italics in original.

oriented towards the past, the *question* of the archive points forward, towards the future

anterior tense, the "will have been."

Barbara A. Biesecker argues that the melancholy of this tense "may not be

understood simply as either a reaction to a historical loss or the playing out of a structural

lack, since the loss is the ghostly predication of the subject who intends to mourn."[75]

Moreover, in the context of Biesecker's analysis of the Bush administration's rhetorical

campaign to justify the invasion of Iraq and the broader war on terror, melancholy

"stages . . . the loss of an impossible object, ideal, or relation that the subject has never

had"[76]—a preemptive nostalgia for a particular, yet spectral object. This, in turn, posits

the return of an idealized version of democratic life that Americans never precisely had,

but "cannot not want to claim as having been our own." In other words, she argues,

"bathed in the notional afterglow of the catastrophe to come, indices of actually existing

democracy's failing . . . return in [Bush's] speech, miraculously transformed by way of

the future anterior, as signs of its success."[77]

In New Orleans, however, the "catastrophe to come" is a more or less permanent

spectral presence for many of its residents, evidence of which can be traced as far back as

the city's founding in 1718, which raises the question: how does one analyze public

memory of an event so thoroughly anticipated, indeed, whose historical anticipation is

fundamental to the later memory of it? It may be argued that history and context are part

and parcel of any responsible analysis of public memory, and that public memory studies

scholars already take into account the historical circumstances that condition memory.

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[75] Barbara A. Biesecker, "No Time for Mourning: The Rhetorical Production of the Melancholic Citizen-Subject in the War on Terror," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 40, no. 1 (2007): 154
[76] Biesecker, "No Time for Mourning," 154.
[77] Biesecker, "No Time for Mourning," 154.

Attending to New Orleans's nearly constant preoccupation with its own erasure, from this perspective, would be a mark of thorough scholarship rather than the introduction of a novel approach to reading public memory. However, we cannot lose sight of the premise on which this dissertation is founded: Hurricane Katrina remains difficult to memorialize in straightforwardly traditional ways. This not only complicates its status as an analyzable object domain of public memory but also requires a rethinking of the function of history and the archivization of tragedy in relation to memory *tout court*. To analogize The Big One with the specter of nuclear war for a moment, Derrida's insight is instructive:

> An individual death, a destruction affecting only a part of society, of tradition, of culture may always give rise to a symbolic work of mourning, with memory, compensation, internalization, idealization, displacement, and so on. In that case there is monumentalization, archivization and *work on the remainder, work of the remainder*. Similarly, my own death as an individual, so to speak, can always be anticipated phantasmatically, symbolically too, as a negativity at work—a dialectic of the work, of signature, name, heritage, image, grief: all the resources of memory and tradition can mute the reality of that death, whose anticipation then is still woven out of fictionality, symbolicity, or, if you prefer, literature.[78]

Rather than merely acting as the historical context within which public memory comes to be interpreted, then, anticipation and the anxiety that accompanies it must figure into the reading of the memory object itself. In this chapter, I argue that the repeated narrativization of The Big One is an anxious melancholic rhetoric that prefigures post-

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[78] Jacques Derrida, "No Apocalypse, Not Now (Full Speed Ahead, Seven Missiles, Seven Missives)," *Diacritics* 14, no. 2 (1984): 28, italics in original.

Katrina memory objects through a process of the incorporation of colonial order as a lost

ideal. I first engage the history of New Orleans and this anxiety, extrapolating the

relationship between anxiety and melancholy along the way. Then, I return to the two

narratives of destruction that opened the chapter to describe memory's prefiguration.

Finally, I turn to a reading of post-Katrina memory objects to demonstrate the work of

incorporation in the production of memory objects.

History, Anxiety, and Melancholy in New Orleans

At the broadest level, the history of New Orleans is the somewhat generic tale of

humans' attempts to tame the environment around it. On one side, the city is merely the

southernmost location of myriad struggles to control the Mississippi over the course of

the last 300 years. The enormity of the river and the tendency of that enormity to translate

into similarly scaled flooding, the need to build adequate bridges over it, its central role

in economics, trade, and development, and the task of facilitating those activities by

modifying the river itself: these imperatives and others have straddled the line between

hubris and opportunity, between overextending the capability to manage the river and

taking advantage of the rewards of development and civilization that its unique qualities

provide. On another side, butted up against Lake Pontchartrain, New Orleans has a

similarly storied history of vulnerability to the effects of major hurricanes, often

exacerbated by the warming waters of the Gulf of Mexico and those very changes to the

Mississippi riverscape that development has brought. The effects of hurricanes on the

city, as was clearly evident during Katrina, come less from the massive winds and rain

than from storm surges and river swelling, both of which have the potential to cause

catastrophic flooding and infrastructural damage. Because of this dual threat,

development of the city since its first founding has been an exercise in engineering, from

a vast system of levees, to artificial channels, to houses built on stilts, to complicated

pumping stations designed to keep the land dry from flooding. From this perspective,

New Orleans is, and has always been, a city wrestling for stability within the environment

that sustains it.

Christopher Morris's thorough environmental history of the Mississippi Valley,

the narration of which is symptomatized by a repetitive return to the site of New Orleans

and the Mississippi Delta throughout, tells the story of the constant struggle for dry,

stable land. An extended engagement with Morris's book helps explain the structure of

the city's anxiety and serves as an initial representative of the anxious melancholic

rhetoric that appears in many of the chapter's subsequent examples. In *The Big Muddy:*

An Environmental History of the Mississippi and Its Peoples from Hernando de Soto to

Hurricane Katrina, Morris argues that Mississippi Valley living is best understood within

a dichotomous frame of wetness and dryness. He begins the book: "There are two

Mississippi Valleys. One is wet, the other dry. The river made the wet valley by flooding

it with dirty water and filling it with mud into dirt. The two valleys exist in uneasy

tension, the wet valley always ready to burst into the dry valley that holds it down."[79] The

juxtaposition of wet and dry is posited here as being constitutive of the Valley itself, an

inexorable coagulation of two extreme conditions of (de)hydration. In peaceful times, the

river sleeps within the confines of its banks, and plant and animal life thrive around it

unperturbed. In more violent ones, the river awakens, overtops its banks, and once more

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[79] Christopher Morris, *The Big Muddy: An Environmental History of the Mississippi and Its Peoples from Hernando de Soto to Hurricane Katrina* (London: Oxford University Press, 2012), 1.

consumes the dry land indiscriminately, only to leave behind an even greater quantity of sediment. Dry land here owes its existence to the river that deposited it. At the same time, however, it is also always under constant anticipation of inundation by that very same force. This figuration of wet and dry sets the stage for the rest of the book, which considers the relationship of European and American settlers to the river's dual forces and their attempts to dry the valley, a brief recounting of which is worthy of our consideration.

The book is organized roughly around a number of historical pivot points whose principal common thread is that "uneasy tension" between wet and dry. According to Morris, during the centuries predating European settlement, Native American tribes lived along the Mississippi from the Delta to the upper Midwest. Those in the north were more agricultural than those in the Valley because the land was more consistently dry, whereas those in the south lived primarily off the abundance of the land that its wetness provided. While there is some evidence of small agriculture in the south as well, and trade up and down the river existed, life for those in the south was a diverse combination of living according to the patterns of yearly flooding and adaptation to it (by, for instance, constructing giant earthen mounds on which to build). When the Spanish arrived in 1541 with the aims of conquest, they permanently disrupted the economy and political relations between various tribes along the river. Seeing the Valley as unfit for real agricultural settlement because of its wetness (grain, for them, was the mark of a truly strong empire), they never settled on a significant scale and were eventually driven out under a barrage of arrows.[80]

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[80] Morris, *The Big Muddy*, 9-23.

Thus, Morris locates the inaugural site of European settlement at the arrival of the

French to the Mississippi Delta in 1673, who were at first baffled by the unpredictability

of dry land there: "They did not understand it as an amorphous place of land and water.

Rather, they saw it as a set dry land that periodically flooded, a misconception that

caused no end of troubles as they tried to build on it."[81] As a result, the next forty to fifty

years consisted of a series of excursions, forts constructed and then abandoned, and many

failed efforts to reconcile their recalcitrant view that they could settle in a French way

with the lessons learned from the natives about how one survives in such an

environment—which, as Morris continuously reminds the reader, is fundamentally a

mixture of wet and dry. "The French did not come to Louisiana to place themselves at the

mercy of the natural environment, or its native populations," he writes. "They believed

themselves superior to both [and] planned to transform the lower valley environment into

a dry land suitable for French habitation."[82] And they did, constructing countless miles of

levees to protect crops and towns, clearing areas for settlement and, finally, selecting a

site for a port town as close to the Delta as feasibly possible. The land was cleared, and

the first buildings of New Orleans were constructed in 1718—only to be completely

flooded the next year, prompting founder Jean-Baptiste Le Moyne, Sieur de Bienville to

order the first levees to be constructed as a barrier between the river and the town. A

major hurricane destroyed two-thirds of the town in 1722. The town flooded again in

1724, this time leaving water for months—and so on.[83] Over the course of the eighteenth

century, the town grew into a city and, Morris notes, became drier and drier. Despite this,

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[81] Morris, *The Big Muddy*, 27.
[82] Morris, *The Big Muddy*, 45.
[83] Morris, *The Big Muddy*, 70-71.

during the nineteenth century, yellow fever ravaged the hot, wet city many times, claiming nearly 20,000 lives from 1853-1858, 7,848 of them in 1853 alone.[84] As New Orleans famously evolved into the mélange of cultures, languages, and races that idealized descriptions tend to glorify, inhabitants continued to technologize the land to keep the water out and the soil dry. (The most famous example and/or exception to this, of course, was during the Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 when wealthy whites dynamited a portion of the levee system to drain the river into Plaquemines and St. Bernard Parishes, both of which were poor and black, in order to prevent flooding in the wealthy, white sections of the city.)[85]

The central political claim of Morris's book is that this gradual and steady drying-out of New Orleans and the Mississippi Delta produced a host of environmental and social conditions whose logical conclusion was Hurricane Katrina. The technologization of the land and water have caused erosion that has decimated the coastline, natural marshlands that need seasonal flooding to exist have receded, intensifying the impact of storm surges, and the drying and compacting of the land is causing the city, slowly but surely, to sink farther below sea level. In the early eighteenth century, these measures prevented drainage when water *did* enter, stagnating into pools of sickness and decay. Today, technologization of the land has allowed development to spread into areas even more vulnerable to disaster and, as Katrina roundly demonstrated, these technologies have not kept pace with the very threats that they have intensified. This philosophy of development has appeared to paint New Orleans into a corner, rendering such a

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[84] George Augustin, *History of Yellow Fever* (New Orleans, 1909), 68.
[85] John M. Barry, *Rising Tide: The Great Mississippi Flood of 1927 and How it Changed America* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1998), 231.

philosophy an eco-technological *pharmakon*: a cure to the city's ailments that is also

poisonous to its very aims.[86]

Morris's recommended response to this dilemma is curative: allow nature to have

some of its nature back; learn to live with the water, not against it. Since the city clearly

cannot keep the Mississippi hypersomnic, and since New Orleans's struggle to shield

itself from the river exacerbates the river's effects, the answer is to allow The Big Muddy

its seasonal release, but in an anticipated and controlled way. Beginning with such a

premise, he argues, would necessitate building more houses on stilts, increasing

population density in the safer areas by upgrading existing buildings, constructing areas

that are designed to flood, and returning some of the most vulnerable land back to nature.

In Morris's final estimation,

> If New Orleans is to be sustained, it will be through a combination of water
>
> manipulation and water acceptance. Nature always takes its course. Repressed in
>
> one place, it returns somewhere else. City blocks abandoned since Katrina are
>
> rapidly reverting to impenetrable jungles like those [La Louisiane founder Pierre
>
> Le Moyne d']Iberville described over three centuries ago, thickets of saplings and
>
> vines harboring snakes, alligators, and small mammals, and shrouding the ruins of
>
> a city built in denial of nature.[87]

This assessment is nothing if not an analogue to psychoanalytic "working through," and

its logic is Freudian throughout. "Repressed in one place, it returns somewhere else," "a

city built in denial of nature," "*nature always takes its course*." Kristeva would recognize

this immediately as a metaphorization of the dialectic between the symbolic and the

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[86] Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 61-171.
[87] Morris, *The Big Muddy*, 219.

semiotic (discussed in greater depth in Chapter 3), that is, the dialectic between signification (the city) and the presymbolic *chōra*, here represented as the river itself and as nature in general. No matter how effectively the subject represses, the trauma of the unconscious always bursts forth. The key for Morris is to develop a strategy whereby the river's diluvial outbursts are acknowledged and lived with, rather than against. Morris's diagnosis of denial, the Freudian *Verleugnung*, is more accurately disavowal (the subject of Chapter 4) and displaces the anxiety over the city's dryness onto the technologies that purport to keep it dry.

However, a more careful reading of the book's own structure of anxiety reveals something absolutely fundamental to the framing of the city's dilemma. We may recall the book's opening sentences: "There are two Mississippi Valleys. One is wet, the other dry. The river made the wet valley by flooding it with dirty water and filling it with mud into dirt. The two valleys exist in uneasy tension, the wet valley always ready to burst into the dry valley that holds it down." Here we have a description of the Valley in its "nature," absent the presence of humans—and yet, still, there is an uneasy tension. One might surmise on the basis of Morris's own curative conclusion that there is in fact nothing "tense" about its existence at all: it is not only perfectly "natural," indeed, it is constitutive of the Valley itself.

Allowing the river to serve provisionally as a useful metaphor for the unconscious, this contradiction beckons the evolution of Freud's theorization of anxiety. His early essay on anxiety and phobia situates the former as an effect of what he calls "unemployed libido," the result of the ego's attempts to shield against primary anxieties developed in childhood:

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In phobias, for instance, two phases of the neurotic process can be clearly

distinguished. The first is concerned with repression and the changing of libido

into anxiety, which is then bound to an external danger. The second consists in the

erection of all the precautions and guarantees by means of which any contact can

be avoided with this danger, treated as it is like an external thing. Repression

corresponds to an attempt at flight by the ego from libido which is felt as a

danger. A phobia may be compared to an entrenchment against an external danger

which now represents the dreaded libido.[88]

In other words, repressive mechanisms "dam up"[89] the ideational content of dangerous

libidinal energy, which is then discharged as anxiety directed at a phobic object in what

Sarah Beardsworth calls "an economic process consequent on repression."[90] Repression

first, then anxiety. Later in his work, however, Freud places anxiety more squarely in the

everyday workings of the psyche. As Beardsworth notes, in this revised framework, "the

ego is the sole seat of anxiety. This means that dynamic factors now replace economic

factors in the investigation into the relation of anxiety and repression."[91] That is, Freud at

this point decides to theorize on the basis of ideational content rather than libidinal

energy which, according to Beardsworth, leads him to the conclusion that "it is not

repression that creates anxiety but anxiety that makes the repression."[92] Faced with the

perception of the threat of danger, anxiety-as-signal activates various defenses that work

to shield the ego from that danger. This process comports with both Morris's description

[88] Sigmund Freud, *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1966), 510.

[89] Freud, *Introductory Lectures*, 507; in the original source, he refers to a "damming-up" of libido.

[90] Sara Beardsworth, *Julia Kristeva: Psychoanalysis and Modernity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2004), 196.

[91] Beardsworth, *Julia Kristeva*, 197.

[92] Beardsworth, *Julia Kristeva*, 197.

of the central problem that New Orleans faces and his prescription to eliminate the hydraulic economy on which it is founded. More importantly, it allows the critic to read anxiety as a generalized function of discourse rather than as only the product of individualized repression.

This reversal also opens up the analysis of anxiety to defense mechanisms other than repression, including, in this case, melancholic displacement. Whereas taking Morris's analysis at the level of its argument—that New Orleans is "a city built in denial of nature"—leads to a diagnosis of repression, reading his prescription at the level of enunciation reframes the relationship between anxiety and its associated defenses as one of displacement. According to Morris, at the heart of the city's dilemma is its false belief that the real danger comes from the water outside the city's walls rather than from the technologies of development that produce the very distinction between inside and outside in the first place. The organization of this claim, framed as it is around the concept of denial, aligns directly with Freud's early theorization of anxiety and phobia: "The weakness of the defensive system in phobias lies, of course, in the fact that the fortress which has been so greatly strengthened towards the outside remains assailable from within. A projection outwards of the danger of libido can never succeed thoroughly."[93] Thus, the cure to this unworkable mentality is to effectively erase the distinction between inside and outside by redeveloping a city capable of being both wet and dry. On a technical level, this may very well work for New Orleans, and Morris provides a number of analogues throughout the world that have achieved such a feat with measurable success. However, that aforementioned little slip—the perception of an inherent "uneasy

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[93] Freud, *Introductory Lectures*, 510.

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tension" in the relationship between the wet and the dry—signals the work of melancholy. How so?

As Judith Butler explains in *The Psychic Life of Power*, melancholy, "the unfinished process of grieving,"[94] involves the incorporation of the lost object in the development of the ego. The loss of a loved object inaugurates a grieving process whereby the subject must somehow "let the object go." Freud, she argues, came to see the process of grief not through the detachment of a subject from the loved object but, rather, "he makes room for the notion that melancholic identification may be a *prerequisite* for letting the object go. . . . [changing] what it means to 'let an object go.'"[95] Rather than being de-cathected, which would represent a successful completion of mourning, the object is instead incorporated into the ego through identification with it:

> The lost object is, in that sense, made coextensive with the ego itself. Indeed, one might conclude that melancholic identification permits the loss of the object in the external world precisely because it provides a way to *preserve* the object as part of the ego and, hence, to avert the loss as complete loss. . . . not full abandonment of the object but transferring the status of the object from external to internal.[96]

Melancholy is therefore not simply unfinished grieving; the introjection of the abandoned object-cathexes, Freud argues, may well precipitate the character of the ego itself, which "contains the history of those object-choices."[97] The upshot of this process, he continues, is that the ego appeases its loss by way of likeness with the lost object which,

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[94] Judith Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power: Theories in Subjection* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997), 132.
[95] Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 134, italics in original.
[96] Butler, *The Psychic Life of Power*, 134, italics in original.
[97] Sigmund Freud, *The Ego and the Id*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton, 1960), 24.

desexualized by its incorporation, takes the form of a sublimation. What, then, is this lost object of New Orleans?

The tension between the wet and dry is no less than the characterization of a tension between the ideals of disorder and order, between the threat of the "disorderly" and the colonial desire to tame it, and the inhabitants of New Orleans have long held a reputation of transgression in this regard. As Shannon Lee Dawdy argues,

> With incredible rapidity following its founding by the French in 1718, New Orleans gained a reputation as a wild town and a colonial failure, a reputation that has endured. Its untamed nature was evident in the ways in which it veered away from the neat, civilized plans designed for the colony's economic development, social structure, and political order. By the 1720s writers were describing Louisiana as a failure and the French crown's reaction as one of "abandonment."[98]

Almost as soon as it was founded, New Orleans was declared a colonial failure, morally depraved and prone to disorder. Instead of the neat, orderly port city that the French had planned it out to be, the city became known for being unruly and ungovernable within just a few years of its founding. "It is hard to imagine how the reputation of any colony could overcome such fatalism," notes Dawdy.[99] Inextricably linked to French Enlightenment ideals of order and disorder, this fatalism infused the city's identity almost immediately, and the French crown all but abandoned hope for it nearly 40 years before they officially relinquished control of New Orleans to the Spanish following the Seven

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[98] Shannon Lee Dawdy, *Building the Devil's Empire: French Colonial New Orleans* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009), 2.
[99] Dawdy, *Building the Devil's Empire*, 26.

Years War. In fact, as early as 1720, just two years after the city was founded, arguments were made among the French elite that the failure of New Orleans could be attributed to two primary causes: first, "a particularly inhospitable province of Nature where flooding, disease, and heat sabotaged efforts to build a respectable community," and second, "a moral failure on the part of the French themselves."[100] The attempt to regularize nature and the attempt to regularize the social order—shot through as it was by slavery, poverty, social hierarchy, and cultural and racial difference—were inexorably linked in their logic. "The predominant image of New Orleans," argues Michael Bibler, "the very thing that the city has historically exploited because it is so appealing to tourists—is of a place defined as much by death and disorder as by its cultural difference from the rest of the nation."[101] "All travel accounts [of the time] agree that it was the *most different* American city," notes Gerald Capers.[102] Thus, from the beginning, the contingencies of failure not only involved the relationship between the wet and the dry, but also between *le grand* and *le petit*, the elite and the commoners. That this most often involved a racial coding goes without question, and it is from within this frame that the anxiety over failure must be read. The melancholy at the heart of post-Katrina New Orleans therefore stems not simply from the failure to contain the natural forces that threatened it, but also as a result of the historical incorporation of the loss of colonial order as an ideal.

In the context of New Orleans, then, anticipatory mourning takes on elements of both the anxious neurotic and the melancholic, and it is on the basis of this dynamic of displacement that the preconditions for Katrina's memory can be determined. In

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[100] Dawdy, *Building the Devil's Empire*, 45.
[101] Bibler, "Always the Tragic Jezebel," 8.
[102] Gerald M. Capers, *Occupied City: New Orleans Under the Federalists* (Lexington: University of Kentucky Press, 1965), 10, italics in original.

repeatedly staging the total destruction of New Orleans, this anxious narrativization

activates a pre-mourning process that prefigures post-Katrina memory objects by way of

incorporation. While Katrina was in many ways The Big One that residents and experts

knew would some day come, for New Orleans there will always be another, that

sweeping blow that will finally be recognized as having been *The* Big One. Before

examining these memory objects directly, I will now examine more closely the narratives

with which I began this chapter to define the parameters of this pre-Katrina anticipatory

loss and its sublimation into post-Katrina memory objects.

Hurricane Pam

On January 14, 2006, mere months after Katrina had battered New Orleans,

flooded the bowl, and ultimately, without adequate help from the federal government, left

many of its citizens either dead or indefinitely evacuated, the Committee on Homeland

Security and Governmental Affairs (HSGAC) held a hearing to assess the role that the

fictional Hurricane Pam had played in the preparations for a catastrophic hurricane in

New Orleans. In the opening statements to that hearing, Senator Susan Collins (R-ME)

makes a telling analogy: "As a dry run for the real thing, Pam should have been a wakeup

call that could not be ignored. Instead, it seems that a more appropriate name for Pam

would have been Cassandra, the mythical prophet who warned of disasters but whom no

one really believed."[103] The basis for the analogy is that, despite the uncanny similarities

between the details of the simulation and the details of the actual storm, the disastrous

governmental response from local to federal levels and the actual effects of Hurricane

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[103] U.S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, *Preparing for a Catastrophe: The Hurricane Pam Exercise*, 109th Cong., 2nd sess., January 24, 2006, 2.

Katrina mirrored the projected effects of Hurricane Pam in nearly every way except fatalities. If, she implies, the purpose of Pam was to predict the tragedy precisely to plan for and mitigate against its consequences, and given that the conditions of both were so strikingly similar, why, then, were those effects still so disastrous?

The trouble with Collins's analogy between Pam and Cassandra, however, is that everyone believed Pam. In fact, the premise of this particular hearing was to determine, first, why the exercises had not been completed in a timelier fashion and, second, exactly why and how their insights were not acted upon, at all levels of government, such that many of the failures of Katrina could have been avoided. In one of the most interesting portions of the hearing on that day, both Sean Fontenot, a Louisiana State preparedness official, and Madhu Beriwal, IEM President and CEO, describe the uniqueness of Pam in this regard. As Fontenot notes, "From the word 'go,' it was understood that this was not a typical exercise. . . . Usually, you write a plan and then have an exercise."[104] Pam was the direct opposite: a specific scenario was posited, and then a plan was devised in accordance with that scenario. Beriwal, elaborating on the rationale for this approach, testifies that "The intent of Hurricane Pam was to create a plan for a catastrophic event, a specific event. . . the intent was to create a sense of reality. When we were working with this project, we were trying to describe a worst case but plausible event. That is the slogan that we had."[105] While it remained up to IEM to craft a specific catastrophe scenario for planning purposes, the guiding metrics of reality and plausibility signal a preexisting standard against which its details would be measured. A news release

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[104] *Preparing for Catastrophe*, 11.
[105] *Preparing for Catastrophe*, 16.

published directly after the exercise affirms this interpretation.[106] This recalls Derrida's

nuclear-age insistence that deterrence, for all its reliance on the technological means of

mutually assured destruction, also relies upon both the rhetorical performance of belief in

that outcome and "the rhetorical simulation of a text."[107] While not apocalyptic, *per se*, it

remains the case that one of the rhetorical functions of Hurricane Pam was to perform

believability through an appeal to realism, as well as to produce a simulation in the hope

that it might act as a substitute. "Instead," Collins laments, "Pam became Katrina. The

simulation became reality. And optimism became the awful truth. We were not

prepared."[108] Katrina could never have been other than, in the words of Senator Joe

Lieberman (D-CT), "the storm people in the Gulf Coast had always feared, the storm

people knew would hit one day, the storm they actually practiced for in the Hurricane

Pam exercise that is the topic of today's hearing."[109] By implication, part of Gulf Coast

existence is living within that logic of not if, but when.

What is remarkable about the Hurricane Pam exercise is that, despite this logic, its

entire framework is organized around the assumption that the levees would hold. The

details of this assumption are telling. Just days after the levees broke, the chief of

engineers for the U.S. Army Corps. of Engineers denied a failure on the part of the

existing levees. In short, he argued, the levees were always designed for a Category 3

hurricane, not a Category 4 or 5. "It was fully recognized by officials," he said, "that we

had Category Three level of protection. As projections of Category Four and Five were

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[106] FEMA, "Hurricane Pam Exercise Concludes," July 23, 2004, https://www.fema.gov/news-release/2004/07/23/hurricane-pam-exercise-concludes
[107] Derrida, "No Apocalypse," 24.
[108] *Preparing for Catastrophe*, 2.
[109] *Preparing for Catastrophe*, 3.

made, [officials] began plans to evacuate the city."[110] Pam may well have been designed

as a Category 3 precisely to support that assumption. And yet, despite the fact that

Katrina did not technically hit New Orleans directly, despite the fact that its force

matched almost precisely the projections that Pam laid out, and despite the fact that

Katrina was actually a Category 3 at the time of landfall, this argument inexplicably takes

the most central assumption of Pam as its locus of deniability. Indeed, the very first page

of the SLCH report, which begins with a section on "unwatering" the bowl, makes clear

the premise: "For the purpose of this plan it is assumed there are no levee breeches [*sic*].

This is the worst case situation." Furthermore, "much other response and recovery

activity depends on the successful unwatering of bowls, at least to the +2[-]foot

elevation."[111] By implication, failure to unwater the bowl—and, in the case of Katrina,

the massive underestimation of the scale of the bowl's watering—would render the rest

of the report of limited practical value. Thus, what is most remarkable about Pam is not

simply that it dismisses the possibility of levee failure, but rather that this dismissal is the

condition on which all the details of effective response specifically rely.

As an exception, "the element with no place in the structure,"[112] levee failure is

the central anxiety that animates the entire SLCH Functional Plan. In beginning with a

catastrophe and then developing a plan, rather than the more typical inverse, Hurricane

Pam did not so much simulate the potential realities of The Big One; instead, it organized

and limited the parameters of the event in advance. As FEMA Response Operation

Branch Chief Wayne Fairley testified, "The project did not result in a catastrophic

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[110] Brian Handwerk, "New Orleans Levees Not Built for Worst Case Events," *National Geographic News*, September 2, 2005, https://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2005/09/0902_050902_katrina_levees.html
[111] Innovative Emergency Management, *Southeast Louisiana*, 1.
[112] Slavoj Žižek, *The Parallax View* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2009), 30.

planning document per se, but rather a *framework* for developing such a plan."[113] It

attempted to freeze the event within a set of conditions that could be planned against but,

in so doing, inadvertently named the exception without which those plans became flimsy.

