

**Public History and Social Archives: Toward a New Materialist Rhetoric of Murder**

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This dissertation follows the many rhetorical (or persuasive) agents and relations in the act or event of murder. I ask readers to postpone blame in order to listen to the other rhetorical agents involved. I follow 4 case studies or instances of murder that happened in Pittsburgh, tracing who and what was influential or persuasive in the final act. Using new materialist theory and rhetoric, I argue that murder happens within a network—not only an online network, but a larger network of influential actors and agents—things like: Facebook, Twitter, language, affect, programming languages, trauma—and that we must understand this rhetorical network of agents for an efficacious intervention and understanding of murder and violence. The dissertation is both practical and theoretical. It is both public and private. It is both about real people who lived and have lived down the street and philosophical ideas that live largely in print. Building on contemporary art movements and recent work in the digital humanities, we must attend to the production of the archive-as-method—a newly emergent practice that raises complex ethical questions about the relationality between language, networks, affects, and bodies in digital social contexts. This dissertation practices an inquiry that is not criminological or pathological but networked and new materialist.



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## PREFACE

“How do we translate listening into language and action,  
into the creation of an appropriate response?”  
—Jacqueline Jones Royster, “When the First Voice You Hear is Not Your Own”

I open this work with a quote on listening because I want to begin by acknowledging my own outsideness to the topic of murder and violence, an outsideness that demands a kind of listening, while simultaneously positing listening as the first step toward imagining “an appropriate response” (29). This is not just a passive listening, but it is rather open and intentional, as Kristi Ratcliffe invites in *Rhetorical Listening*, with a stance toward understanding. I won’t say this is an easy task, nor even a fully achievable task, but I have found the practice itself—the taking on of the task—to be worthwhile.

I admit at the entry, then, that I am an educated white woman, on the outside of violent neighborhoods and communities, and yet despite this, I proceed in a very personal way. This is because I am implicated at the outset.

I first became interested in murder through working with youth in an after-school program in Pittsburgh. I was there to help the students focus on homework, be a role model, and listen. This after-school program was for “high-risk” students in a predominantly African American school, and it was designed to keep them off the streets while doing something productive. I began first by just spending time with the students, watching what they watched, finding out what they were into, and building relationships. Occasionally, I attempted to force homework on them. A few months into our daily routine, after I had gotten to know the students, a few of them came in distraught over a murder in their neighborhood, The Hill District. They were abuzz with speculation and rumors and had covered their arms in text and scrawl memorializing the murdered: “RIP STRIZZ,” “RWG Banger.” (This particular murder later became the content of chapter 2). In the days afterward, I noticed their language about the murder, their memorialization of each murder, and their discourse in and around social media. I think what struck me most was their ease with the murder. What I realized in talking with them is that any one of these kids could have been murdered or committed murder. What I mean is, it is not so impossible for them to conceptualize. Murder is an utterable word and its reality a possibility. In an in-class exercise just weeks earlier, for instance, many of the young male students when asked to draw pictures of what their future might look like in 10 years, illustrated their casket, their self with a gun to their head, or their family photo with an invisible person (see Appendix 1). Their practices surrounding this particular murder revealed a complicated relationship to murder—one that I am still admittedly on the outside of—but which suggests an ordinariness to murder, an everydayness to the realities of murder, and a particular language and

pervasiveness. bell hooks captures it well in her critical acknowledgement that we, as a culture, do not love the African American male:

In actuality many black males explain their decision to become the “beast” as a surrender to realities they cannot change. And if you are going to be seen as a beast you may as well act like one...Sadly, the real truth, which is a taboo to speak, is that this is a culture that does not love black males, that they are not loved by white men, white women, black women, or girls and boys. And that especially most black men do not love themselves. (hooks 8)

My interest in murder is not only a scholarly exercise, nor a conceptual fling. It is not just an attempt at abstract ideas that I might contemplate as a thought-experiment, nor is it a problem I will resolve here, but it is a project that may open up actual relations, reading, writing, thinking practices—both mine and yours—but also those involved in murder. What bell hooks says resonates with me and calls me to take responsibility as a citizen and scholar. Murder terrifies me; it feels very removed from my world, language, and my culture. It’s possible that anyone can be killed in a random act of violence, of course, but *those murderers* are often dismissed as mentally disturbed or “evil,” morally corrupt disturbances to culture. They are depicted as outside of norms in American society. However, and it’s difficult to explain how acutely I feel this, but the youth I worked with, the many young men in the murder archive project and the pages that follow, and those young black men hooks speaks of above, cannot be so easily dismissed. They are not outside of American culture or language, but rather enmeshed in it at different levels of articulation. Their murders, their violence, must be treated as part and parcel to American culture, as intertwined in it, and as part of *us*. There is no outside.

In this way, I try to move away from easily drawn fictive lines between us/them, between the murdering and non, where our explanations and our philological distinctions must be reconfigured. It’s something else.

As I worked with the youth, as I myself became invested in the murders happening in the neighborhoods of Pittsburgh, I took it on as a project to listen via the act of “collecting” the social networking traces of some of the actors involved in the murders. Over time, each human actor became more and more fully elaborated to me. I tried to allow different causes and different explanations to speak. I held the human actors decidedly blameless as I struggled to understand what I have come to call the wholly enfolded network of murder. This is how I began this project: with one murder, my students’ reactions, and one attempt to understand a fuller picture or different narrative than the one already circulating.

I’ll end this preface by saying, I am deeply affected by those lives I have archived, studied, and become wholly intertwined with through the process of this dissertation, and while I try to temper my optimism for change with caveats of all kinds, I still hope this dissertation can open up the problem of murder in new ways and make interventions into actual lives and language. While I’m still unsure of how exactly to do that, to get my work in academia to touch the people it cares about, I am committed to finding a way. For now, I have this dissertation, my abiding care for its people, connections, language, and the very real problem of murder as something our scholarship can address.

## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

“Our job is to go where everyone has gone before, but where few have bothered to linger.”

—Ian Bogost, *Alien Phenomenology*

“The job of an intellectual does not consist in molding the political will of others. It is a matter of performing analyses in his or her own fields, of interrogating anew the evidence and the postulates, of shaking up habits, ways of acting and thinking, of dispelling commonplace beliefs, of taking a new measure of rules and institutions...It is a matter of participating in the formation of a political will. Where [the intellectual] is called to perform a role as citizen.”