It is only in this sense that Senator Collins is correct in saying that "Pam became

Katrina," that "simulation became reality." If Pam was the "realistic" simulation of The

Big One that its inverted logic purported it to be, then the actualization of the fantasy of

The Big One would require the very contingency of failure that it dismissed. Homeland

Security Official Jesse St. Amant recognized this when he testified, "You build a 20-foot

levee, Mother Nature will give you a 25-foot storm surge. . . . [W]e can blame everything

and his brother for what has happened, but the fact of the matter is . . . we knew in this

business that this was coming. We tried to say the words, this is coming, time and

again."[114] Failure, in other words, was anxiously assumed from the start.

Washing Away

　　The Times-Picayune's "Washing Away" series takes this assumption to heart,

describing in vivid detail what such failure would look like. The first installment, entitled

"In Harm's Way," frames the entire series by first recounting two major hurricanes in

1856 and 1909 and articulating them to Louisianan identity. Both of these storms, it tells

us, impacted Louisiana resident Claire Rose Champagne's ancestors, sometimes at the

cost of their lives. Although the family moved 30 miles inland after the first hurricane,

"there was no escape from the storms, which have followed the family inland for over

five generations." Even today, Claire and her family have accepted that life in Southern

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[113] *Preparing for Catastrophe*, 8, italics added.
[114] *Preparing for Catastrophe*, 14.

Louisiana is in no small part a life governed by the rhythm of seasonal hurricanes. "Hurricanes are a common heritage for Louisiana residents," the introduction assesses, "who until the past few decades had little choice in facing a hurricane but to ride it out and pray." The report then systematically lays out the dilemma that Morris and others have also outlined: the development of technologies that provide protections against these storms have made the coast "more vulnerable to hurricanes, not less."[115] As it progresses, the scope of this section quickly narrows to New Orleans itself, and for the remainder of the special report never quite leaves. Whatever larger effects development has had on the Gulf Coast as a whole, those effects are profoundly amplified when it comes to New Orleans.

Rather than dismissing levee failure, the purpose of "Washing Away" is precisely to not only assume failure of all kinds and imagine subsequently disastrous effects, but also to attempt to imagine a "megadisaster" in New Orleans whose scale is bigger than anything the nation had yet seen. In attempting this, it repeatedly places touchstones of disaster and failure in both New Orleans and throughout the world. For instance, in anticipating the pumping crisis that The Big One might initiate, it turns to a 1947 hurricane to describe water levels, 1965's Hurricane Betsy to measure pumping capabilities, and the 1900 hurricane in Galveston, TX that literally washed the city away and prompted the island on which it was built to be raised 7 feet. At various points, in describing everything from logistical response strategies to changes in disaster policy, the report cites numerous hurricanes, earthquakes, tsunamis, wildfires, and floods around the world to illustrate exactly the stakes of disaster in New Orleans. The last sentence of this

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[115] John McQuaid, "Washing Away: In Harm's Way," *The Times-Picayune*, June 23, 2002, http://www.nola.com/environment/index.ssf/2002/06/in_harms_way.html

first section paints a bleak apocalyptic scenario for New Orleans: "Without extraordinary measures, key ports, oil and gas production, one of the nation's most important fisheries, the unique bayou culture, the historic French Quarter and more are at risk of being swept away in a catastrophic hurricane or worn down by smaller ones."[116] The reference to "smaller ones" appears as more than lip service to the regularization of living with hurricanes in the city, however, because the report immediately turns to the next section, "The Big One."

Fairly straightforward in its logic in the first—development has increased risk generally—the second installment of the report introduces the spectral presence that animates it throughout. Its subtitle signals the contradictory logic at the heart of The Big One: "It's a matter of when, not if. Eventually a major hurricane will hit New Orleans head on, instead of being just a close call. It's happened before and it'll happen again."[117] Below the subtitle is an image of the aftermath of Hurricane Georges (1998). In it, a child stands among the wreckage of what can only be presumed to have been a lakeside house. Angled roughly parallel to the coast, the perspective of the photo affords a view of a decimated waterline reduced to battered structures and debris. And yet, the report notes, Georges was a near miss that "measured the slender margin separating the city from mass destruction." The routine occurrence of major hurricanes in the Gulf Coast may be just another part of life on the Coast, but in New Orleans there looms a Big One, the one that jeopardizes the city itself, the one for which Pam owes its very existence, and "officials say that right now, nothing can stop 'the big one.'"[118] The indeterminacy between routine

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[116] McQuiad, "In Harm's Way."
[117] John McQuaid, "Washing Away: The Big One," *The Times-Picayune*, June 24, 2002, http://www.nola.com/environment/index.ssf/2002/06/the_big_one.html
[118] McQuaid, "The Big One."

and singular marks this anticipation as anxiety: although "it's happened before," The Big One's singular tense defines its singularity as event. Not if, but when.

This section of "Washing Away" then turns to Joseph Suhayda, an oceanographer who developed computer simulations of the storm, to narrate a technical description of The Big One that rivals portions of the SLCH report. Suhayda describes a "worst case" scenario of a hurricane approaching "from due south of the city." With the help of Suhayda, the special report narrates the movement of the hurricane, the rising water levels, and the overtopping and perhaps even failure of the levees. "There would be no stopping or slowing it," Suhayda says, "pumping systems would be overwhelmed and submerged within a matter of hours." As the narration, too, breaches the levees and enters the city, the descriptions become even more vivid:

> As the floodwaters invade and submerge neighborhoods, the wind will be blowing at speeds of at least 155 mph at ground level, accompanied by shorter gusts of as much as 200 mph, meteorologists say, enough to overturn cars, uproot trees and toss people around like dollhouse toys. . . . Ninety percent of the structures in the city are likely to be destroyed. . . Amid this maelstrom, the estimated 200,000 or more people left behind in an evacuation will be struggling to survive.

After the storm, the water and food necessary for such survival will have been contaminated by both the storm and the wildlife also struggling for survival. These conditions become a breeding ground for disease and other illness. "The Big One" closes by citing a public health expert at the LSU School of Medicine in New Orleans: "History repeats itself. . . My office overlooks one of the St. Louis cemeteries, where there are many graves of victims of yellow fever. Standing water in the subtropics is the breeding

ground for mosquitoes."[119] Bookended by the tragedies of New Orleans's past, "The Big One" is an imagination of the city's destruction and, unlike Pam, relies directly on the contingencies of failure that render it thinkable.

The penultimate section of the report, "Tempting Fate," uses numerous images of the destruction wrought by Hurricane Andrew to frame the central political argument of the entire series, that irresponsible development has created "a new era" of mass destruction. On nearly every page of this section, details of the heightened risks that development has spurred are accompanied by requisite images of exploded houses, messy tangles of debris, downed trees, and entirely flattened neighborhoods. While the scope of this section widens to include megadisasters across the nation, its logic rests firmly on the anxiety that Morris argues characterized New Orleans from the beginning: "As people have tried to tame nature by building homes, redirecting water, suppressing fires and reshaping coastlines, they have disrupted or blocked natural processes. But you can't just lock nature in place, and these measures have accelerated cycles of destruction in unpredictable and dangerous ways." Flanked by images of ruin, these warnings not only make the case for not if, but when; they also prefigure the landscape of New Orleans in the aftermath of The Big One. In so doing, they also shape the memory practices of the city post-Katrina.

The endlessly repeated narratives of The Big One, as well as the retrospective assessments of why those narratives failed to prevent what was known to be imminent, must be read as iterative performances of an anxious pre-mourning process. Insofar as one understands The Big One as not merely the hurricane itself, which was anticipated

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[119] McQuaid, "The Big One."

and predicted with horrifying accuracy, but rather as the contingencies of failure that retroactively define it, The Big One enters the realm of what Donald Rumsfeld famously called the "known unknowns," the things we know that we do not know.[120] While Slavoj Žižek has argued persuasively that disbelief in the possibility of ecological catastrophe has largely guided the lack of inaction to prepare for it (for him, "unknown knowns," or unconscious disavowal),[121] this has never been the case in narratives of The Big One. If "unknown knowns" represent the unconscious, "known unknowns" can be serviceably translated as anxiety. I have argued that this anxiety and the discourse that marks it prefigured Katrina's memory. On one level, they create the conditions whereby the HSGAC hearing can retroactively name Katrina as The Big One in the first place. On another, however, they prefigure the very rhetorical form of melancholic mourning within the specific object domain within which public memory studies normally operates. It is to this domain that I now turn.

Post-Katrina's Memory Objects

Critics and scholars studying New Orleans have long addressed the question of memory in the aftermath. At regular intervals in its 300-year history, major catastrophes have left in their wakes the question of abandonment: to rebuild the city or not? As Ari Kelman summarizes it, "[s]hould a place like New Orleans, in so dangerous a location, be reconstructed, especially given the costs and the likelihood (or near-certainty) that the

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[120] Donald Rumsfeld, "Department of Defense News Briefing," *U.S. Department of Defense*, February 12, 2002, http://archive.defense.gov/Transcripts/Transcript.aspx?TranscriptID=2636
[121] Slavoj Žižek, "Joe Public v the Volcano," *New Statesman*, April, 29, 2010, https://www.newstatesman.com/environment/2010/05/essay-nature-catastrophe

next disaster is not a matter of if but when?"[122] Like Morris, Kelman recognizes

existential anxiety as part of the city's character. However, he ups the historical ante by

reading it as not only a product of an originary tension between nature and development,

but also as the necessary capacity to forget in order to recover:

> New Orleans has a horrible disaster history. The city, it might seem, hardly
>
> finishes counting bodies before the next tragedy strikes. Katrina, I think, will
>
> become just one more chapter in that long saga. Epidemics, fires, floods, and
>
> hurricanes: after each visitation, the city has picked itself up and rebuilt, largely
>
> because of an uncanny ability to forget past tragedies and ignore the next one
>
> lurking around the corner. New Orleans changes after grappling with disaster, to
>
> be sure. But it's a resilient place, practiced in the art of recovery and forgetting.[123]

Kelman's book serves as a testament to this claim, though perhaps in more ways than he

intends. Originally published in 2003, the book details the history of the riverfront in

New Orleans through a socioeconomic historical lens, demonstrating the various ways in

which manipulation of and control over the river's banks have shaped the relationships

between the cityscape, nature, capital, class, and public space. Traced across each era of

its history, New Orleans is understood as a center of capitalistic opportunity whose

existence is not only a product of its ability to reach a forceful equilibrium with "nature,"

as Morris argues, but also is reliant on a calculus that determines whether in any given

case that equilibrium will be a profitable one. Read through such a lens, the city's

resilience is framed less as an art of forgetting and more as a matter of economic

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[122] Ari Kelman, *A River and Its City: The Nature of Landscape in New Orleans* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), xiii.
[123] Kelman, *A River and Its City*, xii.

advantage. However, the above quote appears in the preface to the paperback edition, published in 2006. In it, Kelman recalls laying in bed the night of the storm, "thinking that the city had dodged another bullet. This storm, though massive and powerful, wasn't going to be New Orleans's 'big one,' the killer hurricane that some day would make its way directly up the Mississippi River or over Lake Pontchartrain, dumping a massive storm surge on the city."[124] "Some day," rather than "someday": not some indeterminate time in the future, but a single, apocalyptic day to come. This would lead the reader to believe that, after the levees broke, after images of the drowned began circulating, after the horrific (though sometimes false) stories of conditions inside the Superdome spread, and even after the administration acknowledged its failure to respond adequately, Katrina would indeed have been The Big One foretold by popular and institutional mythos. Yet, Kelman's conclusion is that, in the final analysis, the memory of Katrina will be both a remembering and a forgetting, that it will be slotted into the long list of catastrophes that merely precede the next inevitable tragedy. The ambivalence sensed in this regard, that, for Kelman, Katrina both was and wasn't The Big One, functions as evidence that the city's ability to forget in order to recover is perhaps an overstated hypothesis. It is a far more tenable conclusion that the repeated narrativization of The Big One overdetermines the memory of Katrina such that not even the cold calculus of capital can adequately accomplish this forgetting.

Michael Bibler's examination of *Jezebel*, a 1938 film about the aforementioned 1853 yellow fever epidemic in New Orleans, demonstrates exactly this point. Rewatching the film post-Katrina, he recounts being "surprised and frightened" at the parallels

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[124] Kelman, *A River and Its City*, ix.

between the film's scenes and the 24-hour news coverage of Katrina: "As I watched the film wind to its conclusion, I began to realize: the film wasn't depicting something analogous to Katrina as much as it was almost *predicting* Katrina."[125] The film's depictions of the racial and economic factors at work in the ability to evacuate the city, the quarantining of the city and the official orders to shoot anyone trying to escape, the fumbling actions of city officials to prevent and respond to the epidemic; these and other scenes appear to do more than simply fantasize about how a major natural disaster scenario would play out in New Orleans. They appear to predict it—*almost*. Rather than giving into this conclusion, Bibler articulates it to the fantasy of a "perpetually doomed southern city" and instead argues that "we can view much of the discourse from Katrina's aftermath as having been shaped by a centuries-long American perception that New Orleans is destined for a tragic ending—a myth that the city itself has done little to dispel."[126] The film's title, *Jezebel*, sheds additional light on the "uneasy tension" that symptomatizes Morris's final conclusion. Jezebel: "the city that is always headed toward destruction because of its decadence, its anti-modernity, and for many, its blackness."[127] In this frame, *Jezebel*, Hurricane Pam, "Washing Away," and the many other narratives organized by the specter of New Orleans's "tragic ending," however pragmatic their motivations, all participate in an anxious melancholic rhetoric that prefigures the memory of Katrina and other manifestations of The Big One going forward.

Consider first the example that inaugurates this dissertation: The Hurricane Katrina Memorial. (Figure 1) The rhetorical form of the memorial demonstrates the

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[125] Bibler, "Always the Tragic Jezebel," 7, italics in original.
[126] Bibler, "Always the Tragic Jezebel," 8.
[127] Bibler, "Always the Tragic Jezebel," 25.

coextensivity of the city and its hurricane. Nestled between Cypress Grove Cemetery and St. Patrick Cemeteries Nos. 1 and 2, in a potter's field currently known as Charity Hospital Cemetery, the hurricane-shaped construction whose rain bands are made partly of the unknown and forgotten dead is situated firmly in a place of public memory. The layers of the rain bands metaphorize precisely the anxiety that has always characterized the city: the innermost concrete sidewalks are surrounded by the outermost layer, two mirrored arcs of trees that engulf the site completely. The city on the inside, nature on the outside. Between these two, distributed across six mausoleums, lie the known unknown, nameless and forgotten casualties pressed between concrete and earth. Indeed, at the center of the eye of the storm is mounted a black granite stone, which explains:

> Most of the deceased were identified and buried by loved ones in private ceremonies throughout the nation. Here lie the remaining. The unclaimed and unidentified victims of the storm from the New Orleans area. Some have been forgotten, some remain unknown.
>
> This memorial is dedicated to these individuals and to all who suffered or died during Hurricane Katrina. Let the victims here forever remind us of those harrowing days and the long struggle to rebuild our city. Let their final resting place call us to constant preparedness. Let their souls join into an eternal chorus, singing with the full might of the indomitable spirit of New Orleans.

Sheltered within the epideictic spirit of this inscription is the deliberative appeal to "constant preparedness," a reminder that The Big One is merely an anticipation that is, to channel Derrida once more, "*fabulously textual*, through and through."[128] While the

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[128] Derrida, "No Apocalypse," 23, italics in original.

outward purpose of the site is to honor the dead, the status of the dead within it is a

reminder that, still, it is a not a matter of if, but when. Acting as the levee between the

concrete inside and the natural outside, between the dry and the wet, the forgotten and the

unknown are combined in this space, quite literally incorporated into its construction.

There is perhaps no product of anxious melancholic rhetoric more apt than the co-

entombment of the forgotten and the known unknown. In this capacity, the memorial

positions them carefully within of a process of mourning already anticipated, already

sublimated. Here, the forgotten/unknown are the contingencies of failure, exceptional in

the fullest sense, and are thus emblematic of the indomitable spirit of New Orleans.
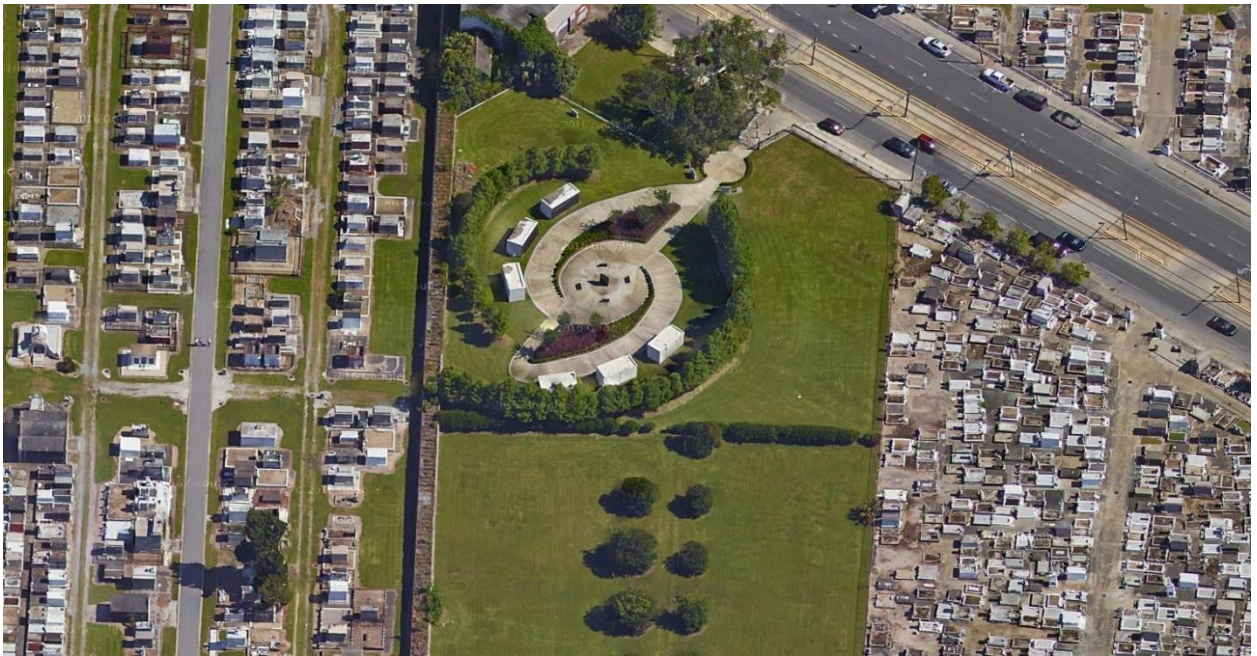
Figure 1: Satellite view of the Hurricane Katrina Memorial in New Orleans (Copyright
Google Maps, 2018)

Another popular memory practice that emerged after the storm was the

organization of bus tours that surveyed affected areas. Buses filled with tourists regularly

drove the streets of New Orleans that were the hardest hit by the hurricane and flooding.

"In fact," writes Lynnell Thomas, "by 2007 just about every tour company, across a

broad spectrum of tourism genres, was offering some type of Hurricane Katrina-related tour."[129] The tours became immediately controversial as busloads of what Phaedra Pezzullo would recognize as "toxic tourists"[130] rolled into ravaged neighborhoods—the residents of which were often still actively cleaning up their properties—snapped photos, and moved on. By design these tours do not typically involve tourists exiting the buses and thus institute yet another barrier between dry and wet. Many residents in these places, who were predominantly poor and black, felt that their misery and misfortune was being exploited and spectated, further highlighting the racial and economic divides that make up much of the city's history. Even more to the point, as Thomas notes, "whereas pre-Katrina city tours strategically circumnavigated the city to avoid most historically and predominantly African American neighborhoods, post-Katrina tours consistently remapped tourist New Orleans to include African American spaces in the Upper and Lower Ninth Wards, parts of New Orleans East and Gentilly, and the Tremé."[131] Whereas before The Big One, the racial poverty and inequality that have always undergirded disaster outcomes and policy in the South[132] remained out of the frame of reference in memory practices (in this city associated as well with colonial disorder and ungovernability), in post-Katrina memory practices they enter the frame directly.

These tours allowed spectators to document the city's ruin, to produce their own photos striking in similarity to the ones "Washing Away" includes in its imaginative warnings. The tours enact a mnemic voyeurism, a documentation of the aftermath of The

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[129] Lynnell Thomas, *Desire and Disaster in New Orleans: Tourism, Race, and Historical Memory* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2014), 131.

[130] Phaedra C. Pezzulo, *Toxic Tourism: Rhetorics of Pollution, Travel, and Environmental Justice* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2009).

[131] Thomas, *Desire and Disaster*, 131.

[132] Mark M. Smith, *Camille, 1969: Histories of a Hurricane* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 21-35.

Big One that reproduces the images that anticipated it. Articulated to the necrophilic

tourist economy for which New Orleans is known in the modern era, these tours, too, rely

on the contingencies of failure on which Katrina's memory rests. As Bibler notes, New

Orleans "is the only U.S. city, with the possible exception of Washington, D.C., where

cemeteries are a major tourist destination." Linking this directly to the post-Katrina bus

tours, he hazards a suggestion that New Orleans's status as "the 'Necropolis of the South'

may be making a comeback." [133] As I have argued, this reputation has perhaps never left,

but rather has been displaced into a continuous anticipation of its destruction. After

Katrina, this anticipation transforms into fascination and "give[s] rise to a symbolic work

of mourning" that involves "monumentalization, archivization and *work on the*

remainder, work of the remainder."[134] As the "Necropolis of the South," however, the

spectatorship and archivization of death and disorder in New Orleans is no more and no

less than the incorporation of the lost ideals of colonial order and the desire to master

both nature and cultural difference.

It is only after Katrina that Kelman accedes to the melancholic premise of "The

Big One." Whereas in his original analysis, development in New Orleans progresses

despite a clear knowledge that the city was particularly prone to disaster, after Katrina he

reformulates this thesis to claim that development in New Orleans progresses *because of*

its environmental and social vulnerability, "*because of* an uncanny ability to forget past

tragedies and ignore the next one lurking around the corner."[135] Neither "forget" nor

"ignore" are perhaps quite the right words, however, as I hope to have shown in this

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[133] Bibler, "Always the Tragic Jezebel," 9.
[134] Derrida, "No Apocalypse," 28, italics in original.
[135] Kelman, *A River and Its City*, xii, italics added.

chapter. Indeed, the dialectic between remembering and forgetting that I have argued animates public memory is what makes possible the notion that New Orleans can incorporate its lost object, all the while anxiously forecasting its own demise, over and over again.

Indeed, at the very moment of my writing this, *The Times-Picayune* just published yet another special report entitled "Our Drowning Coast." Focusing mainly on environmental factors rather than strictly developmental ones, the parallels between it and "Washing Away" are striking. "This year, New Orleans celebrates its 300th birthday," it informs. "Whether it will see 400 is no sure thing." As the report summarizes the post-Katrina infrastructure that federal, state, and local governments spent more than $20 billion on, it notes that these protections are probably not nearly enough, given the environment surrounding the city and the stakes of another Big One. The Army Corps of Engineers, in fact, no longer considers this system a "hurricane protection system," opting instead to call it a "hurricane and storm damage risk reduction system." The author ruminates, "How this came to be is a story of money and politics and, perhaps, a degree of Louisiana fatalism."[136]

It remains the case that a condition of this fatalism is in part the unrealized dream of colonial order, both environmental and social, and the anxiety of the great southern doomed city is its manifestation. While on more celebratory days, tourists mill up and down Bourbon Street with Hurricanes (a cocktail of rum, fruit juice, and grenadine) in hand and locals taunt imminent storms with hurricane parties, in more anxious ones, they

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[136] Mark Schleifstein, "Fortified but Still in Peril, New Orleans Braces for its Future: Our Drowning Coast," *The Times-Picayune*, February 24, 2018, http://www.nola.com/expo/erry-2018/02/5faf9d21ca/our_drowning_coast_fortified_b.html

tell the story of their own city's demise. Given the melancholic temporality of these

narratives, it is impossible to define public memory of Katrina outside of them and the

ways in which they are displaced into its memory objects. Far from letting go of the

traumas that failure produced during the event, they incorporate a much greater failure,

one that is defined as much by the initial frustrations with New Orleans's disorderly

character as by the anxiety of its contingencies.

CHAPTER 3

HURRICANE KATRINA AND THE *CHŌRIC* OBJECT OF RHETORICAL STUDIES

Introduction

In the midst of what major media outlets called the "chaos"[137] of immediately

post-Katrina New Orleans, Mayor C. Ray Nagin gave a radio interview during which the

depth of his frustration at the federal government was overshadowed only by another,

more telling frustration: his eventual inability to fully capture this sentiment through

language. In his now infamous WWL-AM870 radio interview on September 1, 2005, he

blasts the federal government for a laggardly and seemingly apathetic response, telling

them, "*Now get off your asses* and let's do something, and let's fix the *biggest* goddamn

crisis in the *history* of this country."[138] The extant recording of the interview lasts for

roughly twelve minutes, covers a range of topics that primarily circles back to lack of

federal response, and includes a smattering of angry and unreserved appeals. The

interview comes to a close as Nagin says, "The City of New Orleans will never be the

same [five second pause] in this time [fifteen second pause]." WWL host Garland

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[137] See, for example: Sam Coats and Dan Eggen, "A City of Despair and Lawlessness," *The Washington Post*, September 2, 2005, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/01/AR2005090100533.html; Scott Benjamin, "Some N.O. Chaos Fact or Fiction?" *CBS News*, September 28, 2005, http://www.cbsnews.com/news/some-no-chaos-fact-or-fiction/; John Burnett, "More Stories Emerge of Rapes in Post-Katrina Chaos," *NPR Morning Edition*, December 21, 2005, http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=5063796

[138] C. Ray Nagin, interview by Garland Robinette, WWL-AM870, September 1, 2005. In my transcription of the audio recording of this interview, I indicate inflection and rhythm through graphic means, as opposed to the heavily edited, ironed-out transcripts found online. I encourage readers to listen to the interview for themselves, which can be found in various internet archives. See, for instance, https://archive.org/details/WWL_Radio_Interview_New_Orleans_Mayor_Ray_Nagin_.

Robinette sniffs quietly several times during this unfilled period, attempts to craft

something meaningful to say, and Nagin finally signs off with a curt, "I gotta go,"

followed by the click of disconnection.[139] The interview went viral the next day, and the

federal response was thenceforth swift and decisive—and decisively out of line with

Bush's longstanding commitment to local and state readiness procedures. While not

immune from criticism before the interview, by September 3 the Bush administration

faced a barrage of it. The "laundry list"[140] of *en route* supplies that Bush proudly rattled

off the day before the interview quickly evolved, two days later, into a brief Rose Garden

address in which he acknowledged "unacceptable" results without actually taking

responsibility.[141] Despite this ambivalence, a slew of news articles published the same

day quoted Bush as if he had, in fact, held his administration's readiness policies

accountable.[142]

At the level of public discourse, however, Bush's flyover of New Orleans and the

image of the president gazing out of the window of Air Force One, not the interview,

retroactively functioned as the moment at which federal disaster response and relief

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[139] Nagin, "Interview."
[140] "Waiting for a Leader," Editorial, *The New York Times*, September 1, 2005, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/01/opinion/01thu1.html; See also, "Bush Launches Huge Relief Effort; Disease, Pollution Loom as Problems," *Buffalo News*, September 1, 2005, LexisNexis.
[141] George W. Bush, "President Addresses Nation, Discusses Hurricane Katrina Relief Efforts," September 3, 2005, *The White House*, http://georgewbush-whitehouse.archives.gov/news/releases/2005/09/20050903.html
[142] "Bush Tours Stricken States, Says Relief Falls Short: President Signs $10.5 Billion 'Down Payment Relief Bill," *NBC News*, September 2, 2005, http://www.nbcnews.com/id/9157866/ns/us_news-katrina_the_long_road_back/t/bush-tours-stricken-states-says-relief-falls-short/#.U0qqVfldV8E; Peter Baker, "An Embattled Bush Says 'Results are Not Acceptable,'" *The Washington Post*, September 3, 2005, http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2005/09/02/AR2005090200965.html; Elisabeth Bumiller, "Promises by Bush Amid the Tears," *The New York Times*, September 3, 2005, http://www.nytimes.com/2005/09/03/national/nationalspecial/03bush.html?pagewanted=all&_r=0

officially failed.[143] Why was this the case? A reconceptualization of the object domain of rhetorical criticism and a critical heuristic for reading it is requisite to answering this question. Indeed, it will be my suggestion that a close reading of Nagin's discourse is precisely that which explains the force of Bush's flyover in the popular imaginary. That is to say, the question to be answered is: What was it about Nagin's discourse that provided the conditions for its own erasure and the evolution of Bush's in popular retellings of the story? In short, how to read the displacement and its effects? In the reading of Nagin's speech to follow, my principal aim is to begin to outline a different approach and, subsequently, to demonstrate the difference it makes for the stories we tell about both rhetoric's production and its political effects.

In accomplishing this aim, I first consider recent debates over critical object domains both within and outside of rhetorical studies. Drawing upon Julia Kristeva's early work, I then advocate for a turn to a particular understanding of *chōra:*[144] the name of a "space" of generation that nevertheless has no positive existence. Integrating this conception of *chōra* into rhetorical analysis, I argue, positions critics in provisional relation to an unsanctioned, yet consequential, object of rhetorical study. Finally, I tender a reading of Nagin's post-Katrina radio interview. Over its course, I suggest: first, in arguing that the *chōric* function of Nagin's interview simultaneously spurred political change and displaced the appearance of having done so; second that, if rhetorical studies is to avoid remaining complicit with the politics of such displacement, scholars attend

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[143] See, for instance, Kate Andersen Brower and Catherine Dodge, "Bush Says New Orleans Flyover After Katrina a `Huge Mistake,'" November 5, 2010, http://www.bloomberg.com/news/2010-11-05/bush-calls-new-orleans-flyover-in-wake-of-hurricane-katrina-huge-mistake-.html

[144] Throughout this essay, following Jacques Derrida I will be omitting the article "the" before *chōra,*. Doing so keeps evident the notion that *chōra* is a retroactively constituted "space" of reinvention. Jacques Derrida, *On the Name*, ed. Thomas Dutoit, trans. David Wood, John P. Leavey, Jr., and Ian McLeod (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 89-127.

carefully not only to what counts as rhetorical, but also to those objects that do not count but nevertheless function rhetorically. Reconsidering the object domain of rhetorical studies in this way not only opens up new objects for study, but also accounts for how they might function outside of already established narratives.

The displacement of Nagin's interview raises the question of what characterizes an appropriate rhetorical object. This question, no less than a constitutive line of inquiry for the field of rhetorical studies, has succeeded in challenging, legitimating, extending, and upheaving accepted rhetorical objects with dramatic disciplinary effect.[145] However, preoccupation with these questions is also a symptom of another dynamic: while the objects themselves have shifted greatly, quite often along a vector of inclusivity, our relationship to them and our understanding of their production as objects has shifted far less. If shifting objects continue to fulfill the need for flexible theories of rhetoric capable of explaining and recognizing the "speech" of the other and how it functions, theorizing our relationship with them changes the terms of the object question by arguing that this narrative of metamorphosis is already the symptom of a closed understanding of "object." Approached in this way, for rhetorical studies objects are neither simply added to the storehouse of "texts" appropriate for study, nor are they a part of a simple (even if non-teleological) emergence-change-disappearance narrative.

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[145] See, for instance: Donald C. Bryant, "Some Problems of Scope and Method in Rhetorical Scholarship," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 23, no. 2 (1937): 182–89; Stephen E. Lucas, "The Renaissance of American Public Address: Text and Context in Rhetorical Criticism," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 74, no. 2 (1988): 241–60; Barbara A. Biesecker, "Coming to Terms with Recent Attempts to Write Women into the History of Rhetoric," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 25, no. 2 (1992): 140–61; Karlyn Kohrs Campbell, "Biesecker Cannot Speak for Her Either," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 26, no. 2 (1993): 153–59; Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, "Object and Method in Rhetorical Criticism: From Wichelns to Leff and McGee," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 54, no. 3 (1990): 290-316; Dilip Parameshwar Gaonkar, "Introduction: Forum: Publics and Counterpublics," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 88, no. 4 (2002): 410-12; 1. Joshua Gunn, "Size Matters: Polytoning Rhetoric's Perverse Apocalypse," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (2008): 82–108.

Asking "the object question" differently requires an avoidance of additive progress narratives. Robyn Wiegman brilliantly and systematically describes this type of progress narrative in gender studies.[146] She argues that the field whose first object was *women* and was housed in *feminist studies*, because incapable of capturing the complex social, political, and institutional dynamics that it sought to describe, became for theorists inadequate and exclusionary. The redefinition of the field's object of study as *gender* and *gender studies* was regarded as a corrective that took sufficient and necessary distance from *women* and *feminist studies*. This shift in object, Wiegman notes, enabled scholars to tell the story of progress by recourse to a critique of theoretical object categories—first "women" and then "gender"—thereby disavowing the critical and institutional disciplining at work when any critical object is found suddenly to be lacking. Such displays of disciplinary anxiety, Wiegman contends, allow the authority of the critical act—the institutional authority to govern and regulate objects of study—to lay claim to "what counts":

> Hence the field-securing necessity of the very pedagogical lesson this chapter has been tracking, where *categories*, not critical agencies, are said to fail, and new objects and analytics become the valued terrain for sustaining the progress that underwrites the field imaginary's political dispensation to begin with.[147]

The preoccupation with redefining the objects of rhetorical studies functions in a similar way for our field. Rhetorical studies has participated in this progress narrative as well, which is demonstrated, for example, in the debate over "Big Rhetoric." The central anxiety of this debate was the fear that if nearly everything counts as a rhetorical object,

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[146] Robyn Wiegman, *Object Lessons* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 36-90.
[147] Wiegman, *Object Lessons*, 83.

then "rhetoric" is thereby rendered so imprecise as to be supplemental in the narrowest sense.[148]   In his critique of the broader "sizing up" of rhetoric, Joshua Gunn contends that the apocalyptic overtone in repeated characterizations of the field's imminent demise functions psychically as a masturbatory activity. That is to say, for him, the drive to repeatedly measure the field against the narrative of its own death is made manifest as a "getting off":

> [T]he perverse core of the Big Rhetoric debate is that we want to be told about our demise or irrelevance as an academic discipline over and over and over again, for such mock revelations allow us to produce substitute satisfactions over and over again in a kind of sado-masochistic frenzy (of which this article is delightfully not exempt).[149]

By contrast, according to Gunn the requisite tone of critique should be a tongue-in-cheek, playful approach to "sizing up" that embraces the pleasure-in-pain of apocalyptic self-measurement without internalizing its morbid *telos*. Gunn's critique centers on resisting the phallogocentric "tone of the Father,"[150] whose apocalyptic pronouncements wield the same critical authority Wiegman argues against. Gunn's approach counters the attribution of the eventual failure of objects on categorical grounds by encouraging a performative approach that embraces these failures.[151]

I am in agreement with Gunn that a Lacanian psychoanalytic vocabulary aptly describes the affective dynamics at work in such a relentless measuring up of the scope of

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[148] See, for instance, Edward Schiappa, "Second Thoughts on the Critiques of Big Rhetoric," *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 34, no. 3 (2001): 260-74.
[149] Gunn, "Size Matters," 90.
[150] Gunn, "Size Matters," 96.
[151] Wiegman, *Object Lessons*, 45, 49, 53-69.

the field's objects. Nevertheless, the production of good objects in each field is also a

mark of changing political investments in a given field imaginary. As Wiegman

demonstrates, critics' political investments, when advocated for from within institutions

and languages of authority, produce a teleological progression of objects because the

critic tacitly endorses the assumption that an object category will eventually match the

ideal it strives for. Gunn's performative alternative may be one way of operating outside

of this logic by foregoing routine, but essentially repetitious "revelations" and is therefore

one mode of critique that refuses the demands of the Father. Even so, as the displacement

of Nagin's interview in popular memory attests to, the critic's position *vis à vis* the

rhetorical object is only one side of the coin—the other, of course, consists of identifying

and engaging such displaced objects, which I call *chōric*, in the first place.

The *Chōric* Object

Developing an adequate theory of the *chōric* object will first require specifying

the function of *chōra* in Kristeva's writings as it is derived from Plato's original

formulation as well as her departure from Lacanian thought. In the *Timaeus*, Plato posits

chōra as a third term to the intelligible Forms and their sensible Copies and likens it to a

"mother," a "receptacle," and a "nurse": "What essential property, then, are we to

conceive it to possess? This in particular, that it should be the receptacle, and as it were

the nurse, of all Becoming."[152] *Chōra* possesses no form or substance itself, but receives

Paternal "Source," produces a "stamped copy," and then withdraws.[153] But even my

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[152] Plato, *Timaeus*, 49a. See *Plato, Complete in Twelve Volumes*, Vol. IX, trans. W. R. M. Lamb
(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1952).
[153] Plato, *Timaeus*, 50d.

description of this section in the *Timaeus* risks inappropriately temporalizing *chōric*

generation, which Plato says can only be described "as a Kind invisible and unshaped,

all-receptive and in some most perplexing and most baffling way partaking of the

intelligible."[154] Indeed, as Emanuela Bianchi argues, *chōra* "provides the substrate upon

and the space in which the eternal realm of Being makes its mark and instantiates itself

on the way to the creation of the sensible world."[155] We have thus an irreducibly

necessary "space" of Becoming that is not actually a space, which leaves its/her

inscription on things but never rises to the level of Being (is constitutively outside of

Plato's general ontology), and which cannot be described on the basis of what it/she has

consolidated in the world but, rather, by a mystical, "corrupted reasoning."[156] It escapes

both meaning and direct perception.[157] *Chōric* rhetoric, then, is discourse that bears the

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[154] Plato, *Timaeus*, 51a.

[155] Emanuela Bianchi, "Receptacle/*Chōra*: Figuring the Errant Feminine in Plato's *Timaeus*," *Hypatia* 21, no. 4 (2006): 124.

[156] Derrida, *On the Name*, 90. That *chōra* is outside of Plato's constitutive ontology is also indicative of a slight distance between this essay and Diane Davis's important work on rhetoric and the other, especially *Inessential Solidarity: Rhetoric and Foreigner Relations* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2010). Whereas, for Davis, "rhetoricity" is part of a social ontology, for me, *chōra* similarly functions outside of meaning, but is produced by processes of subjectivation.

[157] Rhetorical scholars have recently adopted *chōra* as a concept that assists in theorizing the materiality of rhetoric. Pulling *chōra* out of its metaphysical pretenses, new materialism and affect studies have appropriated it as a theoretical and necessarily heuristic concept for explaining rhetoric outside of systems of meaning. The attempt to specify nonlinguistic rhetorical effect by reference to *chōra* has entailed a turn away from meaningful discourse and towards bodies and places. Of particular note are Thomas Rickert's synthesis of the term's Platonic philosophical origins in Timaeus and its contemporary interpretations and modifications, and Brian Ott and Diane Marie Keeling's appropriation of Kristeva's work on poetic language and political thought. Taken together, these scholars have made crucial attempts to theorize what rhetoric is and can do today—an age, they contend, which is distinguished by fragmentation and the technological saturation of sense experience—through recourse to the rhetoricity of the body and/in its techno-aesthetic environment. The posthumanist tradition out of which this and similarly committed scholarship emerges is thus said to upheave the distinction between the body and discourse entirely by finding rhetorical effect in both realms (as if, the contention goes, they were distinct). See, for instance: Thomas Rickert, "Toward the *Chōra*: Kristeva, Derrida, and Ulmer on Emplaced Invention," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 40 no. 3 (2007): 251-73; Catherine Chaput, "Rhetorical Circulation in Late Capitalism: Neoliberalism and the Overdetermination of Affective Energy," *Rhetoric and Philosophy* 43, no. 1 (2010): 1-25; Brian L. Ott and Diane Marie Keeling, "Cinema and Choric Connection: *Lost in Translation* as Sensual Experience," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 97, no. 4 (2011): 363-86; Thomas Rickert, *Ambient Rhetoric: The Attunements of Rhetorical Being* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2013). See

inscription of this space and unravels meaning. Moreover, its status as *chōric* involves the refusal to acknowledge such inscription, whose source cannot be located, resulting in a displacement within the final narrative of rhetorical effect. This displacement has tended to consequently "disqualify" it, so to speak, as a proper object of rhetorical study.

Kristeva's early work on *chōra*, which draws heavily from Plato's theory even as it reconceptualizes it, helps theorize an alternative approach to specifying the object domain of criticism because her work attempts to describe the transformation of signifying fields by specifying the point of articulation between meaning and affective nonsense. Posed as an articulation, *chōra* within her work emerges as an overt attempt to theorize how discourse itself is shot through with both meaning and nonsense. Moreover, embracing this fundamentally heterogeneous makeup grounds critical analysis in human discourse, but also carries a notion of discourse carefully attendant to the productive effects of the unrepresentable within it. That is to say, specifying a *chōric* object most directly involves a critical attention to what she calls the "thetic," the site at which nonsensical experience gets transposed into systems of meaning. Failure to attend to this boundary traps the critic within either the utopia of the progress narrative or the masturbatory bewailment of disciplinary apocalypse—but in both instances accepts the object of study as it has already been sanctioned.

While recent rhetorical scholarship does highlight the importance of this boundary in her early work on *chōra*,[158] her unique psychoanalytic formulation of the continual production and reproduction of the subject needs to be more carefully delineated in order

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also, for a performative take on rhetoric and materiality: Nathan Stormer, "Recursivity: A Working Paper on Rhetoric and *Mnesis*," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 99, no. 1 (2013): 27-50.

[158] See, for instance: Chaput, *"*Rhetorical Circulation"; Ott and Keeling, "Cinema and Choric Connection"; Rickert, *Ambient Rhetoric*.

to understand exactly how *chōra* functions for her. For Lacan, a subject's entrance into the Imaginary order (i.e., its identification with its own image in a mirror) must be accompanied also by the introduction of the signifier (i.e., the various reference points in the mirror that differentiate the subject's image from other things) in order for "reality [to be] conquered."[159] From that point, it sees itself as whole and not whole—the new image of its wholeness in the mirror (which is the basis for its new concept of its ego, "I") stands in contrast not only to its lack of complete bodily control, but also to a new need to be recognized by the Other, for its wholeness to be confirmed. The fantasmatic state of "unicity"[160] that the subject now lacks activates a perpetual scramble to return to the mythic, original state of wholeness (the original Real) by cathecting phallic object after phallic object, *ad infinitum*, none of which fills that lack (*manque*).[161] Lacan is insistent throughout his early seminars that this position of lack is activated by entrance into the Symbolic, even when a subject's symbolic is unintelligible to others.[162] For Kristeva, on the other hand, a subject experiences this wrenching loss (what she calls in *Powers of Horror* "abjection") prior to the emergence of the self proper,[163] when, for instance, the

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[159] Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book V: The Formations of the Unconscious*, trans. Cormac Gallagher, unpublished seminar from May 2, 1958, 202. See also, Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* Function as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience," in *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: W. W. Norton, 2006), 75-81.

[160] For an extended rhetorical treatment of failed and feigned unicity, see Christian O. Lundberg, *Lacan in Public: Psychoanalysis and the Science of Rhetoric* (Tuscaloosa, AL: The University of Alabama Press, 2012).

[161] *Manque* in French is a dynamic word: It has noun and verb forms and conveys lack, absence, something missing or lost (for a subject: *Tu me manques*, you are missing for me, I miss you).

[162] Take, for instance, his critique of Melanie Klein's work in Seminar I. Klein's case study of a child who not only did not possess an intelligible system of language but also, moreover, did not want one, led her to place the child's experience wholly outside systems of language. Lacan's retort: "But the child already has his own system of language, quite sufficient. The proof is that he plays with it. He even makes use of it to play a game of opposition against the adults' attempts to intrude." Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan, Book I*, ed. Jacques Alain Miller, trans. John Forrester (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), 83.

[163] To extend the force of this point, in *Pouvoirs de l'horreur*, Kristeva speaks at length of the *corps propre*, an ambiguous rendering that could be understood as the "clean body" or as one's "own body," the proper body or the body proper. Abjective wrenching is a rejection of that which has been made unclean that

infant cries and to whomever the maternal figure—its source of total bodily

gratification,[164] who is not necessarily a woman—gives attention instead, it is "[a]t any

rate, not I."[165] As a consequence, she describes a different order of the subject in

language—the symbolic and the semiotic *chōra*—which is not triadic but, rather,

dialectic.[166] Although in her later work she distances herself from this early

Marxist/Hegelian attachment to dialectical movement, and at times even appears to

tacitly endorse Lacan's categories,[167] this early formulation allows her to describe a

function in language not wholly overdetermined by the symbolic order. How does this

play out? Forced to abject from the maternal figure in order to thence begin establishing

an individuated psyche, the child ends up with a *manque à y être*, a formulation subtly

but crucially distinct from Lacan's *manque à être*.

This is a radical reformulation of Lacan that bears directly on the politics of

theorizing *chōric* objects. In both major English translations of Lacan's *Écrits*, *manque à*

être is rendered "want-to-be."[168] In Kristeva's *Revolution in Poetic Language*/*Le*

Révolution du Langage Poétique, after directly quoting this Lacanian formulation (and

footnoting a comment on this translation in the English version), she uses instead *manque*

à y être in the original text, which is similarly rendered "want to be" in the English

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begins establishing what will at some point be the identifiable self. See Julia Kristeva, *Pouvoirs de l'horreur* (Paris: Seuil, 1980).

[164] Kelly Oliver, *Reading Kristeva: Unraveling the Double-Bind* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), 21-5.

[165] Julia Kristeva, *Tales of Love*, Trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), 41.

[166] Julia Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*, trans. Margaret Waller (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974).

[167] See, for instance, Julia Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, trans. Jeanine Herman (New York: Columbia University Press, 2002), 63.

[168] Lacan, *Écrits*, 434, 129.

translation.[169] But the addition of *y*, a pronoun that usually translates as "there" and refers ambiguously in this context to a figurative "space," is perhaps more precisely translated as a "want in/to being there." *There*: maternal gratification, or *chōra*. Kristeva is thus able to sum up her departure from Lacanian lack: "[S]ignification itself appears as a stage of the signifying process—not so much its base as its boundary."[170] Conceiving of signification as a base, she suggests, ensures that what Miglena Nikolchina calls the "quest for the mother" becomes hysterical and necessarily phallic, which eliminates any possibility of discourse-effects not tethered to and produced by meaning and thus not tethered to pre-posited objects.[171] Describing pre-symbolic processes is a way of establishing that maternal force and its manifestation in *chōric* experience becomes a drive-activated site of rebirth and transformation—what Kristeva later calls "intimate revolt." Given the right signifying practices (art and literature in her early work, intimacy in analytic discourse in her later writings), phallic economies are upended and reformulated. On a heuristic level, a rigorous attention to *chōra* sets the stage for a type of critical engagement not bound within the hysterical, phallic economy of wrong objects, and is instead tasked with charting the sudden (and often terrifying) emergence of new objects. Thus, for rhetorical studies, reading a *chōric* object first entails paying critical attention to what appears to find no "space" in histories of rhetorical effect. Doing so

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[169] Kristeva, *Revolution*, 48. She notes in fn53 that *manque à être* could also be translated "want-of-being" or "constitutive lack," given that both Kristeva and Lacan do not, for instance, use the French verb *vouloir*, which conveys the more common sense of "to want" something, but instead use the noun *manque*, which can also connote "missing" in all that word's ambiguity. This point gains importance given Kristeva's subsequent work on maternal loss and mourning.

[170] Kristeva, *Revolution*, 48.

[171] Miglena Nikolchina, *Matricide in Language: Writing Theory in Kristeva and Woolf* (New York: Other Press, 2004).

enables critics to account for these emergences rather than defaulting to already established narratives of rhetorical effect.

The second task of explicating the *chōric* object is to specify more precisely what makes it an object of rhetorical inquiry. Uptake of Kristeva's work within philosophy and literary studies evidences an acute awareness of the workings of Kristevan *chōra*, but generally reduces the role of rhetoric to that of tropological figuration. Sara Beardsworth, for instance, argues convincingly that Kristeva shifts emphasis quite subtly between the mid-1970s and the 1980s. During the cultural revolution in France during the 1970s, she contends, Kristeva's work is principally concerned with the "semiotization of the symbolic," that is, the breaking up of existing socio-political formations of thought through the work of the death drive in artistic practice.[172] In the 1980s, however, as Kristeva seriously undertook psychoanalytic practice, the emphasis of her work shifts towards the "symbolization of the semiotic," or the manner in which potentially destructive semiotic drive activity finds or does not find adequate symbolization for a subject embedded in a particular socio-historical context.[173] Thus, for Kristeva, the trauma that often spurs or re-spurs crises of identity, politics, and subjectivity, while emergent from within the material dynamics of pre-symbolic experience, causes the drive to elaborate itself symptomatically through discourse. But Beardsworth's division, albeit compelling and brilliantly argued, sidesteps the central problematic of political transformation altogether by assuming that the difference between artistic practice and symptomatic irruption *tout court* has any necessary bearing on the rhetorical

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[172] Sara Beardsworth, "From Revolution to Revolt Culture," in *Revolt, Affect, Collectivity: The Unstable Boundaries of Kristeva's Polis*, eds. Tina Chanter and Ewa Płonowska Ziarek (New York: State University of New York Press, 2005), 44.
[173] Beardsworth, "From Revolution," 47.

transformation of a given political logic. It matters little whether such inscription is formed by the cunning of a subject (poet, artist, orator) who flirts with the unrepresentable or by a depressive subject incapable of allowing such traumatic unrepresentability its necessary expression. To think from a rhetorical perspective requires neither considering the *chōric* object from the standpoint of the intending artist nor does it involve analyzing the psychic transformation of a rhetor through her discourse.

Instead, if rhetoric is considered to be a heterogeneous public discursive practice that transforms political logics—one tasked with always keeping these political fields mobile—then the enjoinment of rhetorical scholarship is not merely to identify *chōric* objects and explain their formal characteristics, but is also to specify exactly how and with what effect these discourses rupture and transmogrify sociopolitical fields. The split that Beardsworth identifies, an enduring division that continues to guide contemporary Kristevan analyses in philosophy and literary studies, remains productive only insofar as scholars remain focused on philosophical, aesthetic, and/or analytic inquiry, even when such inquiry is grafted onto political questions.[174] The oscillation between these two poles, in evidence when considering how many of Kristeva's privileged artists were driven/drove themselves to suicide, remains the dominant motif of Kristevan studies in philosophy and literature, but seldom have scholars either in Kristevan studies or rhetorical studies marshaled the resources of the latter towards explaining the broadly, socially transformative function of the semiotic at the thetic, the boundary site of the

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[174] See, for instance: *Psychoanalysis, Aesthetics, and Politics in the Work of Julia Kristeva*, eds. Kelly Oliver and S. K. Keltner (New York: State University of New York Press, 2009).

"precise *jouissance* of a body/text."[175] How does one describe the specific function, then, of such *chōric* objects, artistic and/or symptomatic? What happens when the *chōric* opens out directly onto the field of political practice? Most importantly, what alternate histories are produced when the object is approached in this way? It is clear from these theoretical premises that no method, strictly speaking, of reading such objects can be produced. The injunction is rather to specify in each case the specific articulation of sense and nonsense that characterizes the *chōric* object and its displacement, reading dialectically, both textually and formally in turns. Following contextualization, I attempt to read Nagin's interview at that boundary site through three tropes: repetition, reduplication, and silence.

Then, It Will Have Been Too Doggone Late

Just days before the 2012 presidential elections, Hurricane Sandy was poised to rip through a swath of the eastern U.S. coastline. Amidst a public ambivalence characterized by an inability to decide whether the federal government's response over the coming days was beyond politics and apolitical or a thoroughly political litmus test of President Obama's fitness to lead the United States for four more years, he called upon Congress to "cut through red tape"[176] in order to disperse resources quickly and effectively to people in need. The predominately positive reactions to the federal response from both politicians and the general public, while certainly articulated to the ever-present public negotiation of the federal government's larger role in disaster response and relief, centered overwhelmingly on Obama's successful oversight of the

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[175] Nikolchina, *Matricide*, 21.
[176] Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President at the American Red Cross," October 30, 2012, *The White House*, https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2012/10/30/remarks-president-american-red-cross

Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). Indeed, as Republican candidate Mitt Romney famously backpedaled on his prior professed desire to privatize disaster response, many shared Paul Krugman's sentiments:

> The point is that after Katrina the government seemed to have no idea what it was doing; this time it did. And that's no accident: the federal government's ability to respond effectively to disaster always collapses when antigovernment Republicans hold the White House, and always recovers when Democrats take it back.[177]

Examination of the institutional history of FEMA bears out Krugman's contention,[178] but to reduce contemporary logics of federal disaster response to partisan investments misses a point crucial to a rhetorical approach to politics: That Obama's response to the imminent crisis was suddenly understood as a test of his leadership abilities exposed a qualitative difference between the force with which the U.S. public today demands the federal government's immediate response to natural disasters and the prior assumption that its role was largely a long-term financial one. Put simply, in the wake of Katrina, there was no longer any doubt that major disasters demanded immediate and adequate federal response, and that bureaucratic delays were no longer acceptable.

Contrary to the common presumption that the Bush administration's botched response (what would swiftly be emblematized by the metaphor of "red tape") itself

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[177] Paul Krugman, "Sandy versus Katrina," *The New York Times*, November 4, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/05/opinion/krugman-sandy-versus-katrina.html; see also, Brian Naylor, "Lessons From Katrina Boost FEMA's Sandy Response," *NPR*, November 3, 2012, http://www.npr.org/2012/11/03/164224394/lessons-from-katrina-boost-femas-sandy-response
[178] See, for instance, Thomas A Birkland, "Disasters, Catastrophes, and Policy Failure in the Homeland Security Era," *Review of Policy Research* 26, no. 4 (2009): 423-38; Greg Elmer and Andy Opel, "Surviving the Inevitable Future: Preemption in the Age of Faulty Intelligence," *Cultural Studies* 20, no. 4-5 (2006): 477-92; Amanda Lee Hollis, "A Tale of Two Federal Emergency Management Agencies," *The Forum: The Berkeley Electronic Press* 3, no. 3 (2005).

provoked the shift towards a "cut-tape" logic, I argue that a largely forgotten but pivotal *chōric* object—Nagin's WWL-AM870 radio interview—produced a "cut-tape" logic of disaster response by unraveling and remaking the politics of federal disaster response. Whereas in a "red-tape" logic both bureaucratic processes and partisan deliberation over the role of the federal government in disaster response leave the question of the nature of federal response open for debate, within a "cut-tape" logic not only has immediate and adequate response become a political requirement, but the success of the federal response has come to signify the president's ability to lead. As the historical overview below makes painfully clear, at no point before Katrina—not even after 9/11—had U.S. federal response to disasters occupied such a politically crucial place within the national unconscious. Even more crucially, the failure of Katrina, summed up in the imagery of the flyover, came to signify Bush's failed leadership only after Nagin's interview, despite the fact that the federal government's response was already a topic of public discussion.