—Michel Foucault, *Remarks*

“Murder is unique in that it abolishes the party it injures, so that society has to take the place of the victim and on his behalf demand atonement or grant forgiveness; it is the one crime in which society has a direct interest.”

—W.H. Auden

In 2013, Marilyn Cooper opened the Western States Rhetoric and Literacy Conference with a keynote address, “Rhetorical Being,” by asking, is there some problem with our listening that we can only hear the earth when it is in grave danger? In response to Cooper’s question and plea for rhetoricians to do more listening, the present project began with the hope that continuing to push traditional notions of the archive towards matter and materiality, I might find a way to make new methods for listening to the world by engaging the archive and designing the archive and thus garnering different qualities of experience and different realities. This dissertation makes an argument for a creative-critical practice toward listening to social histories and public events in the digital age. The “creative” serves to express that while this project is in the form of a

dissertation and a scholarly and theoretical endeavor, it could also be productively rendered as a digital art installation, exploring issues of networks, empathy, and interface, but also, that when I began this project it was merely a creative, imaginative, and fraught adventure. It could be nothing more than creative as I struggled to find my way through, and so I retain creative-critical because I think it's important to think of our digital inquiries as hovering between creative and critical disciplinary formations. I use the term practice to connote the material feedback and mutual shaping of method and theory.

This creative-critical practice began with the building of an online archive ([murder archive](#)) of over 200 digital remains, public social networking, audio stories, and fragments of those murdered and murdering in Pittsburgh<sup>1</sup>. This digital and *social* archive holds digital remains of murders in Pittsburgh since 2011. The purpose of this archive was not solely to preserve and remember the lives of those being murdered in our inner-cities, but to think of the production of any archive as a method toward making knowledge about social problems in new ways; by design, it has the capacity to slow us down, speed us up, to change our engagement with the textual and visual remains of murder through the archival apparatus. Like so, the murder archive is visually rendered as a network in order to illuminate the connections between the murders, but the method exceeds this visualization as well. This digital object and archive exceed my own telos, functioning as what digital humanist Michael Whitmore calls a “massively addressable” text, a digital composition that can be “addressed” (entered in undetermined ways) at many levels of abstraction and various scales, the composition itself exceeding the maker, remaining

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<sup>1</sup> Of those 200 social networking pages, 80% are the result of a black-on-black murder. Taking my material on its terms, then, I only work with those involved in black-on-black murder in this dissertation. While the interventions of this dissertation are widely applicable to many different kinds of murder networks, including terrorists' murders, white murders, police murders, religious murder, and so on, I will here focus on the problem of black-on-black murder, its specifics, language, affect and networks.



infinitely addressable as usable potential (36). Through it, with it, and from it, I work to tell a new digital history of the often invisible lives of those caught up in violent communities in order to make new knowledge and interventions about murder—that it is networked, that it lives online and offline, that it is circulated through affective language and social networks, and that the problem itself is socially distributed, non-human and agential, and wildly more complex than the usual one-to-one narratives of gangs, drugs, or even race. Simultaneously, I will use the digital archive of murder to make arguments about what an archive can do in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. But first, I ask you to begin by postponing blame for as long as possible. Begin by trying to hear what else and who else is participating in the violent and misunderstood act of murder. Begin by thinking of an archive as a listening space.

As murder historian, Karen Haltunnen writes, “for some time there has been a pressing need for studies that approach murder as a cultural phenomenon and that recognize its inseparability” from language, images, and the modes through which daily life is lived (32). Murder has been studied sociologically, criminologically, and morally, but not yet discursively, affectively, socially, nor as a cultural phenomenon. Murder, Mark Seltzer tells us, “is where bodies and history cross” (6). Something else gathers there, too: rhetoric. One way of putting it, then, is that this dissertation is an experimental inquiry into murder, asking how and where bodies, histories, and rhetorics collide. But also, who and what propels their collision? Listening particularly to their crashing will be the special subject of this dissertation. In my efforts to discuss murder through bodies, histories, and rhetoric, I engage several different academic conversations, centering around archives and digital historiography, network theory and discourse communities, new materialism, affect, and rhetoric. And yet I will also hold a special hope that some iteration of this project—it’s digital instantiations—will touch audiences far

outside what I have mentioned, audiences like those who have helped contribute and build the online archive which houses the digital imagery of murder, audiences who can help to re-engage issues of violence, audiences with expertise in criminological or judicial concerns. Audiences, to be sure, who are open to entirely reimagining how we might go about a longstanding social and historical concern like murder and violence.

At the level of introduction, then, the argument of this project is that through new methods of digital capture and digital culture, researchers, artists, and scholars can intentionally and collaboratively build important digital historiographies, which are “histories from down below,” of under-represented and even silenced histories, but which carry, also, social, political, affective, and rhetorical interventions (Baron 76). Scholars can listen differently, in short.

Conceptually some of this work evolved from an indelible comment made by Judith Jack Halberstam in an interview with *Trickster* magazine. She said, “when you want to think differently about something, you actually have to use a) a different archive, and b) different concepts ” (*Trickster*). For Halberstam, it is extremely difficult to think these new concepts because “subjugated knowledge,” as Foucault calls it, or “eccentric knowledge,” as Lauren Berlant names it, is knowledge as a “*form of thinking*” that has been subdued, unimaginable even, as a scholarly inquiry (emphasis original, *Trickster*). What was so indelible about this comment is the suggestion that scholars have to find different archives to make something else enunciable, similar to what Halberstam does with the Brandon Teena archive, and that sometimes no archive exists, and so scholarship must build its own. This implies that scholars must move very carefully and even creatively when producing “new vocabularies and new structures,” and one way of doing this is through the production of archives as a legitimating apparatus that *makes* different concepts possible (*Trickster*). Coupling Halberstam’s argument

about different knowledge-producing archives with the 21<sup>st</sup> century proliferation of digital storage and DIY or amateur digital archiving, there is a potential to create many different kinds of archives and thus many different kinds of knowledge through digital collection(s) and digital archives. Why I turned to an archive of murder may seem rather strange or rather dark. Yet this is precisely the problem as I've related it, that there is an everydayness to murder as it happens in our neighborhoods and our cities, and yet what is enunciable and utterable is limited and barely audible. A distance is maintained through a lack of affective and articulable relationships to the murders. It is remarkably difficult to think "outside of received wisdom" or to think new concepts about murder (*Trickster*). Like so, our relationship to murder is rhetorically and cultural constructed. The darkness surrounding murder, then, is no more than a symbolic way of maintaining distance, of drawing an imaginary line between the murderous and the non-murderous. The question becomes, then: why not study murder? Why not murder as an eccentric archive? With its rhetoric, remains, and networks bound up in the lives of people dying and killing. Is this not perhaps a ripe site of rhetoric, new "eccentric" concepts, subcultural practices and ways of being? As Raymond Carver notes, "a murderer is always unreal once you know he's a murderer" (qtd. in Black 780), but the archive of murder seeks to make the murderer real again through new life narratives and alternative relations to living, dying and murdering. When I began "collecting" murder's digital remains three years ago, however, it was more of an entangled and enmeshed incitement, but now I offer it as a new kind of scholarly project, a way of making murder more *real*.