To date, contemporary scholarly treatments of disaster response have mostly centered on critiquing neoliberalism and market solution rationalities.[179] Generally aligned with a critical rhetorical approach, scholars charting the rise of a new form of "readiness" as a rationality of governance within national security discourses that include war, weather, accident, disease, and other unforeseen occurrences have indicated that

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[179] See, for instance, Mark Andrejevic, "Interactive (in)Security: The Participatory Promise of Ready.gov," *Cultural Studies* 20, nos. 4-5 (2006): 441-58; Mark Andrejevic, "'Securitainment' in the Post-9/11 Era," *Continuum: Journal of Media and Cultural Studies* 25, no. 2 (2011): 165-75; James Hay, "Designing Homes to Be the First Line of Defense: Safe Households, Mobilization, and the New Mobile Privatization," *Cultural Studies* 20, nos. 4-5 (2006): 349-77; James Hay, "The Many Responsibilities of the New Citizen-Soldier," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 4, no. 2 (2007): 216-20; James Hay and Mark Andrejevic, "Introduction: Toward an Analytic of Governmental Experiments in These Times: Homeland Security as the New Social Security," *Cultural Studies* 20, nos. 4-5 (2006): 331-48; for an extensive review of this approach, see Bryan C. Taylor, "'A Hedge against the Future': The Post-Cold War Rhetoric of Nuclear Weapons Modernization," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 96, no. 1 (2010): 1-24.

"readiness" is often shorthand for duties of citizenship and surveillance in neoliberal

logics of self-governance. Such scholarship has argued insistently that, in both popular

and political rhetoric, survivalism and preparedness emerge as two mutually imbricated

halves of a logic of citizenship that places the imperative for survival on the individual

and relies on an economic logic of risk assessment and insurance against threats to one's

own survivability. For this vibrant field of inquiry, the decision whether to provide for

oneself and one's family by ensuring their safety in the event of a major catastrophe,

whether natural disaster or economic apocalypse, is the individual's prerogative, but the

achievement of such an aim marks the diligent liberal citizen. "Red-tape" disaster

response policies, thus, do no more than maintain this rationality.

One effect of Nagin's interview, to the contrary, was a partial displacement of the

question of personal responsibility for disaster preparedness by the widespread outrage

over the inadequacy of federal action and capability, despite mixed reactions to local

response. Even at the time, commentators criticized Nagin for his handling of the

situation (and, not incidentally, his subsequent lapses of judgment have brought

corruption, bribery, and tax fraud indictments against him for his actions in the post-

Katrina reconstruction of New Orleans[180]). Lorne Gunter of the *Canadian National Post*,

for instance, wrote five days after the interview, "Nagin neglected to use city transit and

school buses to get out those without their own means to leave. Before [Hurricane] Ivan,

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[180] Matt Smith, "Ex-New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin Guilty after Courtroom 'Belly-Flop,'" *CNN*, February 14, 2014, http://www.cnn.com/2014/02/12/justice/louisiana-nagin-convicted; David A. Fahrenthold, "Former New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin Convicted on Bribery, Other Charges," *The Washington Post*, February 12, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/former-new-orleans-mayor-nagin-convicted-on-bribery-other-charges/2014/02/12/d26c9a8a-9418-11e3-84e1-27626c5ef5fb_story.html; Bill Chappell, "Former New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin Found Guilty of Corruption," February 12, 2014, http://www.npr.org/blogs/thetwo-way/2014/02/10/274925929/former-new-orleans-mayor-ray-nagin-found-guilty-of-corruption

the Mayor claimed he couldn't use city buses because they lacked toilets; this time, he acted as though he was unaware he had buses. . . . True, by the time he made this plea, New Orleans' buses were under water. But before the crisis, when the buses could have done the most good, Nagin failed to act."[181] In addition to other such commentators with similar questions and/or accusations, others later could not help but point out that, while critical of President Bush's lack of response to the crisis, "Nagin's approach to disaster planning and evacuation of the city mirrored the Bush administration's view that individual citizens and private institutions were essentially responsible for the general welfare and not government," a view evidenced by the lack of provisions at the Superdome as well as an urban evacuation plan premised on middle-class residents with cars.

And yet, despite Nagin remaining infamous for both his political demeanor and now his proven corruption, his interview immediately functioned as the catalyst for Bush's "concession" of fault and the swift federal response to the situation, even if Bush himself would not acknowledge it, and even if the lasting image of Bush's failures during Katrina (failures that plagued him for the rest of his presidency) is his cold, curious stare out the window of Air Force One during the now-criticized August 31, 2005 post-Katrina flyover. Most telling, however, is that the flyover was initially reported without fanfare, even regarded somewhat favorably, on September 1.[182] Nagin's interview aired that night and was widely rebroadcast the next day. By September 3, in the aforementioned Rose

[181] Lorne Gunter, "Ray Nagin Isn't Blame-Free," *National Post (Canada)*, September 6, 2005, A16.
[182] Tamer El-Ghobashy, "Fear Toll in the Thousands: Feds Rush to City Besieged by Looting," *Daily News*, September 1, 2005; Sheldon Alberts, "Total Despair: New Orleans Death Toll 'Likely Thousands,'" *The Calgary Herald*, September 1, 2005; Emily Smith, "Looting, Shooting, Sharks…And Still the Water is Rising," *The Sun*, September 1, 2005.

Garden statement, Bush conceded that "despite [local workers'] best efforts, the magnitude of responding to a crisis over a disaster area that is larger than the size of Great Britain has created tremendous problems that have strained state and local capabilities. The result is that many of our citizens simply are not getting the help they need, especially in New Orleans. And that is unacceptable." Then remarking that he had met with the Nagin and the governors of Louisiana, Mississippi, and Alabama to address the problem, Bush hedged taking personal responsibility by confirming that "we all agree that more can be done to improve our ability to restore order and deliver relief in a timely and effective manner." This is hardly a concession of fault, especially given clarifying remarks later that day that he was "certainly not denigrating the efforts of anybody," that he was "satisfied with the response, [but] not satisfied with all the results."[183] Yet, newspapers across the country that day reported such truths as, "For the first time, Mr. Bush acknowledged that the government response to the catastrophe had fallen short."[184] The national conversation about Bush's poor governmental response, his lackluster statements, and his inability to respond to crises that did not call for preemptive military action quickly gained momentum, some of it circling directly back to Nagin's interview[185] as the point at which relief efforts, in Nagin's words, were understood to be "too doggone

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[183] Baker, "An Embattled."
[184] Bumiller, "Promises."
[185] "Fury at Feds Mounts; Bush Pledges More Help: 'Results Not Acceptable,'" *The Capital Times*, September 2, 2005; Helen Kennedy, "'Results Are Not Acceptable': Orleans Mayor Rips Feds for Doing Little," *Daily News*, September 3, 2005; "Mayor Rails Against Slow Pace of Relief Effort," *Ottawa Citizen*, September 3, 2005; Susan Saulny, "Newcomer is Struggling to Lead a City in Ruins," *The New York Times*, September 3, 2005; Andy Geller, "'Get Off Your Asses!': N.O. Mayor Rips Slow Relief Effort," *The New York Post*, September 3, 2005; Jennifer Wells, "Leadership: President Bush's Tour of the Disaster Area was Too Little, Too Late," *The Toronto Star*, September 3, 2005.

late."[186] In sum, it is only after Nagin's interview that Bush's prior flyover came to signify his failure as a Presidential leader.

It follows that Nagin's interview must be situated as a pivot point within transforming political logics of U.S. national security and disaster response, but not for merely institutional reasons. The long and complicated road from the citizen of Cold War era fallout shelter propaganda—ostensibly a pivotal moment inaugurating the aforementioned articulation of survivorship to citizenship—to the contemporary instantiation of this subject is too great a story to tell here.[187] Suffice it to say that the transition from "civil defense" to "national security"[188] occurring primarily during the 1990s and 2000s brought with it an institutional tension that has plagued FEMA from its first breath: the subsumption of disaster relief/mitigation and civil defense/national security under the same organizational umbrella, though federal funding for the latter has routinely far outstripped federal funding for the former. Reforms during the Clinton era, passed largely as a response to FEMA's embarrassing handling of Hurricane Andrew in 1992, focused a greater emphasis on disaster mitigation and response, rehabilitating the agency's image over the next decade.[189] Then, not surprisingly, in 2003, FEMA was suddenly folded into the newly minted Department of Homeland Security (DHS). *Ready.gov*, FEMA's civil disaster preparedness program, was launched that same year

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[186] Nagin, "Interview."
[187] See, for instance: Shawn J. Parry-Giles, *The Rhetorical Presidency, Propaganda, and the Cold War, 1945-1955* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2002); Kenneth D. Rose, *One Nation Underground: The Fallout Shelter in American Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2000); Laura McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press); James Hay, "The Many Responsibilities of the New Citizen-Soldier," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 4, no. 2 (2007); Jenna M. Loyd, "*Peace Is Our Only Shelter': Questioning Domesticities of Militarization and White Privilege*," *Antipode* 43, no. 3 (2010): 845-73.
[188] Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004).
[189] Hollis, "A Tale of Two."

and to this day makes abundantly clear the DHS's commitment to offloading as much

readiness responsibility onto the U.S. citizenry as possible. Then Katrina, considered a

FEMA failure of disastrous proportions. Fast-forward seven years, however, and FEMA's

handling of Hurricane Sandy under President Obama emerged as a metric of political

leadership—prior to the hurricane having even made landfall. Some pundits, like

Krugman, are content with chalking this up to politics as usual. However, Hurricane

Katrina now occupies a position in the American collective imaginary as a nodal point for

a paradigm shift in natural disaster relief and response policy. This shift has made

immutable the obligation of the federal government to marshal resources and respond

immediately, to develop a vaster relief infrastructure, and to do all of this regardless of

the relevant political positions on disaster relief and mitigation funding[190] (though it

should hardly be ignored that "mitigation" has unfortunately still not secured itself so

immutable a spot on the national agenda).

What was so remarkable about this interview so as enable this new "cut-tape"

disaster response logic to displace the deliberative "red-tape" one? And what made

Nagin's discourse so different that it spurred that which prior disaster mishandlings had

not? These questions cannot even be posed—let alone this object chosen for this

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[190]Scholars have also argued that the response to Hurricane Katrina also brought to the national consciousness the systemic link between race and class, particularly given the racial makeup of the temporary residents of the Superdome post-Katrina. It may well be the case that many saw "cut-tape" disaster response logic as a corrective for—or political cover for—the uneven local and state-level disaster response capabilities and their alignment along racial lines. It is an argument that would require a more thorough treatment than I can provide here. Existing literature includes: Henry A. Giroux, "Violence, Katrina, and the Biopolitics of Disposibility," *Theory, Culture, & Society* 24 (2007): 305-9; Daniel A. Grano and Kenneth S. Zagacki, "Cleansing the Superdome: The Paradox of Purity and Post-Katrina Guilt," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 97, no. 2 (2011): 201-23; Kate Lockwood Harris, "'Compassion' and Katrina: Reasserting Violent White Masculinity after the Storm," *Women & Language* 34, no. 1 (2011): 11-27; Lynnell L. Thomas, "'People Want to See What Happened': Treme, Televisual Tourism, and the Racial Remapping of Post-Katrina New Orleans," *Television & New Media* 13, no. 3 (2012): 213-24.

purpose—without critical attention to the *chōric*. There was nothing immediately

remarkable about Nagin's interview at the level of his statements. They were full of

stutters and stops, pauses, circular reasoning, and polemics. Nor did Nagin make any

appeal that Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco had not already formally made. Yet,

what is at first blush unremarkable here appears absolutely pivotal when read at the site

of the thetic, that boundary between meaning and the unrepresentable. Without attention

to the threshold that produces critical objects, critics run the risk of inadvertently

believing the discourse too much and, thus, accepting its object—in this case the

flyover—as it is given.

Death and Repetition

Nagin's discourse might be described as *chōric* first because it is marked by

repeated figurations of helplessness and the ubiquitous presence of death figured

throughout the interview. As Kristeva argues, repetition in semiotic discourse functions

timelessly in that it is characterized by a looping-back to a particular object or objects

whose magnetism cannot be fully accounted for or expressed in temporal terms.[191] Gunn

isolates repetition as evidence of the drive work in rhetorical studies' preoccupation with

sizing itself up: The drive object of rhetorical studies, by extension, is its own critical

object.[192] Drive work involves "non-meaning" (*sens* in Kristeva's *Sens et Non-Sens de la

Révolte* could alternatively be translated as "meaning" rather than "sense"[193]), the

unrepresentable irrupting into and opening up symbolic formations to new possibilities.

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[191] See Kristeva's discussion of Freudian *Zeitlos* (timelessness/lost time). Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, esp. 29-30.
[192] Gunn, "Size Matters," 83-86.
[193] Julia Kristeva, *Sens et Non-Sens de la Revolte* (Paris: Fayard, 1996).

Temporality, on the other hand, is fundamentally experienced through and within fields of meaning and, thus, resides on the side of consciousness and linearity, whereas the timelessness of the unconscious drive bursts into discourse erratically, but not without aim.[194] Because *chōra* must be approached "as if in a dream,"[195] rhetorical analysis can only identify traces of it.

A signal of the necessity of reading such traces is that, in Nagin's interview, one point of fixation is the material context, toward which Nagin expresses a frustrated helplessness. When asked what he said to President Bush during their prior phone conversation, Nagin encompasses this psychic response by summing it up as a "crisis." In a telling account, helplessness is conveyed with astounding succinctness, if not also with symptomatically careless breadth:

I basically told him we had an incredible, uh, crisis here, and that his flying over in Air Force One does not do it justice, and that I have been all around this city, and I am very frustrated because we are not able to marshal resources and we're outmanned in just about every respect. You know the reason why the looters got out of control? Because we had most of our resources saving people, thousands of people, for—that was stuck in attics, man, old ladies, when you pull off the doggone ventilator vents and you look down there and they're standing in there, in—in water up to their freakin' neck.[196]

[194] Barbara Biesecker, following Joan Copjec's Lacanian take, locates political agency precisely at this site of drive activity. See Barbara A. Biesecker, "Whither Ideology? Toward a Different Take on Enjoyment as a Political Factor," *Western Journal of Communication* 75, no. 4 (2011): 445-50.
[195] Plato, *Timaeus*, 52b
[196] Nagin, "Interview."

The easy slide from looting to rising water defines the range of forces besieging Nagin and his officers, and he returns to these and other examples several times throughout the interview. In paraphrasing the pleas of a trapped resident, he says again, "I've been in my attic. I can't s—take it anymore. The water's up to my, up to my neck. I don't think I can hold out." Likewise, in an extended reflection on the mass media coverage of the looting, he partially attributes the escalation of violent crime and theft to the city's status as a drug trade nexus point: "You had drug addicts that are now walking around this city, looking for a fix, and that's the reason why they were breaking in hospitals, and drug stores. They looking for something to take the edge off of their jones, if you will. And right now they don't have anything to take the edge off." He finishes the thought by resorting to a militarized quasi-zombie narrative wherein soldiers stave off "drug-starving, crazy addicts, drug addicts, that are wreaking havoc. And we don't have the manpower to adequately deal with it—we can only target certain sections of the city, and, and form a perimeter around them, and hope to God that we're not overrun."[197]

A second object appears through the staggering, overwhelming presence of death in the interview. The incessant figuration of death and dying marks a repeated return to the borders between meaning and nonmeaning. Indeed, Kristeva writes in *Powers of Horror*, "as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. . . . There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being."[198] Confrontations with death, shit, and rot are firmly situated here, not as biologically causative instinctive responses, but as psychic, affective manifestations of drive activity. The anthropological basis for horror and disgust opens such confrontation

[197] Nagin, "Interview."
[198] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 3, emphasis in original.

onto the question of subjectivity, ensuring for Kristeva that the simultaneous push-pull of the horrific marks the importance of the semiotic: It is the unrepresentable helping to produce, and yet also upheave, symbolic formations.

Present in the already cited passages, death and dying are figured throughout the interview as both encounter and avoidance, people dying and people being saved. Utility workers "endangered their lives" to keep the pumps on, police "were dirt—dead tired from saving people," and even among looters "[m]ost people are looking to try and survive." Yet, despite such efforts, "every day that we delay, people are dying. And they're dying by the—by the hundreds, I'm—I'm willing to bet you. . . . people are dying down here. . . . you probably have thousands of people that have died, and thousands more that are dying every day. . . . I'm at the point now where it [public opinion] don't matter. People are dying."[199] The escalation of scale witnessed in the progression of this repetition illustrates the steadily building irruption of the semiotic into Nagin's discourse. From hundreds, to thousands, and finally elevated to an abstract scale that renders popular political thought literally irrelevant, through repetitious figuration of meaning's limit point, Nagin's despair rises to a fevered pitch. Interspersed within such displays, Nagin's discourse likewise repeatedly returns to intense anger at the federal government's nonresponse. How does such anger function?

Like the majority of major psychoanalytic theorists, Kristeva has little to say about anger except to find its significance in resistance to analysis itself.[200] Linked inexorably to hatred, anger represents a displacement of primal loss, the subject's initial

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[199] Nagin, "Interview."

[200] Cf. Julia Kristeva, *Black Sun*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1989), 45. See also, Lacan, *Écrits*, 82-101.

response to an unnamable injustice that has picked up a provisional object. But this substitution, if it is to replace reactionary anger/hatred with political transformation, can work in several ways. Within the symbolic, Joan Copjec contends, a drive object is not "a means of attaining satisfaction, it is an end in itself; it is directly satisfying. It is not a means to something other than itself, but is itself other to itself."[201] For Copjec, this quality of excess authorizes such objects to function not as infinitely displaced, arbitrary stand-ins—not as objects "chosen" by the superego in response to primary loss—but rather as sites where the drive circles an object endlessly and gains its satisfaction not through finally capturing the object, but by the very act of circling itself.[202]. However, the preponderance of contexts in which the drive refuses to identify (with) its object—or more precisely, when the subject refuses to settle for anything *except* the impossible object (*chōra*)—calls for an alternate explanation. For instance, in the context of depression, Kristeva writes,

> I remind you that the object, in psychoanalysis, is conceived in absence, in a sequence that I will sum up this way: mama is not there, I am sad (mourning), I picture her in words. . . . The depressive does not want to lose his object and prefers it to be "untouchable." By refusing to lose it, he refuses to gain it in words. The object is buried, so to speak, and thus dominated by jealously guarded, unnamable affects and eventually by vocalizations.[203]

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[201] Joan Copjec, *Imagine There's No Woman: Ethics and Sublimation* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2002), 38.
[202] It would be too divergent from the purposes of this essay to detail greatly the partiality of the drives as Lacan describes them. Instead, I want to stress that *the* drive does not properly exist for Lacan and his readers, including Kristeva: "Every drive being, by its essence as drive, a partial drive, no drive represents . . . the totality of the *Sexualstrebung*, of the sexual tendency, as it might be conceived as making present in the psyche the function of *Fortpflanzung*, of reproduction, if this function entered the psyche at all," Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1998), 203-4.
[203] Kristeva, *Intimate Revolt*, 23, ellipsis in original.

Such contexts produce "vocalization" in the subject's speech (quite often meaningless) as the drive rejects its object, but not before attempting to find expression in outbursts.[204] Nagin's own speech is no exception.

Marked by profanity and heightened vocal intensity, anger ignites at various points throughout Nagin's interview, sometimes suddenly and without warning. From the beginning, he tells Robinette, "You call him [President Bush] right now, and you call the governor, and you tell him to delegate the power that they have to the mayor of New Orleans and we'll get this damn thing fixed. [pause] It's politics, man, and they playing games and they spinning. They out there spinning for the cameras."[205] Increasingly exasperated by the gap between official promises and actual relief, he later paraphrases, "'This is coming, that is coming,' and my—my answer to that, today, is B.S. Where is the beef? Because there is no beef in this city. There's no beef anywhere in Southeast Louisiana, and these goddamn [federal aid] ships that are coming, I don't see 'em." He even tempers this anger at one point, although its reining-in is seemingly limited to direct acknowledgment: "And they [the federal government] don't have a *clue* what's going on down here. They flew down here, *one* time, *two* days after the doggone event was over, with *TV cameras*, *AP reporters*, *all kinda goddamn*—Excuse my French everybody in America, but I am *pissed*."[206]

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[204] "Vocalization" takes on variant forms, one of which Joshua Gunn has described as "public release." While our projects align in significant ways, "vocalization" here marks only the speech-symptom of *chōric* inscription, which can otherwise irrupt into the realm of the visual, the performative, and so on. Joshua Gunn, "On Speech and Public Release," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 13, no. 2 (2010): 1-41. Gunn has also proposed the "abject voice" that is the "something more" in speech than speech itself, the Lacanian *objet a*. In my view, this filtering of Kristeva through Lacan limits the potential force of Gunn's intervention. Joshua Gunn, "Gimme Some Tongue (On Recovering Speech)," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 93, no. 3 (2007): 362.
[205] Nagin, "Interview."
[206] Nagin, "Interview."

Such sound-bite-able outbursts punctuate the interview with great frequency, eventually building towards a powerfully delivered, unstoppable passage that signals the rapid dissolution of the interview:

This is ridiculous. [Robinette: (inaudible, talked over)] Now I don't want to see anybody do any more goddamn press conferences. Put a moratorium on press conferences. [Robinette: (inaudible, talked over)] Don't do another press conference until the resources are in this city, and then come *down* to this city, and *stand* with us, when there are military trucks and troops that we can't even count. Don't tell me 40,000 people are coming here. *They not here*! It's too doggone late. *Now get off your asses* and let's do something, and let's fix the *biggest* goddamn crisis in the *history* of this country![207]

This final burst of angry discourse terminates Nagin's insistent return to the question of federal response. As if divested of the displaced object, his despondence summarily turns away from any object, for the final 1:10 of the interview involves nothing less than a complete disintegration of meaningful discourse. The drive-work in evidence throughout the interview finally eats away at the intelligibility of the red-tape disaster response logic. It is not yet clear, however, in what crucial ways this symptomatic reading of repetition differs from Gunn's, which is to say, in what ways such repetition may cause the phallic order to fail—even if momentarily. Consequently, before examining the final act of meaning's disintegration, I track its progression at yet another discursive level, that of its syntax.

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[207] Nagin, "Interview."

Reduplication: Stop, Stutter, Restart

Reading the text at the syntactical level, that is, the level of the rules of the spatio-temporal ordering of meaningful discourse, here involves not so much a generative, structuralist approach as much as one that seeks to explain those instances in which such rules fail so greatly that they are displaced within the narrative of rhetorical events. This shares an impulse with but differs theoretically from other scholars who have theorized the failure of speech. Samuel McCormick and Mary Stuckey, for instance, offer a reading of what they call "presidential disfluency" that explores disconnects between script, utterance, and historical record. They suggest that attending to "vocal political aesthetics" allows scholars of public address to more capably account for how contemporary speech circulates and the ways in which paralinguistic elements of speech—those elements of delivery not captured by the text of a speech—are worthy of study precisely because they "transgress norms and expectations of presidential eloquence."[208] For McCormick and Stuckey, it is precisely the disjunct between what public address scholars study and the speech event itself that is cause for concern. Bringing more directly into focus the question of the object of rhetorical studies, McCormick's recent work argues that passionate disagreement in public deliberation evidences an asignifying, vocalic dimension of speech that "operates *meta-communicatively*, evacuating public speech of its linguistic content—and always in the service of additional, ever more talkative evacuations—until its only remaining content is the act of public speech itself."[209] The essay can be read as a productive exercise in the legitimation of everyday democratic

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[208] Samuel McCormick and Mary Stuckey, "Presidential Disfluency: Literacy, Legibility, and Vocal Political Aesthetics in the Rhetorical Presidency," *Review of Communication* 13, no. 1 (2013): 4.
[209] Samuel McCormick, "Arguments from Analogy and Beyond: The Persuasive Artistry of Local American Civic Life," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 100, no. 2 (2014): 205.

speech as a worthwhile object of rhetorical study, even (or, at times in the essay, especially) when this speech is devoid of semantic content. My project resonates with McCormick's to a striking degree: "Even rhetorics that fail to function—and especially those whose failures are fundamental to their rhetorical force—should be among our prized objects of inquiry."[210] The primary point of difference, however, is also the most consequential. For McCormick, the paralinguistic, specifically vocalic dimensions of speech that constitute these failures include both chatter lacking "direct semantic meaning"[211] and the dis-integration of meaning that I have called *chōric*. Posited in this way, everyday chatter and the terrifying, temporary collapse of meaning exist on a linear scale, from chattering to shattering. Alternatively, I would like to parse the two in order to reserve theoretical room for rhetoric that is not only absent semantic meaning, but also functions within a "space" no meaning could possibly fill. It necessarily follows that *chōric* rhetoric is neither limited to vocalics nor is it measurable along a scale. There is not more or less of it; it is, for the subject, singular in each irruption.

Figured by what Kristeva recognizes as "reduplication" in discourse, Nikolchina argues that *chōra* (figured as female libido) is not space but spatialized, atemporal but temporalized:

Reduplication, carried out as a "jammed repetition" ([Kristeva 1989,] p. 246) is the direct expression and the immediate language of female libido. Referring to the outmost limits of our unstable identities, reduplication unfolds as a

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[210] McCormick, "Arguments," 208. This argument takes on even more force when considering that one of the discipline's early foci was the treatment of stuttering. See, for instance, Pauline B. Camp, "Correction of Speech Defects in a Public School System," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 3, no. 4 (1917): 304-9; Ernest Tompkins M.E., "Left-Handedness and Stammering," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 5, no. 1 (1919): 6-11; Walter B. Swift, "Can Stuttering be Outgrown?" *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 5, no. 4 (1919): 368-74. See also, Joshua Gunn, "Speech's Sanatorium," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 101, no. 1 (2015): 18-33.

[211] McCormick, "Arguments," 204.

stammering of temporality that forever struggles to pronounce one and the same

petrified moment. It is an eternal return of the same, but, unlike the return that

["]is rippled out in time["] reduplication is a reverberation outside of time. It is,

therefore, a spatial occurrence, yet even its spatiality is unstable and tends to

collapse in ["]a play of mirrors lacking perspective or duration.["]][212]

Reduplication is normally understood as the repetition of sounds or grammar ("bye-bye,"

"bric-a-brac," "hotsy-totsy," and so on) to serve any number of semantic purposes,

among them intensification: "They thinking small, man, and this is a major, major, *major*

deal."[213] This is reduplication as meaningful, as a repetition constitutive of semantic

force. But in other contexts, reduplication marks the inability to signify, as anyone who

has spent significant time with advanced Alzheimer's patients, depressives, or

schizophrenic individuals can attest to. Stutters and repeated sounds fill the "space"

where no meaning fits, marking this form of reduplication as a repetition proper to the

drive.[214] Rather than serving a semantic role, drive reduplication is a form of repetition

that allows for rhetoric without meaning.

 The preceding section took helplessness, death, and anger as symptoms of the

drive at work. The final two sections of analysis trace the manner in which such *chōric*

symbolization steadily dissolves structures of meaning until, devoid of significance or

desire, unfillable silence can be the subject's only non/response. Evidenced by an

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[212] Nikolchina, *Matricide*, 8. I have added quotation marks where Kristeva is referenced verbatim. See Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 246.

[213] Nagin, "Interview."

[214] This is somewhat different than the profane, idiotic rhetoric for which Craig Mattson so convincingly argues. Whereas Mattson's interest is in reading what appears as piffle and profanity onto the plane of meaning, attention, and identification, mine is in the rhythm and glossolalia that find their effect outside of these realms. See, Craig Mattson, "From Wimsey to *The Wire*: Distracting Discourse and Attentional Practice," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 100, no. 1 (2014): 31-52.

increasingly frayed, stuttering grammatical and syntactic structure—reduplication here is less a principle of syntactical morphology and more a stuttering—by the end of the interview this unraveling has given way to a silence that does not and cannot immediately mean.