At the start, then, I want to say that this dissertation is also an archive of sorts, working as much to produce an archive as well as to analyze one. It holds together not only some of the indexical documents of the online born digital archive, but also the cross-cutting forces found in

the murder archive. The writing here tries to carry out the intensities of the archive, and invites the audience to think of the archive more robustly, as a place of feelings, networks, affects, charged discourse, and audiovisual traces. To this end, my approach to the archive has been somewhat different, a genealogy I lay out in chapter 1, but let me just say now that I am looking at two sides of the archive.

- 1) The indexical traces left behind in social networking by those involved in murder.
- 2) How these traces help us think an archive that is unorthodox, unusual, eccentric and thus capable of holding affects, effects, relations, and networks.

These are the born digital traces that are both intentional and performative. Archive scholars, like Kate Theimer<sup>2</sup>, have pointed out the troubling nature of naming these digital traces as archives. Are these archives? Who decides? Who curates them? In response to her questions and many others like it, I posit a new archive—the social archive—which is intentionally collected and curated in collaboration with communities and scholars toward a new kind of intervention into social problems and digital historiography. The social archive grants attention to how publics are formed in and through cultural and social publics. These indexical documents and artifacts become the social archive, which tells of culture as a “whole way of life” echoing Raymond Williams and Ann Cvetkovich (9). It is an archival intervention into a public sphere, or more accurately, a counterpublic sphere, where the materials come from more remote cultural and public places, but also privately collected audio and video recordings. Anne Cvetkovich has argued that publics are hard to archive “because they are lived experiences, and the cultural traces that they leave are frequently inadequate to the task of documentation” (9), and yet to do

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<sup>2</sup> In the AHA 2014 roundtable discussion, “Digital Historiography and the Archives,” Kate Theimer presented her talk, “A Distinction worth Exploring: ‘Archives’ and ‘Digital Historical Representation’” which discusses her protection and longstanding interest in the word, archive, not being used for every form of digital repository.

so anyway is to allow an archive to tell the story of a counterpublic and whole way of life, which is to make whole communities visible—their affects, discourse, struggles, and collective suffering. To borrow from Michael Warner, the social archive tries to “support forms of affective, erotic, and personal living that are public in the sense of accessible, available to memory, and sustained through collective activity” (56).

This follows on research being done in web studies and Internet studies. Geert Lovink declared that unlike what we previous thought the Internet was going to be—a liberation “from your old self,” (14) an anonymous alter reality—“there is no alternative identity” (14). How we live amidst and through our online environments is folded into our everyday life. This is not to suggest that life online is an exact replication of life “off-line,” but instead that life itself is augmented and transformed through the pace, real-time speed, connectivity, and propagation of living between sites like Facebook and Twitter, such that the division between online and offline is dissolved. The struggle is for researchers to think this new relationship anew. Modalities of life wildly proliferate in social media sites. The complexity of these daily formations invites researchers to pay more attention to the significance and the role of online environments, their histories, in things like violent acts and racial formations.<sup>3</sup>

It may be apparent that I am dancing loosely here between archive and digital historiography, the two terms that the AHA had a roundtable on distinguishing, and the two terms that figure largely in this project. Digital historiography has been explained by digital historian, Joshua Sternfield, as the “interdisciplinary study of the interaction of digital technology with historical practice” (544). William Thomas further adds in the *Journal of*

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<sup>3</sup> See Lisa Nakamura and Peter Chow-White’s Introduction, “Race and Digital Technology: Code, the Color Line, and the Information Society” and Sanjay Sharma’s “Black Twitter?: Racial Hashtags, Networks and Contagion” for a look at how race can be studied in digital environments.

*American History* that digital historiography is a “methodological approach framed by the hypertextual power of [digital] technologies to make, define, query, and annotate associations in the human record of the past (D. Cohen et al 454). Digital historiography by its very nature challenges disciplinary boundaries, which have in the past decades separated the work of historians, archivists, and rhetoricians. Yet through the still open, and not yet reified, practices of digital historiography, new theories and methods emerge, drawing on many disciplines at once, but most particularly blurring the line between the historian and the archivist, historiography and archives. Do we tell histories or do we curate documents? Do you we produce histories or do we collect them? The answer in this project is both. This move is important because it has ushered in a shared vocabulary between the disciplines that can, for now, live under the methods and theory of digital historiography. In short, we don’t know what it is yet, and so as I forge a not-yet-defined-discipline, I shine light on the power of method, on the archive as a method for proceeding, and a new look at how rhetoric is part of this dynamic project. Indeed, what does pervade all the scholarly conversations and disciplines in this project is method. More specifically, then, because my disciplinary home is rhetoric and composition, I work to situate how I am entering into this emerging interdisciplinary discussion as centering around digital historiography, digital archives, new materialist rhetoric, and methods.

## 1.1 ON METHOD

To take one impetus, Jessica Enoch and David Gold open their 2013 *College English* special issue<sup>4</sup> with a provocative introduction, titled “Seizing the Methodological Moment: The Digital Humanities and Historiography in Rhetoric and Composition” which distills key moves in digital humanities, and one way for “historiographers in our field to pay attention to...new scholarship emerging out of the digital humanities” (106). Gold and Enoch ask rhetoric and composition scholars to look at digital humanities scholarship as more than “technology as a mode of literacy, as those in our field may understand it” but as “the *use* of technology to develop digital tools and platforms that position scholars to do more robust as well as new kinds of interpretive and historiographic work” (106). They ask us to compose more and produce more archives of our own—to write new histories. This is the important new work of digital scholarship merged with rhetoric and composition. From their urging, my murder archive emerges in response, as an archive that is part and parcel to method. The archive is the method. From this line of historiographical thinking, I further situate this dissertation as speaking back to Michelle Ballif’s touchstone edited collection, *Theorizing Histories of Rhetoric*, which asks about new methods for listening and hearing differently and for interceding into histories of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Indeed this text offers many roads in and out of this project work as a way to situate my own intervention into digital historiography in the context of rhetoric and methods, but also as the impetus for how we listen in the wake of new digital technologies.