But how does one read these starts and stops? It is evident that such a candid interview will invariably possess a duller sheen than a polished speech, thus rendering the syntactical structure more vulnerable to stops, stutters, and restarts, sometimes in ways outside acceptable codes of usage. Black Southern vernacular discourse, in particular, has always occupied a position marginal to that of an economically and culturally privileged white discourse. This in part explains the ambivalent stance Nagin's black constituency has always held with respect to his normally well-polished political discourse (polished, of course, to a particular kind of sheen).[215] With this in mind, my task is therefore not to make arbitrary divisions or craft a typology of dominant or vernacular stutters, much less the potentially offensive task of determining where Nagin the person falls on that spectrum; that is, it is not entirely important with what content Nagin's speech signals and brings forth the unrepresentable. Rather, the central critical concern becomes when his speech does so.

From the beginning of the interview, Nagin's discourse is far from combed clean. For instance, in discussing the slow response and lack of authorized leadership, he reflects, "I mean, the air conditioning must be good, because I haven't had any in five days, uh, and maybe it's becau—maybe there's some, some smoke coming out of the air

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[215] Arnold R. Hirsch, "Fade to Black: Hurricane Katrina and the Disappearance of Creole New Orleans," *The Journal of American History* 94 (Dec. 2007): 752-61.

conditioning units that is clogging some folks je—uh, you know, their vision."[216] These

starts and stops typical within everyday conversation litter the entire interview, inviting

the conclusion that reduplication marks Nagin's exhaustion, frustration, and, perhaps, the

search for political arguments that will finally resonate with those able to hasten federal

aid efforts.

And yet, the most pronounced and fragmented syntactical reduplications emerge

when Nagin is forced to make contact with a political logic of federal disaster response

that has, for him, become absurd and unintelligible. When asked, "What do you need,

right now, to get control of this situation?" Nagin reiterates that he needs federal

resources on a scale far greater than the federal government sent them. After what was

perhaps the most widely circulated and remediated command to "[g]et every doggone

Greyhound busline in the country, and get their asses moving to New Orleans," he

becomes increasingly exasperated with the suggestion that he generate a formal political

appeal:

> This is crazy! I've got 15- to 20,000 people over at the convention center, it's
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> bursting at the st—the seams, the poor people in Plaquemines Parish they're ai—
>
> they're, they're air 'vac-ing people over here in New Orleans—We don't have
>
> anything and we're sharing with our brothers in, in Plaquemines Parish. We, w—
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> it's, it's, it's, it's *awful* down here, man.[217]

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[216] Nagin, "Interview."

[217] Nagin, "Interview." Despite any theoretical differences between McCormick and Stuckey's projects and mine, it may be wondered why I choose not to utilize an established, standardized method of transcription as they do, particularly in this section. I made this choice based on the concern that analysis grounded in such forms of transcription may too easily lead to a typologization of forms, which would obviously be at odds with the very theoretical definition of *chōric* rhetoric. Rather than attempting to fully capture and record its paralinguistic aspects, I instead opted to transcribe the audio recording in a more literary fashion, which comports better with the theoretical commitments of this essay (see also fn 93).

The reduplication evident in this answer, a stutter marking meaning's giving way to the anarchy of the drive, is nestled between a discussion of the inadequacy of federal response and the institutional, governmental processes blamed for this inadequacy. Did the governor request this aid? Can the president authorize these resources without such a formal appeal? The procedural inquiry, so often the prey of satirists, never nestles comfortably into the interview. Nagin again, on the unrealized engineering of 3,000lb sandbags:

> It, it—they said it was some pulleys that they had to manufacture but, you know, in a state of emergency, man, you, you, you are creative, you figure out ways to get stuff done. Then they told me that they went overnight and they built seventeen—seventeen concrete structures, and they had the pulleys on them and they were gonna drop them.[218]

The stutter, particularly the repetition of "seventeen"—an interruption delivered as if involuntarily coughed—is often rhythmically jarring in a way that signals a grappling with the unintelligible. It is as if the interview itself comes to represent for Nagin yet another procedural mechanism of formal appeal, requiring him to formulate justifications for more immediate federal action. Thus, when discussion turns seriously towards questions whose answers should be without question, that is, when tasked with making sensible justifications for receiving life-saving resources, Nagin's discourse stutters under the weight of the drive. Finally, as the fever of Nagin's discourse mounts, he calls the existing order into question most directly:

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[218] Nagin, "Interview."

Well, wh—did, did the tsunami victims request, go through a formal process to request? Uh, you know, did Iraq, did the Iraqi people request that we go in there? Did they ask us to go in there? They—what ha—what is more important? This is—you know, and I, I tell you man, I, I am, I'm probably going to get in a whole bunch of trouble. I'm probably going to get in so much trouble it ain't even funny, they probably won't even wanna deal with me after this interview is over—s . . . [Robinette interjects inconsequentially] . . . but, we authorized $8 billion to go to Iraq. Lickity-ss—quick. After 9/11, we gave the President unprecedented powers, lickity-ss—[*snaps fingers*] quick, to take care of New York and other places.[219]

Nagin's speech stutters, stops, restarts—reduplicates—as it attempts to express a political logic of disaster response dislocated from partisan fiscal deliberation and bureaucratic procedures. The arguments Nagin makes are of some consequence, particularly in later newsprint summaries of the interview, but the force of his speech is attained through the reduplicative stutter, in the *chōric* nonsense that undoes sense. In Kristeva's words, "dislocation of lexical, syntactic, and narrative units . . . is *immediately* experienced as a psychic transformation of the speaking being between the two limits of meaning and nonmeaning."[220] Reduplication in Nagin's discourse emerges most strongly when partisanship and governmental procedure reach the limits of meaning, foreshadowing a new federal disaster response logic whose motto becomes, finally with Obama, "cut through red tape."[221]

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[219] Nagin, "Interview."
[220] Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 101, emphasis in original.
[221] Obama, "American Red Cross."

These instances of reduplication are followed immediately by the aforementioned angry outburst, a purging that leaves only silence. It is now possible to examine this silence as a kind of rhetoric without meaning, a force of political upheaval irreducible to any materiality but that of the drive. *Chōric* silence will therefore be understood as the limit point of *chōric* inscription within speech.

Chōric Silence

> *[I]f I am no longer capable of translating or*
> *metaphorizing, I become silent and I die.*
> *-Julia Kristeva,* Black Sun[222]

Because of this limit point, I wish to describe an alternative form of drive work than the one Gunn provides. In a predominately phallic economy, drive repetition is strikingly masturbatory: On this point, we concur. But in the case of Nagin's discourse, its apex is reached not when he "gets off" on his object and circles back for another round, but when the force of the unrepresentable arrests this circling completely, leaves meaning in shambles, and thus effects a reorganization of what makes sense.

How has silence been theorized in the field of rhetorical studies? Scholarly positions, in my view, may be parsed as follows: those offering different interpretations of the political functions of silence; those examining the relationship between speech and silence; and those theorizing the degree to which silence can be productive of rhetorical effect given the right context. An early essay by Robert Scott, for example, sets rhetoric and silence in dialectical opposition, equating silence with elision and rhetoric with

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[222] Kristeva, *Black Sun*, 42.

exposition.[223] In positioning them dialectically, however, he productively contends that speaking generates the silence of the unsaid, and remaining silent in part exposes the significance of speech itself. In response to Scott's essay, we see a related, but divergent pair of critical developments in rhetoric: one that works hard to define the contours of a strategic rhetoric of silence,[224] and another that attempts to formulate a hermeneutics of silence aimed at mining the unsaid in order to map the suppression of political "voice."[225] Silence is most often meaningful. The imposed silence of the courtroom and classroom, the systematic erasure of marginalized speech in the public sphere, and the tendency for one's refusal to speak to be read as "speaking for itself"[226]: These examples make plain the paradoxes and complications that plague theorists attempting to make *sens* of silence. Put simply, these scholars have shown us that silence can be rhetorical.[227]

For all their differences, however, the vast majority of rhetorical theories of silence share a penchant for making all silence meaningful—indeed, meaning and effect are cuffed together. Inaugurating this conversation with Scott's dialectical treatment

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[223] Robert Scott, "Rhetoric and Silence," *Western Journal of Communication*, 36, no. 3 (1972): 146-58.
[224] See: Barry Brummett, "Towards a Theory of Silence as a Political Strategy," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 66, no. 3 (1980): 289-303; Lester C. Olson, "On the Margins of Rhetoric: Audre Lorde Transforming Silence into Language and Action," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 83, no. 1 (1997): 49-70; Cheryl Glenn, "Silence: A Rhetorical Art for Resisting Discipline(s)," *JAC* 22, no. 2 (2002): 261-91; Cynthia Ryan, "Unquiet Gestures: Thoughts on a Productive Rhetoric of Silence," *JAC* 22, no. 3 (2002): 667-78; Robert E. Terrill, "Irony, Silence, and Time: Frederick Douglass on the Fifth of July," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 89, no. 3 (2003): 216-34; Cheryl Glenn, *Unspoken: A Rhetoric of Silence* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004).
[225] See, for instance, Dana L. Cloud, "The Null Persona: Race and the Rhetoric of Silence in the Uprising of '34," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 2, no. 2 (1999): 177-209; Nan Johnson, "Reigning in the Court of Silence: Women and Rhetorical Space in Postbellum America," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 33, no. 3 (2000): 221-42; Charles E. Morris III, "Passing by Proxy: Collusive and Convulsive Silence in the Trial of Leopold and Loeb," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 91, no. 3 (2005): 264-90; Tammie M. Kennedy, "Enthymematical, Epistemic, and Emotional Silence(s) in the Rhetoric of Whiteness," *JAC* 27, no. 1/2 (2007): 253-75; Susan Zaeske, "Hearing the Silences in Lincoln's Temperance Address: Whig Masculinity as an Ethic of Rhetorical Civility," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 13, no. 3 (2010): 389-419.
[226] See Shelby P. Bell, "What Does Silence Signify?: Investigating the Rhetoric of Silence in *Berghuis v. Thompkins*," *Western Journal of Communication* 78, no. 2 (2014): 175-193.
[227] See also: Rod Jenks, "The Sounds of Silence: Rhetoric and Dialectic in the Refutation of Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias*," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 40, no. 2 (2007): 201-15;

ensures that conceptually, silence does not signify the absence of signification and that silence is positively meaningful. Whether a signal of oppression or resistance, and most often posited somewhere in between, theories of rhetoric and silence have tended to assume that silence must always mean in order to have effects.[228]

The wager of this section and of the culmination of my analysis is that silence, among other manifestations of the unrepresentable *chōra* (such as reduplication), can sometimes be most productive of effects *when it does not mean*, or more specifically, when it marks a rhetorical space that no meaning could possibly fill.[229] Silence is perhaps the most challenging form of *chōric* rhetoric to explain because unlike reduplication, which takes its departure (and thus departs) from familiar understandings of repetition, reading silence against meaning violates still tacit presumptions about both speech's form and its content. Scott comes closest to my definition in his more recent essay in which he considers a fundamental, metaphysical silence attributable to the spiritual realm.[230] Edwin Black seems to invoke a similar mode of silence in his famous essay, "Gettysburg and Silence," in which he argues that the swelling brilliance of Lincoln's singularly masterful rhetoric appears to burst forth from nothing.[231] These accounts recall the fundamental struggle around which the *Timaeus* is organized and encourage an alternate theory of

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[228] See, for instance: Trent Eades, "Plato, Rhetoric, and Silence," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 29, no. 3 (1996): 244-58.

[229] New materialism has effectively suppressed the urge to give such primacy to meaning as well, but at the same time has seemed to drop "silence" as a conceptual category of discourse. It is possible that a flat ontology, replete with the rhizomatic movement of bodies and discourse, has the effect of obliterating any distinction between speaking and silence, thus making all silences equally positive, even if not at the epistemological level.

[230] Robert Scott, "Between Silence and Certainty: A Codicil to 'Dialectical Tensions of Speaking and Silence,'" *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 86, no. 1 (2000): 108-10.

[231] Edwin Black, "Gettysburg and Silence," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 80, no. 1 (1994): 21-36.

silence, but ultimately align with its metaphysical and ontological pretensions.[232] In order

to avoid these pretensions, which attribute *chōric* effects to the divine rather than as

constituted by the drive-work implied in the irruption of the semiotic into discourse, it is

necessary to read *chōric* silence as nonsense produced by discourse. Moreover, this

approach affords such unfillable silence a role in discourse even before it "will have

meant" something within an acceptable signifying system.[233]

This provisional departure from semantic life, *chōric* in a general sense, is made

manifest here specifically as silence. I will once more quote it, so to speak:

Robinette: And I'll say it right now, you're the only politician that's called, and

called for arms like *this*. And if, whatever it takes, the Governor, President,

whatever law precedent it takes, whatever it takes, I bet that the people listening

to you are on your side.

Nagin: Well, I hope so Garland, I am just [pause] I'm at the point now where it

don't matter. People are dying [pause]. They don't have homes [pause]. They don't

have jobs [pause]. The City of New Orleans will never be the same [five second

pause] in this time [fifteen second pause].

Robinette: [During the longer silence one can hear muffled sniffles, breathing]

We're both pretty speechless here.

Unidentified Person: [Broken diction] Yeah, I don't know what to say.

Robinette: Ahhhhhh . . .

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[232] See also, for a more directly metaphysical, theological, and mystical interpretation of such silence, Dorothee Soelle, *Silent Cry: Mysticism and Resistance* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2001).
[233] For a Lacanian rhetorical take on the future anterior tense of the "will have been," see Barbara A. Biesecker, "No Time for Mourning: The Rhetorical Production of the Melancholic Citizen-Subject in the War on Terror," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 40, no. 1 (2007): 147-69.

Nagin: I gotta go.

Robinette: Ok, uh, keep us, [click] keep in touch—keep in touch.[234]

Robinette hastily cuts to commercial break: no summary, no segment wrap-up, and no immediate acknowledgement that the interview, transgressive from the start, had reached the limits of transgression. Arguments, appeals, and other tropological figurations no longer make sense. In their stead is a silence that, while later on brought to meaning, is not meaningful and yet has rhetorical force.

During the nearly thirty seconds of *chōric* silence here—beginning hazily with the pause following "will never be the same," peaking most obviously in the fifteen seconds of phonic silence, and then ending with the cut to commercial—there is sound.[235] In the background of the more than twenty seconds of silence—punctuated only by "in this time," a concluding effort preceded by an impossibly long five-second pause and followed by an unthinkable fifteen-second pause—one can hear faintly a television airing a tritely-cadenced advertisement. Its grotesque upbeatness, while quiet and almost undetectable, is nevertheless markedly out of place. This sound is not a violation of the standards of normative decorum, as if a gabbing couple that fails to notice that everyone else began an official moment of silence. It is out of place, rather, because of the impossibility that anything could have appropriately filled that space—even silent reverence. That is, *chōric* silence is not the absence of sound where sound should not be, but rather the absence of meaning where meaning *cannot* be. *Chōric* silence is thus not an

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[234] Nagin, "Interview." An unanswered email inquiry to Garland Robinette failed to reveal who this third person was. It is clear that he is on Robinette's side of the connection, but he had until that moment not spoken.

[235] *Chōric* silence cannot thus be reduced to sonorous encounter. For this approach, see Greg Goodale, "The Sonorous Envelope and Political Deliberation," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 99, no. 2 (2013): 218-224.

auditory account (the Latin *sileō* indicates inaction, rest, and stasis as much as noiselessness,[236]). It is rather an arrestment of meaning engendering rhetorical force, here made manifest in a loss for words. After the fifteen seconds of this "dead air" elapses, during which time can also be heard Robinette's emotional snuffs, he attempts a feeble recovery of meaning, but ends up saying that there is literally nothing to say: "We're both pretty speechless here."[237]

A Small Death

I am not advocating that discourses riven by repetition, reduplication, and *chōric* silence be the "new" objects of rhetorical studies. This contention would no doubt preach either the utopian promise of a finally inclusive storehouse of rhetorical objects or an apocalyptic warning that we are doomed if we do not read the right objects in the right way. Instead, I am encouraging rhetorical scholars to ask not merely "what counts" as a proper rhetorical object, but also, about that which does not apparently count, "why has it not been counted?" What are the mechanisms within the popular psyche that must so feverishly disavow certain kinds of rhetoric, and in what ways do critics inadvertently submit to the authority of this disavowal?

After all, what is the legacy of Katrina if not the sterile, impotent conviction that political logics of federal disaster response were remade outside of rhetoric? That the Bush administration's mishandling of the situation *tout court* upheaved the paradigm of red-tape negligence or, worse yet, that disasters have always prompted cut-tape response

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[236] *University of Notre Dame Latin Dictionary*, s.v. "sileo," accessed May 28, 2014, http://latin.campus.nd.edu/cgi-bin/lookup.pl?stem=sileo&ending=sileo
[237] Nagin, "Interview."

but that Bush failed to deliver?[238] As Kenneth T. Walsh of *U.S. News* put it, "The contrast couldn't be much greater: two killer storms, two commanders in chief, two very different responses."[239]

There is a certain matricide at work in this remembering, one that takes its cue from, but is different from, Nikolchina's characterization. The figure of reduplication, of "jammed repetition" I argued was characteristic of Nagin's discourse, plays out for Nikolchina primarily on the historical plane. In her book she asks, what accounts for the sense within each generation of women writers that they have no inherited legacy?

> The maleness of all wisdom with its entrancing speeches is a retroactive phenomenon: it produces the illusion that the present, any present, is always far more generous than the past in terms of its recognition of women's names. The past was unfair, the present is full of promise, and the future will set things right. The driving force behind this perennial optimism is the work of forgetfulness.[240]

This driving force is not merely the retroactivity at work within any act of remembering but, more, is enabled by a perpetual repression within Western discourse of semiotic force. For Nikolchina, this retroactivity perennially leaves women writers without a

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[238] In a sampling of the Hurricane Sandy-generated press alone, see: Peter Foster, "Republican Attacked for Plan to Cut Relief Agency," *The Daily Telegraph*, October 31, 2012; Lara Marlowe, "At Least 32 Killed as Sandy Sweeps US Northeast," *The Irish Times*, October 31, 2012; Kenneth T. Walsh, "A Tale of two Storms: Comparing Bush and Obama's Hurricane Response," *U.S. News*, October 31, 2012, http://www.usnews.com/news/blogs/ken-walshs-washington/2012/10/31/a-tale-of-two-storms-comparing-bush-and-obamas-hurricane-response; Stacey Plaisance, "Hurricane Katrina Memories Stirred by Sandy's Wrath," *The Huffington Post*, November 11, 2012; John Aravosis, "A Tale of Two Hurricanes: Obama Comforted Victims, Bush Ate Cake," *America Blog*, http://americablog.com/2012/11/bush-obama-hurricane-katrina-sandy.html; Hayes Brown, "Bush's FEMA Director During Katrina Criticizes Obama for Responding to Sandy too Quickly," *Nation of Change*, October 31, 2012, https://thinkprogress.org/bushs-fema-director-during-katrina-criticizes-obama-for-responding-to-sandy-too-quickly-7412ec7c71d0#.vz8bfqk82

[239] Walsh, "A Tale."

[240] Nikolchina, *Matricide*, 2. Bradford Vivian has called psychoanalysis a project set against forgetting and, while the thrust of his critique aims elsewhere, he is fortunately not wrong. Nevertheless, like Kristeva, he sees promise in the Arendtian conception of natality, or rebirth. See Vivian, *Public Forgetting*.

history. For me, the matricide at work in the case of Katrina involves a more immediate reattribution: where the semiotic produces political upheaval, we reattribute such change to paternal Source. Matricidal forgetfulness, which "can be encountered in any discursive field," [241] ensures that the acknowledgement of *chōric* rhetoric remains limited to descriptions of art, film, and literature, and that public controversies abject its influence from their histories. I choose my word carefully: abject, because it appears too threatening and horrific to recognize the semiotic motor behind political transformation, requires too much in the way of critical reflexivity about objects of study, and too willingly accepts the phallic logic that requires this forgetting. Yet, its presence is nevertheless experienced as a rebirth, as the terrifying agency behind the birth of new political logics.

The eschatology of the *chōric* object of rhetorical study is therefore neither utopian nor apocalyptic, but rather is natalistic. Wiegman and Gunn both convincingly demonstrate the hysteria at work in a certain form of preoccupation with critical self-definition, even as each do so very differently. Escaping this hysteria for each involves the performative play of the critic and her or his object. My proposed alternative to this response involves the charting of small deaths and rebirths: neither the transcendence of the finally perfect critical object nor its imminent collapse, but rather its consistent tendency to stop making sense, and for other objects to thereby begin making sense. As the foregoing analysis has shown, this approach operates both within the realm of popular political logics and also metacritically in the disciplinary authorization of one object of study over another. Such a politics, like Kristeva's theory of the subject "in process/on

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[241] Nikolchina, *Matricide*, 8.

trial" (*en procés*),[242] to appropriate S. K. Keltner's phrasing, is "not substantive, but a movement, an event, or an affective relating that takes place at a certain linguistic, affective threshold that is at once also social and historical."[243] In the end, after all, we are tasked ethically with nothing less than tracing the limit point of the given.

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[242] Thorough elaboration of the concept can be found in Kristeva, *Revolution*.

[243] S. K. Keltner, "Introduction," in Oliver and Kelter, *Psychoanalysis*, 3.

CHAPTER 4

FEMA AND THE FETISH, OR, THERE IS NO SUCH THING AS A NATURAL

DISASTER: HURRICANE SANDY AS A *PARALIPTIC* DISAVOWAL OF KATRINA

> *This is a problem of both engineers and statesmen.*
> -Lehman Johnson, 1927[244]

Introduction

In a bizarre but somehow unsurprising period during late October and early

November 2012, New Jersey Governor Chris Christie came under fire by conservative

media and politicians. A Republican Governor in a left-leaning state and one of the top

surrogates for Mitt Romney's presidential campaign, Christie had, for many, done

something unthinkable. It was something so politically damaging that years later pundits

and voters said they were still mad.[245] In the days immediately following Hurricane

Sandy, he accepted President Obama's offer for the president to visit the state and, upon

Obama's arrival, Christie "hugged" him. Although he argues now that it was a handshake

rather than a hug,[246] Christie had made the mistake of publicly affirming the

presidentiality of the incumbent president by, as one former Romney aide put it,

"humping Obama's leg" to secure disaster aid funding.[247] This controversy signaled the

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[244] Quoted in Natalie Schuster, "'This "Who Shot John Thing,"' Disaster Relief as an Entitlement in the 20th Century," *Federal History* 6 (2014): 89.

[245] "NH Voters to Luntz: Still Upset at Christie for 2012 'Hug' of Obama," *Fox News Insider*, August 5, 2015, http://insider.foxnews.com/2015/08/05/nh-voters-tell-frank-luntz-theyre-still-upset-christie-obama-hug-after-sandy

[246] Zeke J. Miller, "Christie: Obama 'Hug' Never Happened," *Time*, February 4, 2016, http://time.com/4207368/chris-christie-barack-obama-hug/

[247] Deroy Murdock, "The Night Chris Christie Killed the Romney Campaign," *National Review*, February 4, 2016, https://www.nationalreview.com/2016/02/chris-christie-barack-obama-2012-hurricane-sandy/

stakes of successful federal response to Sandy. Indeed, Christie admitted later "that

Obama had the opportunity to 'look presidential' during the clean-up effort," then added

the caveat, "the storm did that, not me."[248] This added qualification belies Christie's

knowledge that Romney supporters believed otherwise. I argued in the previous chapter

that the ways in which the memory of Bush's failure is itself partly the product of a

displacement that produced a somewhat new era of public sentiment towards federal

disaster response, one that Christie was swept into seven years later. Pulled between his

role as governor and his role as a Romney surrogate, he chose the former. The purpose of

this chapter is to track that displacement into the future and, more specifically, to

explicate the means by which that shift of sentiment disavows the acknowledgement that

the tragedies of Katrina extend far beyond the failure to respond adequately.

At the heart of this disavowal is the failure to acknowledge a broad national

complicity deeply rooted in neoliberal disaster policy and neoliberalism itself. Majia

Holmer Nadeson explains that "Foucault (2003) and subsequent governmentality scholars

argue that neoliberalism—as a body of knowledge, strategies and practices of

governance—seeks to divest the state of paternalistic responsibility by shifting social,

political, and economic 'responsibility' to privatized institutions and economically

rationalized 'self-governing' individuals."[249] She uses Foucault's conception of

neoliberalism to argue that the moralizing discourse of neoconservatism blamed social

programs for the devastation of human lives during Katrina rather than acknowledging

their root in neoliberalism more broadly. While the target of her essay is clearly

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[248] Katie Reilly, "6 Ways Chris Christie Has Talked about His Obama 'Hug,'" *Time*, February 4, 2016, http://time.com/4208219/chris-christie-barack-obama-hurricane-sandy-hug/
[249] Majia Holmer Nadeson, "Hurricane Katrina: Governmentality, Risk, and Responsibility," *Controversia* 6, no. 1 (2008): 72.

neoconservative neoliberalism, its conclusions remain constructive in analyzing the

Sandy era, in no small part because disaster policy had by and large remained neoliberal

in its logic by the time the storm made landfall in 2012. I would like to push Nadeson's

conclusions one step further to argue that successful federal response itself became a

fetish object during Sandy, *paraliptically* disavowing the complicity of neoliberalism in

creating the conditions whereby large-scale federal response becomes the measure by

which the politics of disaster are assessed. At the root of this disavowal is the imperative

to view Katrina as primarily a natural disaster which, as Chapter 2 made clear, is a

dubious conclusion at best. The long legacy of institutional racism and the resource gap

that it has produced, coupled with geographic and infrastructural segregation, have

engendered disparities of risk and disaster effects that lead Chester Hartman and Gregory

Squires to conclude, "there is no such thing as a natural disaster."[250] It is necessary of

course that, given those conditions, the federal government respond quickly and

adequately. During Sandy, however, the nation witnessed the rhetorical process by which

adequate response became a fetish object that allowed the unfettered logic and complicity

of the relationship between neoliberalism and disaster to remain uninterrogated. In

making the case for this, I first outline the grammar of the fetish and the rhetorical

function of *paralipsis* in the process of disavowal. Then, I briefly recount a history of

disaster policy to describe the stakes of the storm as a metric for presidentiality. Finally, I

turn to a series of three of Sandy's symptoms that characterize successful federal

response as a fetish object.

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[250] Chester Hartman and Gregory D. Squires, eds., *There is No Such Thing as a Natural Disaster: Race, Class, and Hurricane Katrina* (New York: Routledge, 2006).