One methodological innovation of the archive that Ballif ushers in is through an activation of hauntological historiography, which is the writing of history “with/in a haunted,

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<sup>4</sup> The special issue theme was “The Digital Humanities and Historiography in Rhetoric and Composition” in *College English*, Vol. 76, No. 2, November 2013.

uncanny sense of the past, present, and the future...,” where the “borders between past and the future remain—not only permeable, but—impossible” (141). In her argument, scholars must risk rematerialization with the dead by resisting a historiographical practice that buries the dead in order to “lay them to rest” (145). What we must practice instead is “restlessness” with the dead, an aliveness, which leaves us restless, too. In that restless moment, Ballif calmly asserts, we experience the “ethical moment of radical otherness” (145). This opens a methodological change in how we take up our archives. It is not to lay them to rest, but to forge an encounter in the present with precisely those figures who “inhabit the threshold of our understanding and that unsettle our understanding of the past,” thereby “inviting us to refigure the ‘future’ as not-yet, ethically” (5). Along with Ballif, Enoch, and Gold, I began this project by making a methodological move not to understand, and I won’t even say now that I understand it fully, but when I began I had to start with the admission that I wholly did not understand. Whatever despotic illustration of murder, whatever grand narrative existed, I tried to cast it aside, admitting first that I don’t even know how to tell this story. This was a risky venture, which involved resisting the urge to “substitute a known expression for an unknown one” (*Reassembling the Social* 67). This important new methodological approach posits a kind of “epistemological humility” as a gesture toward possibility, a possibility that no one can foresee at the outset, but which allows us to listen in on what stories and relations have been excluded in our human record (11). As a methodological query, then, the question became how does one think murder without also thinking all those re-presentations, narratives, discourses, and rules of cognition that govern our relationship to murder and violence? How does one listen in to precisely what has been excluded?



As a response to these questions I turn particularly to 1) new materialist rhetoric and 2) the archive as method, where both offer a fecund method for listening and responding differently. What new materialist rhetoric offers is a methodological intervention into reconsidering the social and who and what makes up any social event. One trajectory of new materialism can be seen as evolving out of the work of Spinoza, Henri Bergson, Deleuze, Guattari, more recently taken up by Latour, Bennet and Barad. What Spinoza set in motion was the idea of monism, that all substance and matter emerges out of one source. Put in more contemporary terms, new materialism denies that the world is made up of dualisms, arguing that division of the world into two separate things—human/nature, subject/object—fails to account for how things happen in the world. Instead, new materialism asks us take account of the diverse set of materials, where there was never any divide in the first place. To undo bifurcation, Latour insists, we must re-understand the event. Numerous terms have evolved to describe reality and diagram events as something other than a duality. Latour uses “collectives” (1993) and “actor-network” (2005), Haraway “naturecultures” (2003), Hardt and Negri “empire” (2000), Deleuze and Guattari “assemblage” (1980). These terms and their reshaping of the world demand new modes of analysis, what Coole and Frost call, giving “material factors their due in shaping society and circumscribing human prospects” (2-3). Chief among Latour’s additions is the inclusion of the nonhuman into the collective, residing on the same plane, and just as ontologically agential, as the human actor. This work favors the more complex, the messier, description of the world in favor of “new kinds of empirical investigations that foreground distributed relations and attend to the nonlinear processes of materialization” (Gries 6). What comes to the fore specifically is human intentionality and action. The new materialist asks what else and who else is entangled or “mangled” (Pickering) in action. Where does agency reside in a

complex and distributed image of the world? What all has agency? For the new materialist, all things are matter, and all matter has agency.

As Latour proclaims, “we are never alone when are acting” (*Reassembling the Social* 43). Mysterious forces act on us and with us and we are made to do things by other agencies over which we have no control and that seem plain enough, invisible enough, so innocuous as not to be mentioned.” Latour suggests that agency is invisible and yet powerful even as it is distributed across many networks, assemblages, and actors. This question of intention and agency can be productively taken up by rhetoric. While rhetoric has traditionally been focused on the human agent as persuasive agent, new materialist rhetoricians ask for a rhetoric that considers how all things objects, constructs, bodies, digital social networks, languages, discourses, relate or produce effects? Or even initiate action. Rhetoricians such as Nathaniel Rivers, Marilynne Cooper, Alex Reid, Collin Brooks, and Laurie Gries extend Latour in defining rhetoric as the relations between human and non-human bodies in the context of any event. In this way, rhetoric gains power as a study of the networks or assemblages, as the study of collective of actors, and thus any intervention requires the particularity of those actors and their events, along with an inventory of their agency, and all things have agency. To pursue this new materialist study, then, we have to pursue the rhetorical relations, which are always on the move, nonlinear, and continuously unfolding.

How to hold all these relations together? How to re-trace and re-assemble the actors and relations of murder for a new understanding, and a more robust set of connections? These are important questions that I take up through the function of the archive. What the digital archive offers is a method toward understanding an event. It is a repository for the freeze-frame of rhetorical relations involved in a murder-event via the act of collecting and archiving digital

remains. It attempts to listen in on—and ultimately unsettle—some of the most deeply rooted values and assumptions that govern our relationship to murder. I began firstly by collecting diverse materials according to Actor-Network Theory for the murder archive, which holds together the heterogeneous actors in any murder and offers as its main thrust that every event must be reassembled by, “following the actors” and that those actors each has something, sometimes many, things to say. Secondly, I recognized a breakdown in the distinction, which was never very stable, between “archival” and “found documents,” in the advent of the digital indexical trace, and rather than continue to oppose the terms, I saw “foundness” as a constituent element of all archival documents, whether found in an archive, on a street, or in a virtual network” (Baron 17). Thirdly, I began to see this new archive as a way to significantly shape how we experience or are encountered by the audio visual traces of contemporary historical experience. As Jaimie Baron notes, archival documents are not objects, but they, too, are events, or encounters by which a producer and viewer are “affected” both on an intellectual and emotional level” (174). In this way, the archive can be a history from below, but also an experience from below, an encounter from below, and a listening from below. Because the digital archive has the ability to hold materialities, discourses, agents, and histories for and toward future study, it further decries a new way of reading, which looks at texts as texts, not merely documents, following different strands of meaning in a “text” to “designate and transform,” in Byron Hawk’s words, “the field of evidence into as many histories and historiographies as can possibly be fashioned” (37).

What each of these archival renovations allow, then, is what artist Lara Baladi calls the potentials of the “archive as method and medium” to not just uncover silenced histories, but also silenced networks and agents. From these openings, my dissertation challenges the traditional

emphasis on violence and murder as a one-to-one intentional act. I argue, instead, that murder can be approached as distributed through a number of polyvalent actors like social networks, language, discourse, and affect, putting new emphasis on how the relations between these things feeds in and out of murder. From this point of departure, my dissertation forges its main argument: Murder is a networked phenomenon, and it must be studied as such, for any kind of intervention. By networked I mean to imply that murder happens across and because of the connectivity of social networks, but also, more complexly, that the social network itself is just one node in a larger network of other distributed actors. I define murder juridically as the illegitimate, extra-legal killing event—but I do so more to contest that definition, from the space where it lives most impactfully on people's lives--that is, with people who are convicted of being "murderers." I further employ the term murder because it is what circulates in the discourse of murder events, and its history and materiality, take on a special agency in the act, an effect I am interested in upsetting.

In tracking an archive of murder, I hope also to forge methodologies for the documentation and examination of the rhetorical agents and structures of affect that constitute acts of violence. It is important to incorporate human and non human agents and their affective life into our conceptions of citizenship and violent acts, and to recognize that these things, taken together, may fall outside judicial and moral lines, but that they are nevertheless just as powerful and must be considered in the concept of inner-city violence. My investigation into more of the rhetorical agents of violence is motivated specifically by my own dissatisfaction with the public and cultural responses to inner-city violence that take the form of distancing, silencing, and one-to-one accusation. Such political and cultural responses assume individual agency without consideration of the intra-active agents of violence. Within the murder archive (both in this

dissertation and online) what interests me are the affective, discursive, and non-human relations that counter the old tired narratives of our cultural response to violence, especially in inner-cities, or between young black men. Instead, in these pages, I try to offer an alternative to this model on many levels and finally an intervention.

And yet despite all I've said to situate my argument, this dissertation lies between many conversations and disciplines, not quite occupying any one area fully. Its digital publics and cultural cases and sites can be described as public history and network theory, yet this does not do justice to where the chapters take the "cases." In many instances, the materials found herein operate in critical relation to news media and culture, opening a space for radical ethical work and responses centering on violence.

## CHAPTER OUTLINE

In Chapter 1, I introduce the "social archive," sketching out a genealogy of the social and the archive, and how I came to put the two together. This works to frame the importance of public histories and social archives. I survey the theoretical influence that guides the dissertation's approach to both murder and the archive. While acknowledging some cultural and historical versions of murder that have emerged in the last 150 years, I also turn to new materialist theory, actor-network theory, rhetorical theory, and archive theory as resources for thinking about how digital capture and digital trace demand new theories and practices of how archives and public histories contribute to public and social events, like murder. Chapter 2 takes the new framework of the social archive and applies it through a discussion of a specific "instance" of murder, the murder of Dane "Strizzly Banger" Smith by his best friend Marcus Smith. By working through the details of this one murder, I argue for the ability to see the flows of networks as importantly archivable. I also turn to the network as an integral term and diagram

of murder. Chapter 3 continues to work with and consider how networks get archived, but moves more fully into what knowledge this kind of archiving makes around the specific affect of trauma. Chapter 4 addresses the particular social network of Facebook as a powerful agential actor, arguing that it is participatory in the act of murder. Focusing in particular on one murder-instance of Omar Islam by three human actors, the chapter considers how Facebook, its algorithms and informatics, produces and contributes to a distributed assemblaged act of murder. Chapter 5 begins with a practice-based digital piece called, Rhetorical Empathy: A Digital Imaginative Inquiry, which is an experimental and performative digital art piece. It applies and re-appropriates public and social archival materials to re-imagine new ethical relationships with those convicted of murder. Through an intentional process of making and theorizing, I forge an ethical response to murder, which I call rhetorical empathy. The chapter engages not only arguments of intervention in digital culture, but how invention can happen through digital making. I have suggested throughout this dissertation that we can open up new narratives, alternative relations to living and dying, and new ways of seeing murder by listening more closely to the real people and connections, rather than fictive translations, involved in murder, and one crucial element to that puzzle is *empathy*.

## 1.2 A NOTE ON LANGUAGE

I use murder network to describe the entire social constellation involved in one murder including the human actors, the social networks, the discourse, and all the seemingly unimportant collected traces etc. Each part/actor/element taken individually is what I call a “murder-instance.” I choose the term “instance” for its connotations to movement. An instant is so tiny

that it suggests being always on the move and always feeding into something larger. It crashes into other instances in a constantly readjusting continuum, just as, I argue, murder does. The term used most often, however, besides the network is the murder-event. The event is the human and non human actors I have gathered as participating in murder. A murder-event is made up of instances. A murder-event is necessarily fragmented, where totality is not the goal.

I sometimes use archive and compose interchangeably as an action. When I compose a murder, I mean archive, but I mean it in the way my work suggests here: deliberate and social. I think the relationship between compose and archive is important to continue to consider as it relates to the role of archiving and building/designing more generally. Latour similarly uses compose and composition when he might mean assemble, construct or make.