Fetish

In her essay on perversion at the level of the social, Lynne Layton recounts a white patient's retelling of a dream to demonstrate the function of disavowal:

> *I'm watching this dream unfold: there's a black woman who feels ill. She seems to get progressively worse. Her friends dig up a pit in the dirt and with water make it into a mud bath. They have her in it, rolling her around, back and forth, making more mud all the while. I'm worrying that they might be intending to put her under water. I don't want to be watching and not doing anything; I have to hope they have her best interests at heart and that they know what they're doing. The woman is in a delirium. When just her head is visible, her daughter, who has been watching, cries out, 'That's my mama,' and rushes closer to her to hug her. I don't remember seeing her submerged or getting better.*
>
> *In the next scene, however, there's a whole crew of people escorting her to a tv show where she was supposed to be going on, but they were filling in for her because of her illness. Not only had she recovered, she looked absolutely stunning, glamorous: reminiscent of Oprah. Her friends were rushing ahead and there was commotion as they were letting the tv people know that she was coming and to plan for her to come on.*[251]

Following the dictates of a Lacanian-Freudian reading strategy, Layton importantly reads this recounting at the level of enunciation. For one, although the session from which this account was drawn occurred only weeks after Hurricane Katrina, the patient does not mention the hurricane at all. When asked about the race of the people in the dream,

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[251] Lynne Layton, "Irrational Exuberance: Neoliberal Subjectivity and the Perversion of Truth," *Subjectivity* 3, no. 3 (2010): 306, emphasis in original.

however, the patient makes an immediate metonymic association between Katrina and the failure of the federal government: "She said she was very upset about what was going on and then went on to speak disparagingly about 'them', those horrible people in the Bush administration and in New Orleans who didn't think about how poor people without cars were going to get out."[252] For Layton, the patient's conviction in her lack of complicity in the situation is marked by a symptom–"That's my mama"–that gives away an admission that "we are all interimplicated and interdependent."[253] A figure who is at first an onlooker exclaims, "That's my mama," suddenly becomes a daughter who rushes in to help lift her mother from the mud pit and facilitate her televisual and personal transcendence. The others in the scene either are helpless watchers or are the ones capable of rescue but fail miserably at that task. The disavowal described in this scene involves a transposition made as the daughter rushes in: without having witnessed the transformation, the patient was suddenly presented with an image of personal triumph, a woman who was in one moment drowning in the mud and in the next rushing towards TV stardom. The passive voice—"the transposition made"—is necessary here: the unconscious requires the dream to displace the agency of this transformation because a narrative of collective assistance would by necessity include complicity in the black woman's predicament in the first place. Complicity is the trauma that this disavowal functions to displace. Layton argues that this transposition "turned a tragedy in which we were all complicit, a tragedy of class, race, and the indifference to human vulnerability

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[252] Layton, "Irrational Exuberance," 306.
[253] Layton, "Irrational Exuberance," 307.

manifest in neoconservative foreign policies and neoliberal monetary and domestic

policies, into a spectacle, a story of personal triumph over adversity."[254]

But there is a more telling disavowal that Layton identifies which involves the

patient's lack of reference to Katrina until asked about it. At first, the patient interpreted

this dream as signifying the anxieties and opportunities of a personal transformation.

Then, when the connection to Katrina was made, it also represented to her the sense of

absolute failure of the federal government to take care of its people. However, as soon as

the subject of her own complicity was introduced—the sense, perhaps, that the anxiety of

the dream stemmed as well from the creeping feeling of implicit participation in the

tragedy—the patient flatly refused such a conclusion: "She said she did not; she'd never

let such a thing happen."[255] Layton continues: "Shame had set in, and I realized only later

that addressing the complicity rather than the helplessness had likely suggested my own

refusal of complicity, as though I somehow was able to stand outside as the curious, but

NOT HELPLESS onlooker."[256] Layton's suggestion of her own refusal thus afforded the

patient the same. The transformation of collective responsibility into the refusal of

complicity symptomatizes not only in the dream's perverse narrative but also, and more

importantly, in the structure of the patient's treatment itself.

In psychoanalysis, disavowal—in this case, the disavowal of complicity

performed by both Layton and her patient—is always enabled by cathexis in a substitute,

a fetish object. The concept of the fetish has a somewhat controversial standing among

psychoanalytic scholars across disciplines, but it remains at its core a mechanism of

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[254] Layton, "Irrational Exuberance," 307.
[255] Layton, "Irrational Exuberance," 307.
[256] Layton, "Irrational Exuberance," 307, emphasis in original.

substitution. For Freud, it functions as a penis-substitute, but not just any penis: "To put it more plainly: the fetish is a substitute for the woman's (the mother's) penis that the little boy once believed in and—for reasons familiar to us—does not want to give up."[257] In other words, the traumatic realization that the mother does not have one, and subsequently that castration is a possibility, requires that he invest in a series of substitute objects that disavow that fact. Feminist scholars have taken issue with Freud's characterization, in particular because it distinguishes between boys and girls on a genital level, and configures the dynamic of fetish differently for each, subsequently fashioning psychoanalytic concepts with reference to the boy.[258]

Lacan reformulates Freud's theory of fetish by replacing the penis with the phallus, a representation of the lack explained in Chapter 3, as a privileged signifier of that "wholeness" or "unicity" that the subject has renounced in order to enter into language. While in that chapter, *contra* Lacan, I utilized Kristeva's work to define a realm of speech not reducible to the Lacanian structure of lack, Lacan's revision of Freud informs the formulation of fetish in this chapter.[259] Henry Krips summarizes the phallus's function within the Symbolic as such: "where the place of the [big] Other (which may be occupied by the mother, a policeman, or any other authority figure) is the externally projected position from which the subject looks for an answer to the question of his or her own desire."[260] Such a redefinition allows Lacan to also introduce the little other, the

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[257] Sigmund Freud, *Fetishism*, in *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud (Vol. XXI)*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1927), 152-53.

[258] See, for instance: Marjorie Garber, "Fetish Envy," *October* 54 (1990): 45-56.

[259] It is worth noting here that Kristeva, on whose work I have hinged a significant portion of my own theoretical approach in this dissertation, affirms the structure of fetish and disavowal passed down from Freud through Lacan. Although, as might be expected, she takes issue with the centrality of the castration narrative in explaining fetish and disavowal, that is a conversation outside the scope of my purposes in this chapter.

[260] Henry Krips, *Fetish: An Erotics of Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 8.

objet petit a or simply *objet a*. Located in the Imaginary, the *objet a* acts not as a desired

object, but rather as the object-cause of desire, an object around which desire is

organized. Krips explains, "the *objet a* creates the false impression that there was

something—an original lacking object . . .—for which it acts as a substitute."[261] In the

context of fetish, however, the subject recognizes this impression as false, but must for

whatever reason continue operating as if it were not. Žižek elsewhere describes the fetish

as "the embodiment of the Lie which enables us to sustain the unbearable truth."[262] It is

"a substitutive formation as the outcome of a displacement,"[263] and, in the words of Freud

himself, "a compromise formed with the help of displacement."[264] Octave Mannoni

famously outlines the grammar of this gesture as "*Je sais bien, mais quand même*," or "I

know very well, but nevertheless."[265]

These substitutions are important to the study of memory precisely because they

are symptomatic of the sort of psychic trauma that memorialization so often attempts to

sooth. Derek Hook describes the relationship of fetish and memory as such:

> In psychoanalysis there is a term that describes this operation – in which we see a
>
> great investment in a certain object or person taken out of a disturbing context,
>
> and that is then memorialized, instituted in a way that enables us to forget, in a
>
> manner that protects us from a far more threatening situation. I have in mind the
>
> notion of the fetish, a term whose anthropological use gives us a useful sense of

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[261] Krips, *Fetish*, 21.

[262] Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom!* (New York: Routledge, 1992), x.

[263] Siegfried Zepf, "A Note on the Application of the Term 'Disavowal' in Psychoanalysis," *The Scandinavian Psychoanalytic Review* 36, no. 1 (2013): 38.

[264] Sigmund Freud, *An Outline of Psycho-Analysis*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989), 91.

[265] Octave Mannoni, "*Je sais bien, mais quand-même...*" *Clefs pour l'imaginaire ou l'autre scène* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1969), 9-33.

how precious this object or activity is, not only in fending off anxiety but in enabling a kind of magical thinking, in making coherent a particular ideological world-view.[266]

Likewise, Russell Kilbourn highlights the traumatic dimension of the fetish in memory: "In other words, Freud's fetish connects to memory through trauma: 'the fetish allows access to its own cause. It acknowledges its own traumatic real and may be compared to a red flag, symptomatically signaling a site of psychic pain.'"[267] In other words, where you find fetishistic substitution, you find the trauma that initiates it. It is for this reason that a complete account of the displacements of public memory of Hurricane Katrina—as a moment of national trauma—must take stock of subsequent fetish objects and their attendant disavowals.

Even where Katrina is taken as a direct point of reference for understanding subsequent disaster response, all too often discourses surrounding these events posit the experience of this trauma primarily as a result of the failures of governance in the face of a politically neutral natural force—not as the result of more than three hundred years of social and economic vulnerability to that very force, the most recent decades of which have been amplified by neoliberal policies. The national trauma of Katrina is in no small part rooted in the visibility of the failures of neoliberal logics of disaster relief and response as well, the result of a history of civil defense strategies that make disaster preparedness and response an individual civic duty, even amidst the growing sentiment

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[266] Derek Hook, *(Post)Apartheid Conditions: Psychoanalysis and Social Formation* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 81.
[267] Russell Kilbourn, *Cinema, Memory, Modernity: The Representation of Memory from the Art Film to Transnational Cinema*, 168.

that response and relief are federal entitlements.[268] Because of decades of policy making

that stripped funds from public response projects, because of a hearty survivalist culture

that has been a part of the American ethos for most of its history, because of the

systematic disproportion of economic resources and opportunities across a host of subject

positions and geographies—because of these factors and more, American neoliberalism

remains complicit with the infrastructural and political failures of Hurricane Katrina. A

full account of the differences in consequence between Hurricane Sandy and Hurricane

Katrina could not but focus squarely on the effects of institutional racism and poverty

which, as the narratives of The Big One in Chapter 2 attested to, in many ways

predetermined those consequences. In this sense, under no circumstance could Sandy and

the Eastern Seaboard have been another Katrina and New Orleans. Yet, that President

Obama's electability seemed to at least partially hinge on his response to Sandy revealed

the shadowy spectre of Katrina, the presence of which signals a fetishistic disavowal of

the most consequential differences between the two.

Paralipsis

Classically, *paralipsis* is figured directly in the content of speech: "We need not even

mention my opponent's ghastly voting record to demonstrate his corruptibility."

Paralipsis is the figure of "not to mention," the figure by which a rhetor talks about

something by directly stating that she will not talk about that thing. It is an insidious

figure that smuggles in a topic while simultaneously absolving the rhetor from the duty of

defending its inclusion. Likewise, *paralipsis* can work to position the rhetor strategically.

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[268] Schuster, "'This "Who Shot John Thing."'"

Barack Obama, in his "A More Perfect Union" speech, promises not to "recite here the history of racial injustice in this country"[269] and then goes on to trace economic disparity backwards towards Jim Crow and slavery.[270] *Paralipsis* in this case, then, functions to surreptitiously integrate a rationale for Reverend Jeremiah Wright's controversial comments—that his anger and sometimes anti-nationalist sentiments are legitimate reactions given the history of black experience in the United States—while at the same time disassociating himself from Wright. In mentioning that she or he will not mention the thing, the rhetor quite explicitly brings the thing to bear without the requirement that they accede to its affirmations. On its face, Sandy does not fit the bill: rarely in discourse during and surrounding Hurricane Sandy do we find *paraliptic* speech in expressed in this traditional construction.

However, in the context of fetish, *paralipsis* functions at the level of the utterance itself. The relationship between the impossible ideal and the substituted fetish object, it must be remembered, is one wherein the subject recognizes the falseness of the ideal but continues operating as if it does not. Megan Foley's description of *paralipsis* in the context of sound bites makes this structure clear:

> Sound bites are not a thorough ellipsis of public speech; they are paraleipsis.
> Rather than completely leaving speech behind, sound bites emphasize oratory
> through the very gesture of leaving it behind. Sound bites constantly circulate and
> recirculate political speech by pointing to its supposed loss. . . . Chaining out in a
> string of endless substitutions, sound bites have turned the public speech into a

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[269] Barack Obama, "A More Perfect Union" (speech, Philadelphia, PA, March 18, 2008), American Rhetoric, http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/barackobamaperfectunion.htm

[270] Paul Lynch, "Not to Shy Away: Barack Obama's Rhetoric of Friendship," *Present Tense* 2, no. 1 (2011): 1-7, http://www.presenttensejournal.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/09/Lynch1.pdf

fetish, a substitute object that simultaneously takes the place and marks the place

of an absent or lost object of desire. . . . In the form of the ever-present sound bite,

political oratory has been hiding in plain sight.[271]

Thus, the fetishistic rhetorical structure of *paralipsis*: a substitution that emphasizes even

as it leaves behind. Likewise, as Slavoj Žižek explains, the structure of fetishistic

disavowal—"I know very well, but nevertheless"—is displayed in the grammar of object

relations:

[T]hink of the way we behave towards the materiality of money: we know very

well that money, like all other material objects, suffers the effects of use, that its

material body changes through time, but in the social *effectivity* of the market we

none the less *treat* coins as if they consist "of an immutable substance, a

substance over which time has no power, and which stands in antithetic contrast

to any matter found in nature" (Sohn-Rethel, 1978, p. 59).[272]

The operation of both the fetish-as-substitute and that which attends it, disavowal,

requires a certain "not-noticing." If socio-economic and infrastructural conditions and

their overwhelming influence on the effects of natural disasters represent the most

obvious tragedy of Katrina, evidence of which has been manifold thus far in this

dissertation, then the "not-noticing" of that fact allows the stakes of federal response in

both Katrina and Sandy to gain undue equivalence. It is only within this equivalence that

successful federal response functions as a fetish object, a substitution that takes the place

of the impossible ideal of a system of economic and infrastructural invulnerability (or at

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[271] Megan Foley, "Sound Bites: Rethinking the Circulation of Speech from Fragment to Fetish," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 15, no. 4 (2012): 619.
[272] Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), 18, italics in original.

least less vulnerability) to disaster that is not at odds with the neoliberal ideals that undergird disaster policy as a whole. The impossibility of this ideal situates equivalent invulnerability in the place of the phallus, the position from which adequate disaster response is authorized as the real solution to the nation's disaster problems. The *paralipsis* at work in the nation's response to Sandy is thus a fetishistic process of substitution that posits response as the primary site of failure.

Insofar as response became the real tragedy of Katrina, response became the rallying cry of Sandy. Recognition of the infrastructural, political, and economic differences between those affected by each storm would be a direct confrontation with the relationship between race, class, and neoliberal subjectivity itself. Naming these differences is instructive, as well, given their similarity to the distinctions often made between the performances of memory regarding Katrina and that of another Bush-era moment of national trauma: 9/11. Maria Pramaggiore argues, for instance, that

> the WTC [World Trade Center] can be designated a commons of grief in ways that New Orleans and the devastated Gulf Coast region never can be, partly because of New Orleans' problematic position as an un-American space prior to the hurricane—expressed in designations such as "the northernmost Caribbean city" and its associations with repressed American histories of slavery, Catholicism, and voudoun—and partly because the Katrina disaster has as much to do with breaches of race, region, and class within American culture as it does with the breach of the levees. Without a clear story of national unity, the practices of memorialization are jeopardized.[273]

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[273] Maria Pramaggiore, "Expanded Medium: National Public Radio and Katrina Web Memorials," in *Old and New Media After Katrina*, ed. Diane Negra (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 85.

"National unity" here refers to the rallying cry of a nation attacked and whose assailant could be named and retaliated against, something that neither Katrina nor Sandy had. And yet, national unity was the foremost concern during Sandy as well, however differently articulated. The nation was asked to come together behind the causes of quick response and expedient recovery, to show its unity through lives saved and structures rebuilt. Pramaggiore's observation highlights the central problematic: without an identifiable assailant, the call for national unity during Sandy could not proceed on the same grounds as with 9/11. Instead, it was necessary to claim unity (without naming those other, more systemic differences that Pramaggiore identifies) by fetishizing response.

To understand the federal response to Hurricane Sandy as a fetish object, it will be necessary not only to understand the trauma that was Katrina, but also the conditions that allowed Sandy to function as it did. In Chapter 2, I traced the historical relationship between natural disasters, race, class, and capitalism, particularly as they have affected the South, even more specifically around southern Mississippi and New Orleans. Weaving into this history the more specific ways in which neoliberalism has structured the development of disaster relief in general, as well as natural disaster relief specifically, throughout the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries gives nuance to the analysis of how this particular fetish object functioned during and immediately after Sandy.

A Brief History of Disaster Policy

During the 2011 primaries and in the wake of the tornado disasters of the Midwest, CNN interviewer John King asked Romney whether it was time to shift the

burden for disaster response more squarely onto the shoulders of the so-affected states.

Romney replied:

> Absolutely. Every time you have an occasion to take something from the federal
> government and send it back to the states, that's the right direction. And if you
> can go even further and send it back to the private sector, that's even better. . . .
> We cannot afford to do those things without jeopardizing the future for our kids.
> It is simply immoral, in my view, for us to continue to rack up larger and larger
> debts and pass them on to our kids, knowing full well that we'll all be dead and
> gone before it's paid off. It makes no sense at all.[274]

While the immediate response to the Joplin disaster evidenced none of the national
outrage seen during Katrina, perhaps leading one to suspect that the reformations
wrought in the Post Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act of 2005 were
provisionally sufficient, the national conversation over the budgetary obligations of
FEMA of which this interview was only a part continued well into the presidential race,
right up to the moment at which it became clear that Sandy was likely to devastate the
Northeast.

At this moment, Romney's remarks took on a new meaning that implicated him in
a long history of conservative, pro-business discourse that effectively called his
compassion for disaster victims into question. Honing in on his invocation of morality
(and conveniently eliding the salient fact that the FEMA budget debate was the catalyst
for a near-government shutdown in 2011), critics hammered Romney for using free

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[274] Brad Johnson, "Mitt Romney: Federal Disaster Relief For Tornado And Flood Victims Is 'Immoral,'
'Makes No Sense At All,'" *ThinkProgress*, June 14, 2011,
http://thinkprogress.org/climate/2011/06/14/244973/mitt-romney-federal-disaster-relief-for-tornado-and-
flood-victims-is-immoral-makes-no-sense-at-all/.

market logic as cover for his intent to avoid national responsibility during declared

national disasters. As Huffington Post writer Andrew Taylor opines, "There's nothing

like a natural disaster to test the depth of politicians' preference for small government."

[275] Likewise, and with even more candor, Sarah Jones, writing for the Leftist website

Politicus USA, expressed simultaneously a "revelation" and a prediction:

> Oh, wait, that was primary Mitt. Primary Mitt is gone now, having succumbed to
>
> a visceral hatred of his "values." Today's Mitt will no doubt deny having ever
>
> said this. Please proceed to erase what you just saw from your mind. Etch-a-
>
> sketch will be pro-life for disaster victims and outraged at you for daring to bring
>
> up when he wasn't in 5…4…3…2…[276]

The metaphors of "depth" and the "Etch-a-sketch" syndrome obviously express a severe

dissatisfaction with political posturing in presidential campaigns. More than simply this,

however, the saliency of this particular political argument, at this particular time, may be

seen as a symptom of an as-yet-unresolved political and ethical crisis.

Indeed, the politicization of Sandy was a highly contentious talking point during

the week before the election and revolved around the extent to which disaster response,

good or bad, could significantly alter the outcome of the impending presidential election.

For instance, in assessing the electoral landscape, Karl Rove remained convinced that

"Obama has temporarily been a bipartisan figure this week. He has been the Comforter-

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[275] Andrew Taylor, "Romney Relief Effort Faces Scrutiny," *The Huffington Post*, October 31, 2012,
http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/10/31/mitt-romney-sandy_n_2049852.html.
[276] Sarah Jones, "Remember When Mitt Romney Called Disaster Relief Immoral and Wanted to Privatize
It?," *PoliticusUSA*, October 28, 2012, http://www.politicususa.com/2012/10/28/remember-mitt-romney-
called-disaster-relief-immoral-wanted-privatize-it.html.

in-Chief and that helps."[277] Larry Sabato, political scientist at the University of Virginia,

told CNN, "The better the response, the better Obama is going to look. . . . The worse the

response . . . the worse he's going to look. This presidential moment could help or hurt

him."[278] Countless other popular reports likewise took bets as to whether or not Sandy

would be a godsend for Obama—provided, of course, that he succeeded in playing the

role not only of the Comforter-in Chief, but also in fostering an image of himself as a

continuing leader of presidential magnitude. Often, these assessments were couched in

terms that avoided giving the whole election over to Sandy, as with New Yorker staff

writer John Cassidy: "If Obama does win tomorrow—as almost all the pundits and

pollsters now expect him to do—it will be too much to say that Sandy was responsible. . .

. But if Sandy didn't cost Romney the election, it may well have cost him his last shot of

winning."[279] It was, after all, notably controversial that Obama and Christie "hugged."[280]

One opinionist even suggested that Sandy's primary influence would be to disentangle

Obama's presidentiality from Benghazi: "Notice Obama isn't being asked whether aid

was denied in Benghazi. Instead, he's invited to demonstrate to voters how much aid he's

going to bring to the Northeast, as he becomes the great Federal Daddy to storm-tossed

battleground states."[281] Whatever the ultimate conclusion of these many appraisals of

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[277] Michael Leahy and Sean Sullivan, "Hurricane Sandy Helped Obama Politically, Karl Rove Says," *The Washington Post*, November 2, 2012, http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/the-fix/wp/2012/11/02/hurricane-sandy-helped-obama-politically-karl-rove-says/.
[278] As quoted in Patrik Jonsson, "Could Anger over Superstorm Sandy Response Taint Recovery, Election?" *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 3, 2012.
[279] John Cassidy, "How Much Did Hurricane Sandy Help Obama?," *The New Yorker*, November 4, 2012, http://www.newyorker.com/news/john-cassidy/how-much-did-hurricane-sandy-help-obama.
[280] Michael Barbaro, "After Obama, Christie Wants a G.O.P. Hug," *The New York Times*, November 19, 2012, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/20/us/politics/after-embrace-of-obama-chris-christie-woos-a-wary-gop.html
[281] John Kass, "Sandy Swoops in to Save Obama," *Chicago Tribune*, October 31, 2012, http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2012-10-31/news/ct-met-kass-1031-20121031_1_white-house-situation-room-barack-obama-benghazi

Sandy's political effects, the sheer fact that Sandy was so thoroughly understood to be a consequential political event marks it as a moment during which broad federal disaster response became a central marker not only of presidentiality, but also of the need to work through a contradiction: how, in the face of both a massive national disaster and under the pretense of another Katrina-like national trauma, does the nation rationalize extraordinary levels federal aid while at the same time maintaining the neoliberal ethic that has long been dominant in the United States?

Such a question undermines the logic espoused by many critics, both during Sandy and at my time of writing that takes simple recourse to a partisan history of FEMA and disaster response more generally. Paul Krugman makes the link to Katrina in the vein of the latter: "The point is that after Katrina the government seemed to have no idea what it was doing; this time it did. And that's no accident: the federal government's ability to respond effectively to disaster always collapses when antigovernment Republicans hold the White House, and always recovers when Democrats take it back."[282] Examination of the institutional history of FEMA bears out Krugman's contention to a degree worth noting: the response to Hurricane Andrew (H. W. Bush) was seen as a massive failure, the favorably appraised response to the 1998 floods in the Midwest (Clinton) was seen as the product of a successful reformation of FEMA, Katrina was the biggest mistake of George Bush's presidency by his own assessment,[283] Sandy was generally seen as a success for Obama, and the failure of the Trump administration to address the ongoing

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[282] Paul Krugman, "Sandy Versus Katrina," *The New York Times*, November 4, 2012, sec. Opinion, http://www.nytimes.com/2012/11/05/opinion/krugman-sandy-versus-katrina.html.
[283] Kate Andersen Brower and Catherine Dodge, "Bush Calls New Orleans Flyover a 'Huge Mistake,'" *Bloomberg.com*, November 5, 2010, http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2010-11-05/bush-calls-new-orleans-flyover-in-wake-of-hurricane-katrina-huge-mistake-.

crisis in Puerto Rico post-Maria remains one of many points of major criticism—even as

response and recovery efforts for Hurricane Harvey received much less criticism in kind.

But given the history and politics of disaster response in the United States, to reduce

these public appraisals of federal disaster response to partisan policy positions, while not

meritless, does not fully explain fully how successful federal response became a primary

factor in Obama's electability.

That Obama's response to the imminent crisis was suddenly understood as a test

of his leadership abilities, and that Sandy was seen in advance as having the potential to

move the polls substantially in either direction, exposed a qualitative difference the extent

to which disaster response was seen as a central issue of presidential concern. There are

clearly many factors involved in this shift, including but not limited to the effects of

climate change on the frequency and severity of natural disasters, changing urban

demographics which exacerbate a more general wealth transfer from poor to wealthy

populations,[284] and perhaps even 9/11 itself.[285] It is also the case, however, that policy

positions regarding response and recovery continue to follow the neoliberal principles

that came to the fore during the post-WWII era and were refined during the Cold War,

and that that commitment remains conspicuous in contemporary discourse domains that

otherwise eliminate bureaucratic barriers to providing wide-ranging federal assistance. I

described the ways in which disaster policy in the South has always been explicitly tied

to race in Chapter 1, but it is worth briefly recounting the development of disaster policy

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[284] Diane Negra, "Introduction: Old and New Media after Katrina," *Old and New Media After Katrina*, ed. Diane Negra (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 10-13; *What is a City: Rethinking the Urban after Hurricane Katrina*, eds. Phil Steinberg and Rob Shields (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008).
[285] Kevin Fox Gotham and Miriam Greenberg, *Crisis Cities: Disaster and Redevelopment in New York and New Orleans* (London: Oxford University Press, 2014).

more generally from then until now in order to understand its relationship to neoliberalism.

The invention and use of the atomic bomb brought into the national consciousness a sense of the very material possibility—and in some discourses the inevitability—of the large-scale and immediate destruction of urban centers. As David Monteyne argues, architects and civil defense engineers "imagineered" scenarios wherein nuclear weapons were dropped onto major cities.[286] The importance of Monteyne's argument is precisely the distinction between engineering for existing conditions—such as earthquakes, floods, hurricanes, and the like, all of which had historical precedent which could be used as a basis for such infrastructural development—and imagineering for hypothetical ones, and were not unlike the Hurricane Pam exercises in premise and function. It is of course the case that Hiroshima and Nagasaki were taken as starting points, as were pre-nuclear urban disaster scenarios, but the particularities of this post-war planning, for Monteyne, indicate a set of ideals independent of technical architectural and engineering feats. First, that such events were not only inevitable, but also survivable.[287] This premise provided both a rationale and the public impetus to take wide pre-emptive measures, which included city planning, building public blast and fallout shelters, developing urban evacuation strategies and the infrastructural upgrades to accommodate them,[288] constructing actual sites of imaginary ruin, urban dispersal to the suburbs, and producing reports that predicted the likely points of ground zero and extrapolated from there. The second, more insidious ideal that animated these measures was the unspoken implication

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[286] David Monteyne, *Fallout Shelter: Designing for Civil Defense in the Cold War* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press), 2.
[287] Monteyne, *Fallout Shelter*, 2.
[288] Kenneth Rose, *One Nation Underground* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 28.

that "certain survivors were more important than others."[289] From New York to Detroit, these hypothetical scenarios regularly positioned the blast directly on top of urban areas of color, often quite explicitly as ancillary measures to urban renewal in general. Thus, the architectural imagination fervently supported and publicized by governmental discourses as a strategy against nuclear attack articulated quite directly to the destruction of "the slums" and their replacement with "rationally planned, hygienic, lower-density housing that conformed to reformist standards"[290] Planners soon more fully realized, however, that the intensity of the blasts, the very real dangers of nuclear fallout, and the increasing dispersal of whites into the suburbs required a quite different approach. Blast shelters would do little to protect against the intensity of a nuclear bomb, fallout would stay in the air for months, and the middle class was no longer primarily living in densely concentrated urban spaces. In other words, these planning efforts were pre-nuclear solutions for post-nuclear concerns.[291]

In addition to the practicality of focusing exclusively on urban nuclear survival, there was also perhaps the most central irony of planning for localized urban nuclear strikes: the ideological tightrope strung between active civil defense against Soviet communist threats and the nation's resistance to funneling money and governmental power towards carrying out this defense. As Laura McEnaney argues, "the logic of anticommunism often undermined the home front militarization: it inflamed hysteria about the Soviet threat, fostering a public mood supportive of preparedness, but it also prevented an all-out militarization effort, labeling any federally-funded public shelter

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[289] Monteyne, *Fallout Shelter*, 2.
[290] Monteyne, *Fallout Shelter*, 7.
[291] Rose, *One Nation Underground*, 24.

system as a subversion of the very American ideals civil defense was set up to defend."[292]

On another level, it was not simply governmental expenditure that made the whole plan appear communistic; it was also the sentiment that post-holocaust shelter living would necessarily look communistic.[293]

U.S. civil defense programs thenceforth turned their attention towards the suburbanization of survival. They began a long campaign to convince American suburbanites to construct fallout shelters in their backyards or basements, distributing millions of copies of various pamphlets that worked to create the "citizen-survivor," the individual who, having accepted the spectral presence of the bomb within the domestic sphere, carried out her or his civic duties by way of nuclear preparedness.[294] The turn to do-it-yourself survival, however, was not simply a governmental compromise; it also echoed the ideals espoused in the early urban-focused planning strategies. As a political compromise, it allayed the outrage of centralized governmental civil defense institutions not by dissolving them, of course, but by obscuring them. It constituted the citizen-survivor by linking personal preparedness to nationalism: "The doctrine of self-help . . . was advantageous because it released the government from complete responsibility for citizen protection while giving people a tangible role to play in the defense of their

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[292] Laura McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home: Militarization Meets Everyday Life in the Fifties*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 41.
[293] Monteyne, *Fallout Shelter*, 13.
[294] Such pamphlets include: U.S. Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization, *Facts about Fallout Protection*, brochure produced by the Executive Office of the President, April 1958; U.S. Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization, *The Family Fallout Shelter*, brochure produced by the United States Department of Defense, June 1959; accessed through the Prelinger Library online archive; U.S. Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization, *Ten For Survival*, brochure produced by the United States Department of Defense, May 1959; accessed through the Prelinger Library online archive; U.S. Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization, *Fallout Protection: What to Know and Do about Nuclear Attack*, brochure produced by the United States Department of Defense, December 1961; U.S. Office of Civil and Defense Mobilization, *Home Protection Exercises*, brochure produced by the Executive Office of the President, December 1961;

country."[295] As an ideological compromise, it created the conditions necessary for the widespread dissemination of propaganda aimed at naturalizing the threat of nuclear war by enveloping the activity within the interest of dutiful American citizenship. The privatization of survival enhanced the suburban American individualistic rhetoric of, as Kenneth Rose has put it, "gun-thy-neighbor" morality.[296] It espoused the ethic of suburbanism that consolidated the responsibility for survival to the level of the family.