## 2.0 SHOWING MY WORK: A GENEALOGY OF THE SOCIAL ARCHIVE

“If we look at the [human] social world, the only one we know from the inside, we see the agents, the humans, much more differentiated, much more individually characterized, much richer in continuous variations, than the governmental apparatus, the system of laws and beliefs, even the dictionaries and the grammars which are maintained through their activities. An historical fact is simpler and clearer that any mental state of any of the actors [participating in it]”  
—Gabriel Tarde

“The archive exceeds the lived.”  
—Diana Taylor, *The Archive and the Repertoire*

“The problem may be not how to get into history, but how to get out of it.”  
—Hayden White, *Getting out of History*

We might begin to think murder through Hannah Arendt’s argument about Adolf Eichmann<sup>5</sup>, the inventor of the “final solution”; she says, he was not a “psychopath but a bureaucrat” merely abiding by the “ethos” of his organization (Katz 258). What she meant was that people take on the voice and discourse of their organization, adopting its ethos and

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<sup>5</sup> While her argument about Eichmann has been complicated by archival research, showing he was also psychotically committed to anti-Semitism, I use it to highlight Katz’ argument about ethos and discourse as having much influence.



employing it as their own<sup>6</sup>, and so what gets created and eventually articulated as “appropriate” is always inside a network of language and culture. Murder begins here, then, as already complexly causal happening in part through a discourse communities’ ethos and as deeply embedded within a network of relations<sup>7</sup> involving language and its act. “To most people the holocaust appears as an aberration in Western civilization,” as something that lies outside of human culture (Katz 259). It is always thought to be “something else, a universe outside the universe,” (1) Weisel complains, but Katz and Arendt argue that it is exactly the opposite and must be seen as arising from *within* culture, language, and rhetoric. It is not apart from society, but deeply embedded in it. What I want to dismiss at the outset, then, is that murder happens as the result of misfire in a network or one flaw in an otherwise smoothly operating system, and instead pursue it as happening from within,

Thus the making of someone into a maniacal murderer is itself “fictive” and reveals much more about American culture’s methods for dealing with violence than the problem of murder itself (Haltunnen 781). As Hayden White has written, even the nonfictional narrative account “is an artificial construct,” because “any story of murder involves a fictive process” (2). Murder operates as a kind of limit case for assessing the relationship between law and culture. This is because murder renders as an indisputable case of “evil in action,” yet the ways in which murder is depicted and accounted for reveal a great deal about the related questions of how we conceive of our “public identities, our relationships with others, the nature of our social order, and our place in the surrounding cosmos” (Lewis 161).

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<sup>6</sup> This is Stephen Katz argument in “The Ethics of Expediency,” where he argues that ethos of an organization can result in adopting the ethos of murder. Put more simply, Katz main point is that perhaps anyone can be a murderer under the right discourse, ethos, and telos.

<sup>7</sup> I also want to suggest “groupthink” as a possibility here. It’s not just that murder is always embedded in relations, but that it perpetuates within the energy of a group dynamic, which is nevertheless situated within culture.

The “dominant narrative” for expressing and shaping our responses to murder underwent a major transformation in the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century leading us to the current conception of the “murderer-as-monster,” surrounded by both mystery and horror (Haltunnen 2). In the 17<sup>th</sup> century murder was not as mysterious. The fact that murder occurred in these religiously grounded communities in New England was easily explainable as a “dramatic eruption of evil in a society deeply committed to doing battle with sin” (Haltunnen 13). Communities dealt with murder through what was called an “execution sermon,” which were public trials held before the murderer was convicted, designed to detail the smaller sins of the sinner, which finally led to the largest act of evil (13). During these execution sermons, people would speak on behalf of the accused and the accused would offer some last words and explanations for the act of murder. All of this would be transcribed into print, and later distributed, working to shape the narrative of the murderer itself. Very little concern was given to the actual details of the murder, focusing instead on the accused and his/her path towards murder. The goal of these execution sermons was to create a rhetorical identification between “ordinary sinners and condemned criminals” (15). Thus the primary function of the execution sermon was to “induce the audience to identify with the condemned criminal and to rededicate themselves to following the murderer’s spiritual example, attending to the pattern of their own sins and seeking redemption in spiritual commitment” (Lewis 162). The murderer was held, then, as the common sinner. She was not repugnant, but ordinary, and in the context of the execution sermon, identifiably human.<sup>8</sup> By the middle of the nineteenth century, the execution sermon had largely disappeared replaced by court reports, transcripts, cheap tracts and

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<sup>8</sup> See the execution sermon of Esther Rogers, born in Kittery, Maine in 1680, who was convicted of murdering her newborn child, after an illicit affair with an African American man in her household. Yet her execution sermons reveals quite a bit more detail and complexity than these facts listed here.

newspaper accounts that offered more comprehensive reports of murder, reports which might seem familiar and commonplace to us now. During this time, murder became problematic, inexplicable and alien. Because the murderer was no longer held as a person to be identified with, set in a public place of language, the murderer became the “inexplicable moral other” (49). There were no means in which to come to terms with the basest of human acts, and yet, people loved to read and hear about murderers, but now it was at a distance. And along with this distanced horror, the murderer became more and more mysterious. Amidst the explosion of reports about murder, Haltunnen concludes, “moral uncertainty about the nature of crime and guilt” ensued (97). The reports were so many and the accounts so varied that an audience was left unsure of how to make sense of the murder or murderer. What Haltunnen ultimately concludes is that we have tried and “failed to come to terms with the shocking revelation that murder had been committed,” in part because of the circulating dominant narratives of murder and discursive relationships to the murder (4). From the nineteenth century to now, then, the murderer has become a distant fascination, surrounded by mystery, but also made into a fictive virus or immoral monster. Thus what is redeemable about the execution sermon was its ability to create a space for identification between culture and murderer, between a non-murdering citizen and a murdering citizen. Even while its end was a moral one, which I am not interested in here, it’s effect worked to dissolve the mystery, fiction, and distance that now surrounds American murderers. This is an effect my dissertation seeks to compose through the social archive.

In this chapter, then, I tell a genealogy of how I came to imagine, theorize, and compose the social archive, and how this social archive helps me re-consider what an archive can do and say epistemologically and ontologically. By the end of the chapter, I will circle back around to the spectacular topic of murder, offering ways it has been narrativized, archived, and produced in

our imaginations, and finally, how it became my test case inamorata for the social archive. Along the way, you will hear about an ethos of care, murder and queer archives, archive as art, and the archive as a practical method for critical eavesdropping.

## 2.1 SHOWING MY WORK

I came to the archive somewhat backwardly and this backward trajectory animated new insights into the archive. I did not begin by thinking or working with archives as preservation spaces, nor even as material repositories housed in libraries or other institutional frameworks.

But I didn't start with murder either.

I started somewhere else—

One might call it *method* or even *rhetoric*<sup>9</sup>.

I began with Latour's Actor-Network Theory and his work in *Reassembling the Social*. What drew me most to Latour's conceptualization was his way of undoing what we think we already know. Latour asks sociologists, philosophers, practitioners, and scientists to un-build, to un-do and un-construct our constructions and then re-construct carefully and differently according to more and more traces, relations, and connections. He writes that when "social scientists add the adjective 'social' to some phenomenon, they designate a faux stabilized state of affairs, a bundle of ties that, later, may be mobilized to account for some other phenomenon" (1).

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<sup>9</sup> Here I mean to define rhetoric as Nathaniel Rivers does in his Enculturation project, Latourian Provocations. Rhetoric, for Rivers, and after Latour, means a "redrawing of lines," the lines that are *of* and *for* relations. Thus when I say rhetoric here, I mean it as the redrawing of lines in order to make something other possible, sayable and articulable. Of course, it might be easier just to say I began with Latour's actor-network method.

Yet the social is not a stable state. Instead, the social is always made up of many shifting traces and so must be re-traced in each new context. Specifically, Latour redefines sociology to mean not the “science of the social” but the “tracing of associations” (5). He distinguishes this from the stable state, saying the social “does not designate a thing among other things, like a black sheep among other white sheep, but a *type of connection* between things that are not themselves social” (emphasis mine 5). The social becomes, then, not a concrete object or “special domain” but a mangle of **connections** and **associations**, where social “is neither mechanistic nor teleological but rather alive with movement” (Bennett 447).

Latour connects this shift to the uncertainty of action, explaining that “we are never alone in carrying out a course of action”; action is always taken up by others, distributed amongst the associations; we can never be sure who or what is acting when we act, making “action...a surprise, a mediation, an event...an un-determination about who or what is acting when we act”; action is always uncertain and controversial in transmission (45). Along these lines of conjecture, the social comes to be ever unresolved and always in need of reassembly. Chief among Latour’s interventions into the social, however, is his inclusion of the non-human in the tracing of associations. The social collapses into a flat ontology of agency, where humans and non-humans are always interacting equally, and who is made to act and by what or whom is multiply uncertain, though equally capable. Action, then, is dislocated and distributed and always up for inquiry: “Just as actors are constantly engaged by others in group formation and destruction, they engage in providing controversial accounts for their actions as well as for those of others” (47). To describe this new definition of agency, Latour and Michael Callon coin “actor” as any “element which bends space around itself, which makes other elements dependent upon itself, and translates their will into a language of its own” (118). The social, as I’m continuing to define

it, is made up of these many human and non-human actors all of which are bending space around themselves perpetually. In so far as interaction becomes enfolded, actions distributed, and thus much more difficult to account for. What matters in this new paradigm are the traces left by the social actors—their movements—where every interview, articulation, narrative, and commentary, regardless of seeming triviality, are to be collected, traced, and saved to parse out any “social” event and any “social” action.

Consider as one site of illumination, Jane Bennett’s enactment of tracing the social in “The Agency of Assemblages and the North American Blackout,” where she offers an account of the blackout that struck North America in August 2003. Bennett re-traces all the human and non-human actors involved in the blackout detailing “powers of expression”<sup>10</sup> showcasing different sources of agency, questioning intentionality of human acts, “the temperament of a brain’s chemistry, the momentum of a social movement, the mood of an architectural form, the propensity of a family, the style of a corporation, the drive of a sound field, and the decision of molecules at far-from-equilibrium states” (447). Ultimately her recounting leads to a problematizing of human responsibility. Because intentions are distributed amongst actors in a network, no one person can be held entirely responsible, so the real act of responsibility for Bennett is “one’s response” to the social assemblage or network in which one finds oneself participating (464). For instance, “Do I enter into the proximity of assemblages whose conglomerate effectivity tends toward the enactment of nobler ends?” (464). Bennett leaves unanswered the criminal justice system’s *raison d’être*: Who is to blame? From the perspective of

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<sup>10</sup> This is Bennett’s phrase for the “ability of bodies to become otherwise than they are, to press out of their current configuration and enter into new compositions of self as well as into new alliances and rivalries with others” human or not (447). “Powers of expression” also echoes Baruch Spinoza’s materialist argument that bodies “have a natural tendency to form groups, and complexity theory accounts of the autopoietic or self-organizing capacity of some physical systems” (qtd in Bennett 447).

the social archive, delaying the question of blame, having a “hesitant attitude towards blame” (464) directs attention to more interesting and productive questions. In some ways, it could be argued that the social archive and this project are merely profound attempts to delay the question of blame awhile longer in favor of the more interesting questions and even the more productive questions.

For instance, what can be said of the *souls* involved? The burden of the social is not just the inclusion of non-human actors along with human actors in each event and context, but that what’s at stake in seeing the social in this way, in seeing action as distributed and located within networks, are *souls*. As Nathaniel River puts it in *Latourian Provocations*, “Latour wants souls,” —which returns us momentarily to Plato and his wanting of souls, or rhetoric as the moving of souls. To get at souls, Latour offers not just the inclusion of the nonhuman or the study of objects, but he asks practitioners to consider the way we **move** through the world and to do so more slowly, carefully, thoughtfully, *to show our work*<sup>11</sup> (as we compose or construct in order to see and save souls—so that any social event can weave together industry, text, souls and law. When we begin to compose the social, we create a rhetorical playground for souls, a place for beings, not murderers, nor blame. In this space “the hopes and doubts and fears and dreams they engender collide and cause them to exist,” practically and literally in the world (Stengers 15). And so importantly, putting together the social can be considered a “composition.” This is a multifaceted act of making. Inside the composition(s) are the rhetorical relations between things,

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<sup>11</sup> This is Nathaniel Rivers’ summary of what Latour is inviting us to do in Rhetoric and Composition, “Show our work.” ( From Latourian Provocations, Enculturation). It is adapted from Graham Harmon’s reading of Latour, as well: “You have to show the step-by-step translations that allow the person to build the house. You can’t say it had a magic potential in advance, because for Bruno [Latour] every step of the translation is very important” (Graham Harmon, *The Prince and the Wolf* 121).

human and otherwise. When a practitioner collects the social, new lines are drawn, new relations emerge, and new knowledge made. These new lines and relations are how Nathaniel River and Alex Reid have sought to define rhetoric --“as of and for relations” or “rhetoric as the redrawing of lines”-- by re-thinking and re-theorizing our relationship to and with rhetoric and its compositions, the question of souls becomes more palpable, “Wars and more wars,” Latour writes, “so many wars,” and so many lost *souls*. Rhetoric has historically been, as Marilyn Cooper points out, wrapped up in “war-like struggle,” and persuasion about force and dominance, then the redrawing and re-composing of lines, the showing of our work, creates a rhetoric and composition that can finally work in tandem to re-imagine social encounters, social relations, and the work of the social archive. This is to define rhetoric against its history of struggle.