One episode of *The Twilight Zone* entitled "The Shelter" (1961) narrates this consolidation, and the social ramifications of it, with tense clarity.[297] The protagonist Bill celebrates his birthday with family and friends at his home. As a doctor, Bill functions as a servant of the community, and his friend Jerry commemorates this with an after-dinner speech. Bill, Jerry announces, "in the short space of 20 years, has taken care of not only us, our children, but even our grandchildren." The conversation then pivots to his "hammering at all hours of the night," for Bill has also been constructing a shelter in his home's basement. "Well," muses Jerry, jovially, "I'm afraid we'll have to forgive him for all that. Despite the fact that what the doctor thinks of as farsightedness on his part has been a real pain in the neck to the rest of us, what with all the concrete trucks and the nocturnal hammering and all the rest of it." Grievances aside, Jerry sums up Bill's regard in the community:

> Doc, you're a very beloved fellow, and rightly so. And you may not have the
> biggest practice in medical history, but I can assure you there isn't a single

[295] McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home*, 24.
[296] Rose, *One Nation Underground*, 93-100.
[297] Rod Sterling, "The Shelter," *The Twilight Zone*, CBS, September 29, 1961.

sawbones in the entire 50 states whose patience has such a regard, such affection, such respect for their man with a little black bag as we do for ours.

As the neighbors gather their things to depart, a CONELRAD announcement suddenly warns of an imminent nuclear attack and instructs those with shelters to retreat to them immediately. The guests rush out the door to their own homes to prepare, and Bill and his family make a coordinated retreat into the basement shelter. One by one, the neighbors return to the house, pleading for admittance into Bill's shelter, and one by one he must refuse them: "I built that for my family," he says. Over the course of the episode, the social fabric of this small community devolves directly outside the shelter door until, at the climax, the very neighbors who toasted to Bill's lifetime of public service smash the shelter door in with a battering ram. At the very moment they gain entrance, CONELRAD once again chimes in, announcing that no missiles are inbound and that the citizenry should return to normal activity. The neighbors, appearing to suddenly but dramatically awaken from their frenzy, move from apology to reparation all too quickly, offering to pay Bill for the damages. Bill turns slowly, replying,

> I wonder if any one of us has any idea what those damages really are. Maybe one of them is finding out what we're really like when we're normal. . . . I mean all of us. A lot of naked, wild animals who put such a price on staying alive that they'll claw their neighbors to death just for the privilege.

His reproach is framed, as the show is famous for doing, as a lesson is public morality. But in staging this conflict at the shelter door, the show positions the ethics of the post-war citizen-survivor identically to official civil defense discourse: morality interfaces in the suburbs.

On a cultural level, these discourses continued to promote a normalized version of disaster survival: white, middle class, patriarchal, suburbanites who took it upon themselves to be ready.[298] In placing the burden of survival on the individual, and in continuing to depict the ideal survivor under such normalized pretenses, civil defense campaigns mark a significant development in the neoliberalization of disaster response, what Henry Giroux describes, *vis à vis* Katrina, as the *new biopolitics of disposability*: "the poor, especially people of color, not only have to fend for themselves in the face of life's tragedies but are also supposed to do it without being seen by the dominant society."[299] While Giroux's conviction that this political logic is particularly new is clearly overstated (as may be his conviction that Republican neoconservatism is the primary catalyst for it), it clearly summarizes the longstanding relationship between the federal government and disaster response, relief, and recovery.

Although the focus of federal disaster assistance shifted over the course of the next forty years, this stance toward federal funding was largely maintained. FEMA (1978) was established by President Jimmy Carter to consolidate and coordinate federal preparedness and recovery entities, the Stafford Act (1988) introduced the provision whereby presidents could trigger federal response assistance by declaring states of emergency and major disaster, and the Agency went through countless modifications and

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[298] There is a wealth of literature on this topic. See, for instance, Steven M. Gelber, "Do-It-Yourself: Constructing, Repairing and Maintaining Domestic Masculinity." *American Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (1997): 66-112; Sarah A. Lichtman, "Do-It-Yourself Security: Safety, Gender, and the Home Fallout Shelter in Cold War America," *Journal of Design History* 19, no. 1 (2006): 39-55; Jenna M. Loyd, "Peace Is Our Only Shelter': Questioning Domesticities of Militarization and White Privilege," *Antipode* 43, no. 3 (2010): 845-73; McEnaney, *Civil Defense Begins at Home*; Monteyne, *Fallout Shelter*, 29; Kenneth D. Rose, *One Nation Underground: The Fallout Shelter in American Culture*. New York: New York University Press, 2000.
[299] Henry A. Giroux, "Reading Hurricane Katrina: Race, Class, and the Biopolitics of Disposability," *College Literature* 33, no. 3 (2006): 175.

reorganizations during the 1990s in response to failures of coordination. During the late years of the Cold War, the Reagan and Bush administrations were faulted for putting undue stress on issues of civil defense at the expense of natural disaster preparedness and response, the effects of which were seen during Hurricanes Hugo (1989) and Andrew (1992)[300] and the Loma Prieta earthquake in San Francisco (1989),[301] often particularly in vulnerable communities.[302] Over the course of the following eight years, the Clinton administration made significant changes, including appointing FEMA Director James Lee Witt to a cabinet position and allocating additional federal funding for FEMA, and the reputation of the agency somewhat rehabilitated.[303] Even at the beginning of this period, however, the 1993 report of the U.S. National Performance Review determined that

> Americans traditionally help one another when disaster strikes, but policies and
> practices of the government and others tend to discourage important self-help
> measures. This country's response to catastrophic events relies to a great extent on
> federal assistance to state and local governments, whether or not those
> governments have tried to reduce the effects, including the costs, of such
> disasters. The ready availability of federal funds may actually contribute to
> disaster losses by reducing incentives for hazard mitigation and preparedness.[304]

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[300] Christopher Cooper and Robert Block, *Disaster: Hurricane Katrina and the Failure of Homeland Security* (New York: Times Brooks, 2006), 55-57.
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[301] Eugenie L. Birch, "Learning from Past Disasters," in *Rebuilding Urban Places after Disaster: Lessons from Hurricane Katrina*," eds. Eugenie L. Birch and Susan M. Wachter (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 141.

[302] Andrew L. Cherry and Mary Elizabeth Cherry, "A Middle Class Response to Disaster: FEMA's Policies and Problems," *Journal of Social Service Research* 23, no. 1 (1997): 71-87.

[303] Patrick S. Roberts, *Disasters and the American State: How Politicians, Bureaucrats, and the Public Prepare for the Unexpected* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 104-5.

[304] National Performance Review (U.S.), 1993, *Free National Performance Review report*, [Washington, D.C.]: [U.S. Office of the Federal Register], FEMA03.

Following this opening premise, the recommendations, by and large, encouraged a more comprehensive approach to disaster that scaled back civil defense focus and allocated more funds towards localized, coordinated mitigation. However, the conflation of "help one another" and "self-help" that prefaces the recommendation not only belies the distinction made between local coordination and personal readiness, but also in so doing produces a hard split between the federal government and everything else. Coupled with the ambiguity of "and others," this split maintains the logic by which the very systems that exacerbate vulnerabilities to the effects of disaster in the first place, such as evacuation capabilities and infrastructure, are then tasked with making up the difference.

Though disaster response was considered to be generally effective during the Clinton years, the basic logic of survival in the face of such disasters remained intact and, as evidenced by Katrina's failures, serious infrastructural mitigation work was minimal. This is in part because, under the Stafford Act, "in practice FEMA has assumed that most mitigation plans will be developed in a post-disaster situation."[305] In 2003, following the 9/11 attacks, FEMA was folded into the newly created Department of Homeland Security and its focus was redirected once more towards civil defense, this time in response to the perceived threat of international terrorism. It was in this capacity that the George W. Bush-era not only rolled back many of the organizational changes made during the previous administration, but also launched Ready.gov in 2003, a post-9/11 FEMA-run campaign that primarily encourages self-help and personal preparedness. The campaign remains essentially a modernized version of Cold War disaster preparedness literature with added considerations regarding infrastructure and business preparedness. This

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[305] David Godschalk, Timothy Beatley, Philip Berke, David Brower, and Edward J. Kaiser, *Natural Hazard Mitigation: Recasting Disaster Policy And Planning* (Washington, D.C.: Island Press, 1998), 13.

history established a precedent for Katrina such that residents who stayed behind could be blamed for having done so despite evacuation orders, and blamed they often were.

But the capacity of this philosophy of disaster governance to create the conditions that helped produce Katrina's most traumatic consequences also prompted its most central post-disaster displacement: by what logic can successful response become the truly compensatory gesture that makes up for Katrina? That Obama's response to Sandy was so crucial to his re-electability would seem at face value to temper Nadeson's claims that neoliberal and neoconservative thought "explained social-welfare policies and programs as directly responsible for the devastation of New Orleans."[306] To be sure, the neoconservative discourses she analyzes in the essay argue that the failures of social-welfare institutions signal the need for market-based disaster policy. What Sandy shows, however, is that while the moralizing neoliberalism of neoconservatives would thenceforth be overshadowed by the expectation of federal assistance during disaster, acknowledging that Katrina was a hard lesson in neoliberalism itself would have required the recognition of a broad national complicity which, recalling Layton's lesson from the beginning of this chapter, characterizes one of the principal disavowals at work in Katrina's memory. In short, the rallying cry during Sandy took on a particular fetishistic grammar that said, "I know very well that Katrina was not a natural disaster, but nevertheless, I act as if it was, I act as if a successful federal response to Sandy will have been the signal of national redemption." The story of Sandy thus became the story of its fetish object, marked as such by three characteristics: the survivor, coordination, and cut red tape.

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[306] Nadeson, "Hurricane Katrina," 74.

"Survivor"

Principle to the fetishization of response was the partial solidification of the terms "victim" and "survivor" between Katrina and Sandy. The rhetorical distinction between victim and survivor has emerged from a diverse set of contexts, including Holocaust victims/survivors, sexual violence victims/survivors, and cancer victims/survivors, all of which have undergone this shift to varying degrees. Shani Orgad argues that the proliferation of the "survivor" in

> public discourse creates a space within which "survivor" becomes a meaningfully visible, cultural notion, which refers to a wide range of experiences of suffering and struggle. It is embedded within the contemporary cultural environment in which trauma has become an "envied wound"—a culture that invests traumatic experience with moral value and authority.[307]

Survivorship, she notes, while notably traumatic, is enviable as compared to victimage, as evidenced by the terminological shift from "victim" to "survivor" during the 1960s and 1970s in discourse domains as disparate as the Holocaust, psychotherapy, and childhood and sexual abuse, and then later in patients of potentially terminal illnesses. "Victim," on the other hand, possesses an ambiguity that, for instance, allows the perpetrators of violence to claim victim status,[308] complicates the determination of who can claim victim status in the context of criminal justice reform,[309] and can frame women who experience

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[307] Shani Orgad, "The Survivor in Contemporary Culture and Public Discourse: A Genealogy," *The Communication Review* 12, no. 2 (2009): 134-35.

[308] See, for example: Brett Lunceford, "Armed Victims: The Ego Function of Second Amendment Rhetoric," *Rhetoric & Public Affairs* 18, no. 2 (2015): 333-45; Larry Powell and William R. Self, "The Rhetoric of Sacrifice in the 'Rantings' of the Virginia Tech Killer," *Journal of Communication and Religion* 34, no. 1 (2011): 24-35.

[309] Bryan J. McCann, "Therapeutic and Material <Victim>hood: Ideology and the Struggle for Meaning in the Illinois Death Penalty Controversy," *Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies* 4, no. 4 (2007): 382-401.

sexual violence as helpless or without agency.[310] In certain cases, a clear distinction can

be made between survivors and victims, between those who lived and those who died. In

others, such as with sexual violence, the difference is less clear, the acknowledgement of

which has prompted not only a scholarly but also a broader public preference for the

language of survivorship. As such, the relationship between these two terms and the

movement from victim to survivor has been at the heart of a vast amount of feminist

scholarship working towards the resignification of the identities of those who experience

sexual violence.[311]

Usage of the terms *vis à vis* hurricanes and other natural disasters has followed

this general shift as well. During Hurricane Andrew, news media outlets were far more

likely to refer to those affected as "victims" rather than "survivors," even in reference to

the still-living.[312] "The plight of the victims of Hurricane Andrew in Dade County is

indeed tragic. But almost as tragic are the partisan demagogues who are quick to blame

the president for not sending in the federal troops before being requested by the

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[310] Lori E. Koelesch, "Sexual Discourses and the Absence of Agency,: *Women & Language* 37, no. 2 (2014): 11-29.

[311] See, for example: Jan Jordan, "From Victim to Survivor – and from Survivor to Victim: Reconceptualising the Survivor Journey," *Sexual Abuse in Australia and New Zealand* 5, no. 2 (2011): 175-98; Liz Kelly, Sheila Burton and Linda Reagan, "Beyond Victim or Survivor: Sexual Violence, Identity and Feminist Theory and Practice," in *Sexualizing the Social: Power and the Organization of Sexuality*, eds. Lisa Adkins and Vicki Merchant (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1996), 77-101; Catherine Kohler Riessman, "From Victim to Survivor: A Woman's Narrative Reconstruction of Marital Sexual Abuse," *Smith College Studies in Social Work* 59, no. 3 (1989): 232-51; Tami Spry, "In the Absence of Word and Body: Hegemonic Implications of "Victim" and "Survivor" in Women's Narratives of Sexual Violence," *Women and Language* 13, no. 2 (1995): 27; Kathy K. Swink and Antoinette E. Leveille, "From Victim to Survivor: A New Look at the Issues and Recovery Process for Adult Incest Survivors," *Women & Therapy* 5, nos. 2-3 (1986): 119-41.

[312] See, for example: Margo D. Beller, "As Ander Victims' Claims Pour in, P/C Insurers Add up the Damages, *Journal of Commerce*, September 4, 1992; Howard W. French, "After the Storm: Lucky Homeowners Facing Long Liunbo before Repairs," *The New York Times*, September 4, 1992; Robert Davis and Paul Hoversten, "There;s no Place Like Home: Residents Reluctant to Leave," *USA Today*, September 3, 1992; Larry Rohter, "Hurricane Andrew: Down to Basics; Hunting for Food, Water and Shelter," *The New York Times*, August 26, 1992; Diane Steinle, "Refugee Flow from South Florida Starting," *St. Petersburg Times*, September 14, 1992.

governor," wrote one Florida resident in a letter to the *St. Petersburg Times*.[313] "Victim" was the stand-in for anyone affected by the storm, both the dead and the living, whose plight could continue to be narrated. During Katrina, news media coverage balanced the two fairly evenly, although it retained the ambiguity between the living and the dead.[314] Whereas an article in *The New York Times* distinguishes between victims whose "bodies were found together in a subdivision" and "survivors who have weathered the storm and its bitter aftermath,"[315] elsewhere news media referred to President Bush "comforting victims"[316] and the "federal government's failure to help thousands of survivors for days after Hurricane Katrina."[317] However, when the time came to begin assessing the effects of Sandy, U.S. news media referred much more regularly to the living as survivors and, when scant mention of the word "victim" was made, it often referred to the dead.[318] This

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[313] Walter S. Snyder, "Blame Should Be Shared for Slow Response to Andrew's Victims," *St. Petersburg Times*, September 2, 1992. It is also worth noting that the provision in the Stafford Act that federal aid must be formally requested by state governors was still in place in 1992.

[314] See, for example: "Katrina Aftermath: Hard Times Ahead, but We'll Survive," *Wisconsin State Journal*, September 8, 2005; "U.S. Response to Katrina was Too Slow: Letters to the Contra Costa Times," *Contra Costa Times*, September 19, 2005; Jamie Doward, Simon English, and Mark Townsend, "Aftermath of the Hurricane: It was the Week that Hell Visited the Streets of the World's Richest Nation as a City Degenerated into Chaos, Debased By Anarchy; But What Now for New Orleans and an Embattled President Bush?" *The Observer*, September 4, 2005; Garnet Coleman, "Poverty, A Daily Disaster," *Austin American-Statesman*, September 22, 2005.

[315] Sewell Chan and Jeremy Alford, "Heavy Damage, Lost Lives and Plaintive Pleas," *The New York Times*, September 4, 2005.

[316] Doward, English, and Townsend, "Aftermath of the Hurricane: America's Ordeal," *The Guardian*, September 3, 2005, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2005/sep/04/hurricanekatrina.usa

[317] April Lynch and Glennda Chui, "Rethinking Disaster Plans," *San Jose Mercury News*, September 12, 2005.

[318] Patrik Jonsson, "Could Anger over Superstorm Sandy Response Taint Recovery, Election? The Longer Sandy Survivors Suffer, the More Harshly Incumbent Officials – From Gov. Chris Christie (R) to President Obama (D) – Will be Judged for their Response, Experts Say," *The Christian Science Monitor*, November 3, 2012; Judy Keen, "'Thrivers' of Past Disasters five Sandy Survivors Hand: Louisianans, Especially, Feel their Pain," *USA Today*, November 15, 2012; This trend continues to the present moment. See, for example: James Fanelli, "Parents of Sandy Victims Keep Children's Memories Alive on Brooklyn Street Where they Lost their Lives," *New York Daily News*, October 26, 2017, http://www.nydailynews.com/new-york/parents-sandy-victims-revisit-street-children-lost-lives-article-1.3591112

was of course not universally the case, but the distinction between victim and survivor had gained a small amount of solidity in the time between the two storms.

Nowhere is this distinction more evident than in official government discourse. For example, the final report of the Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina uses survivor and victim interchangeably, but uses "victim" ubiquitously—nearly twice as often as "survivor."[319] Then-FEMA director Michael Brown's testimony to the committee encapsulates the ambiguity of victim status succinctly in just two sentences:

> [T]he last thing I'm going to do is to put equipment or manpower in place where they themselves become victims and then cannot assist the people they are there to assist. You cannot, you cannot physically—I don't think you can do it statutorily or any other way—say to any victim in this country that the minute you come out of your abode, your home, your shelter, whatever it is, that the Federal Government going to be there with a meal ready to eat for you.[320]

In the first instance, his use of victim remains vague but implies the possibility of death, whereas in the second, the victim has physically weathered the storm and remains among the living. Throughout the report, reference to victims moves fluidly between recovery and response concerns as disparate as ready-to-eat meals, cause of death, shelter, body identification methods, those looking to rebuild, and the general restoration of residents' livelihoods.

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[319] U.S. House of Representatives, *A Failure of Initiative: Final Report of the Select Bipartisan Committee to Investigate the Preparation for and Response to Hurricane Katrina*, 109th Cong., 2nd Sess. (2006).
[320] U.S. House of Representatives, *A Failure*, 320-21.

In contrast, governmental literature regarding Sandy almost completely eliminates the use of "victim" and replaces it nearly wholesale with "survivor." The 2013 "Hurricane Sandy FEMA After-Action Report," for example, never uses the word "victim," but mentions "survivor" well over one hundred times. Telling also is the inclusion within "areas of improvement" of an entire section devoted to "Being Survivor-Centric:" "Responding to and recovering from disasters is ultimately about meeting survivors' needs. As FEMA states in *Publication 1*, the Agency's 'primary responsibility is to support state, local, and tribal partners in caring for all those affected by disaster.'"[321] "Those affected," it would seem, are no longer victims of disaster; they are, rather, survivors. While "Publication 1," FEMA's "capstone doctrine," no longer includes that sentence as of the April 2016 report, it remains the case that its use of "survivor" far outweighs its use of "victim," which occurs only a few times in the document.[322] Likewise, a FEMA news release from November 13, 2012 refers to "survivors" in almost every sentence. An excerpt reads:

> One of the ways we're reaching out to survivors is through our Disaster Recovery Centers (DRCs). At these centers, disaster survivors can meet one-on-one with officials from voluntary and non-profit agencies, local communities, and state and federal agencies such as FEMA and the Small Business Administration. Personnel staffing the DRCs are there to answer questions from survivors about the types of assistance available, how to apply for assistance and details about how exactly the

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[321] U.S. Department of Homeland Security, FEMA, *Hurricane Sandy FEMA After-Action Report*, July 1, 2013, 17.
[322] U.S. Department of Homeland Security, FEMA, *Publication 1*, April, 2016, https://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/1462196227387-c10c40e585223d22e2595001e50f1e5c/Pub1_04-07.pdf

recovery process works. It is important to note that survivors do not need to visit

DRCs to apply for assistance.[323]

Across a host of governmental literature assessing the impacts of the storm and the

various roles and effectivity of FEMA, "survivor" becomes the primary human object of

attention. Quite unlike the post-Katrina coverage of individuals affected which, argue M.

Justin Davis and T. Nathaniel French, overtly held individuals responsible for both their

own victimhood and their survival,[324] the concerted shift towards survivorship removes

the concept of victimhood altogether and produces only the dead and survivors, those

who have weathered the storm and need assistance.

This assistance is not, however, without condition. The contemporary survivor,

writes Orgad, "constitutes a desirable mode of being or identity that people are

encouraged to comply with and take on. It is not a given identity or role, but one that

must be achieved: one *becomes* a survivor."[325] If, as disaster experts in "Washing Away"

argued, Hurricane Andrew was a pivot point into a new era of megadisasters due to

development and increased risk, the attendant shift to survivorship as an achievement or

becoming can be read as part of a disavowal of that very fact. In the context of

contemporary American disaster relief and response, this becoming is of course grounded

in the do-it-yourself ethos of 1960s suburban fallout shelter warriors like Bill, assisted by

CONELRAD but not saved by it. Survivorship is thus achieved by collaboration between

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[323] U.S. Federal Emergency Management Agency, "Washington: Assisting Survivors Through our Disaster Recovery Centers & Community Relations Specialists," *US Official News*, November 13, 2012.

[324] M. Justin Davis and T. Nathaniel French, "Blaming Victims and Survivors: An Analysis of Post-Katrina Print News Coverage," *Southern Communication Journal* 73, no. 3 (2008): 243-57.

[325] Orgad, "The Survivor," 150, emphasis in original.

the federal, the local, and the personal, the amalgam of which—"coordination"—came to be yet another fetish object of the post-Katrina era.

"Coordination"

The Obama administration made major changes to disaster preparedness, response, and relief frameworks between 2008 and 2012, many of which focused and consolidated diverse federal actions under the banner of coordination, which scholars have argued was the central failure of Katrina.[326] No doubt many of these changes proved effective. A central failure of Bush-era disaster policy was that, post-9/11, such policy was premised on the assumption that 9/11 was a symptom of a lack of top-down planning and preparedness for such events and, thus, the redefinition of the national focus on "homeland security" necessitated such a top-down approach. This approach is characterized by Thomas Birkland as "a top-down system in which decisions are made in Washington, DC, and subordinates' compliance is expected and is gained through either coercion (the threat of taking money away) or inducements (the possibility of gaining resources, even if those resources are not quite what the community needs)."[327] The critique of this structure is, in short, that "all-hazards" inducements fail to direct resources in ways that meet the needs of individual areas or regions, and the coercive requirements to receive preparedness funds could leave poorer communities unable to meet those requirements further behind, further unprepared for disaster. Indeed, a March,

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[326] Vicki Bier, "Hurricane Katrina as a Bureaucratic Nightmare," in *On Risk and Disaster: Lessons from Hurricane Katrina*, ed. Ronald Daniels, Donald Kettl, and Howard Kunreuther (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 243-54.

[327] Thomas A. Birkland, "Disasters, Catastrophes, and Policy Failure in the Homeland Security Era," *Review of Policy Research* 26, no. 4 (2009): 428.

2005 report for Congress by the Congressional Research Service expressed concern over exactly this latter effect: "Some express concern . . . that agencies in poor or rural areas may lack the resources to reach new national standards; these areas could be penalized through the loss of federal funds if they fail to meet the standards."[328] In addition, top-down disaster policy served the explicit purpose of folding terrorist attacks into the same organizational mechanisms as other types of disasters, rendering "all-hazards" a euphemism for the siphoning of federal funds from traditional disaster response into anti-terrorist planning. In the end, this "significantly degraded the nation's ability to address natural disasters."[329] This, too, was met with criticism in the 2005 Congressional Report, which asked, "Should the 'all-hazards' preparedness goals be modified to include 'some differences' in response needs?"[330] Katrina revealed among other things that, indeed, "some differences" made all the difference when it came to response. The degradation of natural disaster response capabilities in the "all-hazards" philosophy was one more tacit acknowledgement that there is no such thing as a natural disaster and that improved response was not a fix to the underlying problem. Thus, "coordination" emerged during the Obama years as an all-encapsulating term that essentially retained the top-down structure (though not without improvements) that the Stafford Act amendments and FEMA reorganization produced while rhetorically flattening the appearance of that structure.

Across a wide range of government reports, press releases, and presidential speeches, usage of the term "coordinate" and its derivatives describes three distinct

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[328] U.S. Library of Congress, Congressional Research Service, *The National Preparedness System: Issues in the 109th Congress*, by Keith Bea, RL32803 (2012), 3.
[329] Birkland, "Disasters," 423.
[330] Bea, *National Preparedness System*, 14.

processes: coordinating the distribution of supplies, resources, and information to survivors and first responders, coordination between federal entities, and coordination between the federal government and localities, states, and tribes. Each of these is obviously related to the others, but taken as separate functions of disaster response, they each describe drastically different mechanisms of disaster policy. Combined, however, they signify a broad and ethical kind of efficiency that promises both conditional and unconditional responsibility for disaster aid.

President Obama addressed the American people several times directly before and after the storm, and each address focused on the need for citizens to follow instructions; the valor of first responders, volunteers, and local officials; and the commitment of the federal government to work with states and localities to distribute resources and coordinate aid. In these speeches, "working with" is Obama's primary translation of the Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act's (PKEMRA) amendment to Section 224 of the Stafford Act, which specifies that the FEMA Administrator shall

> *develop policies and procedures relating to the effective coordination of disaster assistance from non-Federal entities, including private and foreign entities and governments* . . . [including] coordination with other disaster assistance from the Federal Government, and State and local governments and other sources; . . . identification of requirements for use that are necessary and appropriate for such assistance; . . . [and] receipt and distribution of such assistance.[331]

On October 28th, Obama gave assurance of this coordination: "The federal government is working effectively with the state and local governments. It's going to be very important

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[331] S. 3721, 109th Cong., 2nd Sess. (2006), https://www.congress.gov/bill/109th-congress/senate-bill/3721, italics in original.

that populations in all the impacted states take this seriously, listen to your state and local

elected officials."[332] He echoed this sentiment the following day just before Sandy made

landfall.[333] As the storm still raged further north the following day, October, 30th, Obama

once again stressed these points in a speech at the American Red Cross, but added also

that "[t]he coordination between the state, local, and federal governments has been

outstanding."[334] A day later Obama held a campaign rally in Wisconsin in which

"working with" became fully a central component of his 2012 presidential campaign,

"working together":

> There are no Democrats or Republicans during a storm, there are just fellow
>
> Americans. (Applause.) Leaders of different parties working to fix what's broken;
>
> neighbors helping neighbors cope with tragedy; communities rallying to rebuild; a
>
> spirit that says, in the end, we're all in this together—that we rise or fall as one
>
> nation, as one people.[335]

Insofar as the federal government's primary duties before, during, and after disasters

involve coordination with non-federal entities, coordination and "working with" therefore

become conceptually synonymous throughout the speeches with a successful response.

Indeed, by November 15th, coordination takes a more central role in Obama's speech,

[332] Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President on Hurricane Sandy," October 28, 2012, *The White House*, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/10/28/remarks-president-hurricane-sandy
[333] Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President on Hurricane Sandy," October 29, 2012, *The White House*, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/10/29/remarks-president-hurricane-sandy
[334] Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President at the American Red Cross," October 30, 2012, *The White House*, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/10/30/remarks-president-american-red-cross
[335] Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President at a Campaign Event — Green Bay, WI," November 1, 2012, *The White House*, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/11/01/remarks-president-campaign-event-green-bay-wi

both in "coordinating closely with state and local governments" and in developing a coordinated plan for rebuilding.[336]

Nowhere is coordination of successful response more fetishized, however, than in governmental reports assessing the effectiveness of the response to Sandy. The Hurricane Sandy FEMA After-Action Report identifies both strengths and areas for improvement across a wide range of actions. One theme, "Fostering unity of effort across the Whole Community," lists the following:

• Strength: Integrating response and recovery efforts with nongovernmental

  partners

• Area for Improvement: Coordinating among states, localities, and tribes[337]

"Whole Community" is a term developed by the Obama administration to describe everyone responsible for disaster preparedness and response, from the federal government to non-profit organizations to individuals—in short, everyone. A report on The FEMA Disaster Assistance Reform Act of 2015 explains that PKEMRA "reorganized FEMA and provided it with substantial new authority to remedy gaps . . . [and] the clear authority and capability to direct and coordinate a federal disaster response."[338] It precisely here that the report tacitly acknowledges that there is no such thing as a natural disaster, that the success of federal coordination with localities will depend significantly on the capacity of those localities to prepare themselves. It is only given those conditions that these new authority measures can function effectively. As part

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[336] Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President After Surveying Damage from Hurricane Sandy," November 15, 2012, *The White House*, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2012/11/15/remarks-president-after-surveying-damage-hurricane-sandy

[337] U.S. Department of Homeland Security, *Hurricane Sandy*, iv.

[338] U.S. House Committee on Transportation & Infrastructure, *The FEMA Disaster Assistance Reform Act of 2015*, *(to Accompany H.R.1471)*, https://transportation.house.gov/uploadedfiles/fema_reform_act_2015.pdf

of an appeal to "Whole Community" preparedness, the championing of coordination thus

gives the lie to the equivalency between Katrina and Sandy and the presumption that

successful federal response itself isn't primarily beholden to the preexisting

vulnerabilities of the place where the disaster lands.

"Cutting the Red Tape"

Finally, the most acute appeal that Obama made before, during, and after Sandy

was not the efficiency of coordination but , directly in the service of that coordination, the

need to streamline bureaucratic processes to provide food, water, power restoration,

housing, and other aid services to those in need. "My message to the governors, as well

as to the mayors," he said on October 28th, "is anything they need, we will be there. And

we're going to cut through the red tape."[339] I have already argued in Chapter 3 that "red

tape" functioned as a metaphor that came to emblematize the Bush administration's

handling of Katrina, ultimately framing Obama's response to Sandy as efficient,

compassionate and, above all, presidential. It does more than simply this, however.

Red tape, or, rather, the cutting of it, metaphorizes anti-bureaucracy more

generally. The term "originated in sixteenth-century Spain," writes Del Dickson, "when

the government first used bright red ribbon to bind critical government documents

requiring the Council of State's immediate attention." In the modern age, however, "[i]t

is what most people think of when they think of bureaucracy: the inscrutable tangle of

regulations that serve no apparent purpose except to make government more complex,

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[339] Obama, "Remarks," October 28, 2012.

inaccessible, inefficient, inflexible, inscrutable, and expensive than it should be."[340] Yet, in the context of disaster policy, this poses yet another conundrum. Take, for instance, the Trump administration's red tape cutting ceremony in mid-December 2017.[341] Standing beside two heaps of office paper, one immensely larger than the other, with a sash of red fabric strung between them, Trump ceremoniously cuts the ribbon directly in the middle to signify his administration's commitment to cutting federal regulations across the board. Setting aside the confusing series of signifiers this event mashes together, Trump cutting the red tape is meant to signify a deregulatory stance, a position that rightwing politicians have long championed in the service of small government. It is precisely the consolidation of FEMA, as we have seen, that hamstrings the federal government in times of crisis, however, because of the focus on federal. In other words, the more one cuts the red tape on disaster aid between states/localities/tribes and the federal government, the greater the responsibility to provide sweeping federal aid immediately regardless of location, and not simply as a last resort. And that, of course, directly opposes the position for which Mitt Romney came under fire during the last weeks of the 2012 election.

The Obama administration had been criticized over its first term for an excessively regulatory stance, something it tried to alleviate in 2011,[342] but the President's message regarding Sandy stood in sharp contrast:

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[340] Del Dickson, *The People's Government: An Introduction to Democracy* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 176.

[341] Brenna Williams, "Trump Literally Cuts the Red Tape on Regulations," *CNN Politics*, December 14, 2017, http://www.cnn.com/2017/12/14/politics/trump-deregulation-in-gifs/index.html

[342] John McArdle and Gabriel Nelson, "Obama Issues Executive Order to Cut Red Tape," *The New York Times*, January 18, 2011, http://www.nytimes.com/gwire/2011/01/18/18greenwire-obama-issues-executive-order-to-cut-red-tape-93114.html

There are places like Newark, New Jersey, for example, where you've got 80, 90

percent of the people without power. We can't have a situation where that lasts

for days on end. And so my instructions to the federal agency has been, do not

figure out why we can't do something; I want you to figure out how we do

something. I want you to cut through red tape. I want you to cut through

bureaucracy. There's no excuse for inaction at this point. I want every agency to

lean forward and to make sure that we are getting the resources where they

need—where they're needed as quickly as possible.[343]

In other speeches as well, this forward-leaning anti-bureaucratic attitude defined the

principal message that aid would come quickly and without regulatory hiccups. Like so

many concerns during Sandy, the subtext to red tape politics was Hurricane Katrina,

whose lasting memory included sheriffs without electricity who were told to email aid

requests to FEMA,[344] aid requests from Louisiana Governor Kathleen Blanco that were

never delivered,[345] and the revelation that those requests included "shelter and

provisions," but she "didn't specifically ask for help with evacuations."[346] The often-

partisan tension between federal disaster aid as an entitlement vs. as strictly assistance

above the capabilities of states/localities/tribes, then, was superseded *during* the storm by

the presupposition of federal responsibility. That is, in a post-Katrina world, Obama

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[343] Obama, "Remarks," October 30, 2012.

[344] Evan Thomas, "The Government Response to Katrina: A Disaster within a Disaster," *Newsweek*, September 18, 2005, http://www.newsweek.com/government-response-katrina-disaster-within-disaster-118257

[345] "Blanco Papers Recount Katrina Response," *CNN*, December 6, 2005, http://www.cnn.com/2005/US/12/04/blanco.papers/

[346] "Who's to Blame for Delayed response to Katrina?" *ABC News*, September 6, 2005, http://abcnews.go.com/WNT/HurricaneKatrina/blame-delayed-response-katrina/story?id=1102467

finessed his regulatory reputation precisely by advocating for a position that his own party had long held, but which the majority of the country now expected.

By the time the storm had subsided and it was time to rebuild, many of the nightmarish stories of FEMA red tape resurfaced. A former Queens resident told *The New York Times* in 2013, "It's been close to 15 months later and the only thing we're getting is a bureaucracy and promises. . . . I want nothing more than to go back to live in Queens, or buy me out."[347] A veteran said in 2015 that he would "rather go back to Falluja" than have to navigate FEMA paperwork any longer.[348] Of the hundreds of billions of dollars allocated to FEMA and the Department of Housing and Urban Development to help rebuild after Sandy, residents expressed over and over that the process to receive those funds was so protracted and complicated that it often times felt impossible to achieve.

"Red tape" and its cutting, while representing what ultimately proved to be a more effective and successful federal response than during Katrina, characterized the fetishization of federal response. Like the survivor and federal coordination, it stood in as part of a federal response ideal sharply contrasted to the failures of Katrina in order to disavow one of the very facts that Katrina exposed, that there is no such thing as a natural disaster.

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[347] Patrick McGeehan, "Displaced by Hurricane Sandy, and Living in Limbo," *The New York Times*, December 6, 2013, http://www.nytimes.com/2013/12/07/nyregion/displaced-by-hurricane-sandy-and-living-in-limbo-instead-of-at-home.html

[348] David W. Chen, "Hurricane Sandy's Red Tape Makes a Veteran Say, 'I'd Rather Go Back to Falluja,'" *The New York Times*, August 18, 2015, https://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/19/nyregion/victims-of-hurricane-sandy-desperate-to-move-on-weigh-reopening-claims.html

Conclusion

In fetishizing federal response before, during, and after Sandy, the essential structure of mitigation, response, and relief that failed so miserably during Katrina, as well as the structural inequalities that continues to ensure that economically and socially disadvantaged communities are by far the most vulnerable to the effects of natural disasters is largely maintained. During Sandy, the memory of Katrina primarily comes to signify a failure of response rather. It appears as a course-correction for a localized failure of the federal government instead of a much larger and more complex historical socioeconomic dynamic of natural disaster consequences. It is not, of course, that no one in the federal government had called for such measures—indeed, New York Senator Charles Schumer and Congressman Jerry Nadler called for infrastructural improvements in New York City immediately after Hurricane Sandy.[349] Rather, the appeals to national unity and effective response mark a distance from the failures of Katrina through an implicit metric of improvement without the need to acknowledge that Katrina was not only about improvements to disaster policies, which although beneficial, would not have changed the underlying structural inadequacies that produce such vulnerability in the first place.

Obama made clear in 2015, during a speech on the 10-year anniversary of Hurricane Katrina, that New Orleans continues to improve upon many of the conditions that influence vulnerability, including healthcare, economic development, education, and

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[349] Matt Chaban, "Schumer and Nadler Say Sandy Was Our Wake-Up Call for Better Disaster Infrastructure," *New York Observer*, November 12, 2012, http://observer.com/2012/11/schumer-and-nadler-say-sandy-was-our-wake-up-call-for-better-disaster-infrastructure

crime;[350] it is also the case that Hurricane Sandy as an event disavowed the traumatic

realization that Katrina produced and that, rather than confronting the sources of that

trauma, the nation *paraliptically* displaced it by fetishizing rapid response. Years later,

however, the frustration felt by those in the Northeast still trying to rebuild their lives

stands as evidence of myriad socioeconomic conditions that continue to factor into not

just a biopolitics of disposability, but also into a disavowal of the broader national

complicity in those politics. The abysmal response in Puerto Rico to Hurricanes Irma and

Maria in 2017 stands as yet further evidence[351] that Sandy, in the very grammar of its

relations, functioned to *paraliptically* displace the trauma of Katrina in the absence of the

nation's willingness to admit to its most disadvantaged, "that's my mama."

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[350] Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President on the Ten Year Anniversary of Hurricane Katrina," August 27, 2015, *The White House*, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/08/28/remarks-president-ten-year-anniversary-hurricane-katrina
[351] Laignee Barron, "U.S. Emergency Response Efforts in Puerto Rico Aren't Good Enough, U.N. Experts Say," *Time*, October 31, 2017, http://time.com/5003470/united-nations-puerto-rico-hurricane-response/

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: THE POLITICS OF KATRINA'S MEMORY-WORK

Ten years after Hurricane Katrina made landfall, inside the newly constructed
Andrew Sanchez Community Center in the Lower 9th Ward, President Obama delivered
a speech that evinced the manifold displacements of the public memory of Katrina during
the years prior. Primed by an affirmation of the strength of the U.S. economy, Obama's
reflections then turn to the spirit of New Orleans, the commitment and capacity of its
people to recover and rebuild, and the many failures that made Katrina into the tragedy it
turned out to be. Recalling images of the Lower 9th directly after the storm, he admits,
"the notion that there would be anything left seemed unimaginable at the time." The most
unsettling part of this failure of imagination, moreover, was that it appeared
retrospectively to have been inevitable. Herein lies the most undisguised
acknowledgement of Katrina's displacements in the speech:

> And this was something that was supposed to never happen here—maybe
> somewhere else. But not here, not in America. And we came to realize that what
> started out as a natural disaster became a manmade disaster—a failure of
> government to look out for its own citizens. And the storm laid bare a deeper
> tragedy that had been brewing for decades because we came to understand that
> New Orleans, like so many cities and communities across the country, had for too
> long been plagued by structural inequalities that left too many people, especially
> poor people, especially people of color, without good jobs or affordable health

care or decent housing. . . . And so like a body weakened already, undernourished

already, when the storm hit, there was [*sic*] no resources to fall back on.[352]

In one fell swoop, Obama lays bare the displacements I have tracked throughout this

dissertation. This was supposed to never happen here—here, America—but for the body

weakened, it was an inevitability, not if but when. And that deeper tragedy underpins the

tragedy of the failure of government and the Bush Administration in its response,

impressing on those failures the knowledge that Katrina as an event was a centuries-long

undertaking. This has become easier in later years to acknowledge, not least because

schools have since been rebuilt, levees have since been upgraded, coastlines are

continuously being restored, and community centers like the Sanchez Center now sit atop

the ground where others had washed away.

Yet, as Naomi Klein has demonstrated, many of the same systematic forces that

made Katrina are still at work. For example, within nineteen months of the storm, "New

Orleans' public school system had been almost completely replaced by privately run

charter schools. Before Hurricane Katrina, the school board had run 123 public schools;

now it ran just 4. Before that storm, there had been 7 charter schools in the city; now

there were 31."[353] This is just one example on a laundry list of exploitative "disaster

capitalism" tactics rolled out after Katrina (Ray Nagin's indictments for bribery, fraud,

money laundering, and conspiracy related to the recovery contracting process were yet

others) and presents a harrowing irony. As the public memory of Katrina moves

increasing towards the reluctant public acknowledgement that structural racism and

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[352] Barack Obama, "Remarks by the President on the Ten Year Anniversary of Hurricane Katrina," August 27, 2015, *The White House*, https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/08/28/remarks-president-ten-year-anniversary-hurricane-katrina

[353] Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism* (New York: Picador, 2008), 6.

poverty in all its forms played a primary role in its devastating effects, at the same time, the privatization of public services and the lip-licking of wealthy investors who immediately saw the city as a "clean slate" capitalized—quite literally—on the economic rationalities that helped produce such vulnerability in the first place.

To begin this concluding chapter with these two observations is to say no more than what scholars of public memory have said before: public memory in its manifest content is always a matter of the present, as is scholarly analysis of it. The laggardly commemoration of the storm's victims with the Hurricane Katrina Memorial, the bus tours of the Lower 9th Ward and other areas, the commemorative events and reflections marking each anniversary—these and others can all be read as spaces wherein the memory of Katrina comes to mean differently at different times and in different contexts. This observation remains sound in the analysis of Katrina's memory objects. Marking the boundaries of public memory scholarship on the basis of these objects has produced a vast compendium of insights about how they function, and without those insights and the scholarly conversations they spawn, this project could not have been possible.

At the same time, this dissertation is a challenge to the implicit laws governing that object domain by way of an encouragement to remember differently the translation of Pierre Nora's landmark publication of *Les Lieux de Mémoire*. In his preface to the English translation, *Realms of Memory*, Nora recalls not only the trouble one has with adequately translating the French noun *lieu* into English, but also the ways in which the French term came to take on a more amorphous definitional quality throughout the course of even his own project's development:

The narrow concept had emphasized the *site*: the goal was to exhume significant

sites, to identify the most obvious and crucial centers of national memory, and

then to reveal the existence of invisible bonds tying them all together. . . . The

broader conception required by the planning of *Les France*[, the final volume,]

placed the accent instead on *memory*, on the discovery and exploration of latent or

hidden aspects of national memory and its whole spectrum of sources, regardless

of their nature.[354]

In short, what began as a project of producing a history of French nationalism by

examining a wide range of memory "sites"—memorials, "museums, commemorations,

and mottoes" [355]—upon broadening the conception of "site" and putting emphasis instead

on "memory" ultimately became a project of retelling France's history through its most

seemingly unrelated and unremarked *lieux de mémoire*. His anxiety over this method is,

of course, that some readers would be appalled, that to set an "almost caricatural symbol

such as the Gallic cock alongside the palace of Versailles or the battle of Verdun . . . is to

blur the distinctions between the greatest and most brilliant accomplishments of French

history and tradition and the humblest instruments for fabricating that history and that

tradition," and that "to do so runs the risk of appearing to diminish those

accomplishments."[356] To this he responds: that is precisely the point, a French history

without French nationalism. The running assumption that the monuments of our memory

should dictate not only method but also object domain reflects a certain adherence—even

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[354] Pierre Nora, "Preface to the English-Language Edition," in *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past,* vol. I: Conflicts and Divisions (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), xvii-xviii.
[355] Nora, "Preface," xvii.
[356] Nora, "Preface," xxi.

a critical one—to the *a priori* constitution of that domain. The widening and rethinking of that domain on the basis of this insight has been one crux of the current project.

It has been my wager throughout that Freud and his readers provide a necessary framework for reading such a broad and seemingly disconnected object domain of memory through the concept of displacement. Is it not the case that the interpretation of dreams is to a significant degree the attempt to discern a unifying symbolic framework out of an often ridiculous set of manifest dream content? Freud argues in the book by that same name that absurdity as such only presents itself in dreams where the dream-work attempts to represent contradiction.[357] In all other cases, the ridiculousness of dreams, the setting alongside of the Gallic cock and the palace of Versailles, is not questioned by the dreamer, for the Freudian bargain holds that some psychic process intelligibly links them in its logic (and later, with Lacan, in its language). The task of scholars of public memory who take up this Freudian charge, then, is to do the same. While Nora's concern with object domain is a shared one in this task, the method I begin to suggest differs fundamentally. The aim of the analyst/critic—unlike Nora's historiographer—is to interpret the logic of the memory-work on the basis of its displacements, not to figure out what the cock and the palace have to do with one another. The principal contribution I hope to have made in the preceding pages has therefore been a retheorization and demonstration of method that I see as a departure from previous approaches to the rhetorical analysis of public memory studies, with an attendant rethinking of how that retheorization determines public memory's object domain.

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[357] Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. James Stranchey (New York: Basic Books, 1955), 442.

The Kristevan and Lacanian readings of Freud on which I have relied have also enabled my examinations of public memory's displacement to be grounded firmly in rhetoric and language. In thinking through memory-work, we may recall Lacan's chief insight that the unconscious is structured like a language, and that he demonstrates this by translating condensation/displacement into metaphor/metonymy. As Christian Lundberg argues, while indebted to the formalism from which its terms are derived, Lacan's framework is at the same time descriptive of the tropology by which the subject enters language and operates within it via a feigned unicity. Because "there is no automatic correspondence between signifiers, representations, and the objects to which they refer or between signifiers and the Real, which they attempt to capture," Lacan's tropology describes the artificial means by which subjects nevertheless produce and maintain meaning and the desire that underpins it.[358] While my own textual readings of displacement rely far less directly on metonymy, *per se*, nor do they place upon metonymy and metaphor the overarching tropological roles that Lundberg's own work does, the observation that the psychic processes of condensation and displacement are achieved by means of rhetoric is the guiding assumption of the theorization of memory-work found here.

Each chapter is thus organized around the rhetorical means by which these collective psychic functions achieve the displacement of Hurricane Katrina's public memory. In Chapter 2, I contend that the repetitive pre-Katrina rhetorical simulation of The Big One performed an anxious melancholic rhetoric whose upshot was the incorporation of certain elements of those simulations in post-Katrina memory objects. In

[358] Christian Lundberg, *Lacan in Public: Psychoanalysis and the Science of Rhetoric* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2012), 3.

Chapter 3, I argued that repetition, reduplication, and silence marked Nagin's interview as *chōric*, a rhetoric characterized by a matricidal erasure in the final memory of the most harrowing days during Katrina. And in Chapter 4, I suggested that successful disaster response during Hurricane Sandy was a fetish object that *paraliptically* disavowed the hard lessons of Katrina. Simulation, repetition, reduplication, silence, and *paralipsis* in these chapters are described as the means by which anxiety, melancholy, incorporation, matricide, fetish, and disavowal are marked and carried out, illustrating above all the rhetorical character of displacements of memory and the symptoms that accompany them.

As a result of this reading strategy (not to mention, or, better yet, precisely because of the fickle nature of commemoration and memorialization when it comes to Katrina), it would have made little sense to engage traditional memory objects as if they were the principal *lieux* where one would find the meanings of memory being made. Indeed, to paraphrase Nora: that is precisely the point. Instead, I argued that reading for memory's displacements necessitates focus on somewhat unconventional objects of analysis for studying its public memory. In Chapter 2, I examined the long history of New Orleans' narratives of fatalism pre-Katrina, with particular focus on two of these narratives told in the years just prior to the tragedy. The analysis of memory objects at the end of the chapter demonstrated that it was impossible to understand how they function apart from the simulations that prefigured them. In Chapter 3, I read an interview that may be remembered infamously in its own right, but because of its *chōric* quality is not normally remarked upon as one of Katrina's most crucial moments. Finally, in Chapter 4, my focus shifted into the future of Katrina but away from New Orleans, to Hurricane

Sandy, which I read as an all-too-underacknowledged working-through of the memory of Katrina.

As might be expected, the question of the displacements of Katrina's memory is a political one as well. I have suggested that, unlike many other tragedies, Katrina is difficult to memorialize in traditional ways because of the structural injustices it exposed. Reading Katrina's memory differently, then, reflects also my own desire to describe the ways in which displacement, to again quote Freud, "strips the elements which have a high psychical value of their intensity, and . . . creates from elements of low psychical value new values" within public memory.[359] That is, the ways in which it displaces the traumatic events of Katrina, not to valorize or even precisely to forget, but to remember differently.

At the heart of the political question of the memory of Katrina is the role of the federal government to mitigate against the forces of capital that have threatened the city from the moment of its founding. The precarity of New Orleans's existence has always in some sense been part of a calculus that sees the rewards as being worth the risks. This is, no doubt, because both reward and risk have always been distributed unevenly, and the industries that continue to inflate that risk the most dramatically are often those least affected when storms befall the region. As briefly mentioned in Chapter 2, *The Times-Picayune* recently published a lengthy report examining the accelerating losses of the Louisiana coast. It reports that more than a quarter of the state's wetlands have disappeared, and the land loss caused by the oil and gas industry, erosion, and climate change now represent roughly 90 percent of the land loss in the United States as a whole.

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[359] Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 324.

Cities and towns along the coast have been tasked with carrying out massive

infrastructural ventures to protect against the increased risks as a result, and many

understand their localities to be involved in a "race against time." The concentration of

poor and working people of color in New Orleans may raise the stakes, but a wide range

of poor and working communities all along the coast are facing many of the same dire

projections: the coast is shrinking, water levels are rising, and storms are becoming

increasingly destructive. As has been the central anxiety of New Orleans since the

eighteenth century, the question that insists for all of these communities "is less whether

[they] will succumb than when—and to what degree scarce public resources should be

invested in artificially extending [their lives]." [360]

Yet, the artificiality thesis is already symptomatic of that trademark Louisiana

fatalism that I have examined in this dissertation: to see increasingly necessary

protections against increasingly violent "natural" forces as artificial, but the

developmental factors that produce those increases as inevitable, is to already give over

to the very unnatural, indeed, very *human* forces that have always seen the "taming" of

the natural environment as coextensive with progress, even as the forces of colonialism,

slavery, segregation, and the biopolitics of disposability underwrite it. On one view, the

fact that New Orleans has never quite escaped this logic is a testament to the durability of

those institutions. Read another way, however, it is also a testament to the politics of

memory. Turning one final time to Ari Kelman, the uncanny ability of New Orleans to

"forget past tragedies and ignore the next one lurking around the corner" signals the

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[360] Nola.com, "Our Drowning Coast: Left to Louisiana's Tides, Jean Lafitte Fights for Time," *The Times-Picayune and The New York Times*, February 24, 2018, http://www.nola.com/expo/erry-2018/02/37908ff4b8/our_drowning_coast_left_to_lou.html

process of memory's displacement, the implications of which extend far beyond the self-reflections of the field of rhetoric or even memory studies more broadly construed. It also signals the political impact of such forgetfulness—not the strategic forgetting that engenders new and fresh horizons, but rather the type of forgetting against which a post-Holocaust and post-9/11 world leveled the injunction to "Never Forget."

Yet, this political concern does not imply a correlative ethics that places remembering and forgetting at opposite ends of a binary, either. As Bradford Vivian has so deftly argued, the political and academic indictment of forgetting perhaps itself "forgets" something as well. He summarizes the traditional approach this way:

> Forgetting, in academic as well as popular usage, continues to signify a loss, absence, or lack—not simply of memory but of live connections with a tangible past. Forgetting is acutely meaningful in both scholarly and public circles as the ontological opposite of memory, as a hindrance to mature understanding and full experience of a nourishing past.[361]

Vivian challenges this this ontology of memory by arguing for the "positive" function of memory and the ways in which social agents "argue for and enact such forgetting" alongside its effects. As I noted in the introduction, I am in agreement with Vivian that calls to forget can be formative sites of the production of public memory.

In this dissertation, however, I have taken the "loss, absence, or lack," not *of* memory, but *in* memory, to be the starting point for understanding remembering and forgetting as dialectical. Whether Kristevan *chōra* or Lacanian lack, viewing the unconscious as the seat of memory's production and maintenance likewise challenges the

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[361] Bradford Vivian, *Public Forgetting: The Rhetoric and Politics of Beginning Again* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 2010), 5.

study of not just remembering and forgetting, but also the degree to which one can differentially allocate their ethicality. It follows, then, that it is a matter neither of the productive functions of remembering vs. the oblivion of forgetting, nor of elevating public forgetting onto the same ethical plane as remembering. The task is rather to parse the logic of the memory-work in any given case study, describing where, when, and how those most traumatic events of our collective existence become something other than themselves, end up somewhere other than where they began.

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