And so finally, the social is heterogeneous, made of many social connections, postponing questions of blame in favor of different questions, questions of rhetorical relations, aesthetics and creative-critical practice. When a practitioner traces and gathers along the relations of the social, including human and non-human actors, a collection amasses and this collection eventually becomes a composition. In this context, collecting the social has an important function and potential because of our digital technologies’ capacity to leave traces, to allow for collection of those traces, and thus collection—in all its forms—might be more productively re-thought along the lines of the social.



## 2.2 WHY ARCHIVE, WHICH ARCHIVE?

Coming to the archive rather backwardly, through thinking of the social, I've viewed the archive as a space of production and composition, not preservation. Most plainly, I began my academic work with Latour; when he began arguing for a compositionist who composes prospects of the future rather than flees from the past, I responded with the most concrete way I could imagine: composing without fleeing is an archive. For Latour, the compositionist must do the active thing; she must *compose*. This composer relationship to the archive reverberates through Michel Foucault's 1969 argument that an archive governs what can be said about the past, "The archive is the first law of what can be said, the system that governs the appearance of statements as unique events" (28). He goes on to say, "the archive is also that which determines that all these things said do not accumulate endlessly in an amorphous mass, nor are they inscribed in an unbroken linearity; but they are grouped in distinct figures, composed together in accordance with multiple relations" (28). Thus the archive is endowed with a particular power with the potential to create or delimit possibility, especially if such an archive were only composed and kept by institutional archons.

Yet the archive itself is undergoing dynamic changes ushered in by digital logics, collection practices, and social networking, which all enable research, artistic creation, and knowledge production to converge upon the open and pendant role of the archive. What can be collected and archived, for instance, is exponentially greater than fifty years ago, transcending the archive's institutional boundaries. Jessica Enoch and David Gold respond to our moment by calling it a "methodological moment," where scholars must "seize" the opportunities offered by digital agitation of the archive. Crucial to this seizure is making a way through the massive "sea of information," and the ubiquitous "archival infinitude" of our current digital moment, where

everything is saved (106). Indeed everything is archived, “to write now is to archive” (Eichorn 6). The “practice of history will change dramatically,” and the archive as a vital force has the capacity to make knowledge and meaning in the name of cultural and political change (qtd in P. Cohen).

So while the archive, then, can *say* variously, and its power no longer held solely institutionally, there is now an “unruliness” associated with its excess. Jaimie Baron, in *The Archive Effect: Found Footage* names the current archive “unruly” because of the excess of archival objects, and, in part, because archives are now composed of both audio and visual documentation, which resists the popular cause and effect historical narrative of written histories before the 1970’s. Audiovisual documents (photographs, videos, sounds records) “share the problem of excess and inexhaustibly—there are always too many documents and too many possible ways of reading them” (3). This renders them unruly. Media theorist Friedrich Kittler reiterates that the “indexical sign, unlike writing, records uncensored, unfiltered ‘noise,’ which resists signification” (qtd in Baron 4). Digital collection and digital archiving threatens to both preserve too much of the past while creating only an “archive of noise”—that is, an archive of that resists signification or narrativization.

As the sources of archival documents shift and multiply, our sense of these documents in the archive changes, and what constitutes “the archive” in our contemporary social and historical “unruly” moment changes. To this end, I practice and re-theorize the archive through three interrelated propositions. Firstly, because scholars and citizens curate, mine, and tend the archive collectively and collaboratively, I propose “archive-as-method” and with it a new ethos of use.

Indeed, we have always been obsessed with saving and archiving, our archive fever<sup>12</sup> always high and fervent. But we now have digital tools to not only compose archives but also mine already existing records more swiftly and adeptly, opening up questions of the social and deliberate record-making of our time. Archiving, once an institutional domain, is now a citizen's domain, a compositionist's domain, and a humanist's domain, replacing institutional curation and preservation with more complex relationships of *use*, memory, and concept production. Media archeologist, Jussi Parikka, points out that the digital forces us to “look at the question of whether preservation as preservation is even desirable, or if we should look at the active use, reuse, and remixing of archival resources as a better way to retain cultural memory” or a better way to engage the changing archive (121). Emergent artists like DJ Spooky and Mark Amerika treat archives as their own source material, there for the taking, re-using and repurposing—“a rhythm scientist begins as an archivist of sound, text and image,” (016) making new contexts and new knowledge out of old forms. What all three of these thinkers instill is archive-as-method. Their intervention is methodological in that that they not only rethink the ways we use archives, but they also posit the archive as a method for making new knowledge. We are reminded of the archives revisability, its decomposability, and thus its potential to be composed and recomposed for different hermeneutic purposes. As Stella Bruzzi suggests, the indexical document in the archive “may possess the potential to serve multiple interpretive frameworks” (4).

Secondly, and perhaps most importantly, archives are sites of knowledge production. This is an idea with which rhetorical scholars are increasingly drawing attention. Michelle Ballif claims, “what is at stake in re/dressing histories is the production of new narratives, new discourses, new idioms” (96). And Wendy Sharer asks scholars to always consider “what an

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<sup>12</sup> I'm referencing Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever*, which I merely wish to vaguely reference here, but which many have quoted at length in their own works about archives.

archive is and does, how it means and matters” before new knowledge is constructed from that archive (124). Charles Morris III has further brought these ideas together under the frame of queer archives, which are not necessarily nonheterosexual archives, but rather archives that imply “a broad critique of normativity along many different axes of identity, community and power” (75). Queer archives, then, are not necessarily important for their preservation of queer lives and queer documents, but for the kind of knowledge and history they can produce about otherwise forgotten or over-written lives. In this way, the archive as knowledge production always exceeds itself. Making an archive, gathering the material pieces of something or someone is the kind of composition that makes something seen, which was previously unseen. This is the kind of archive that composes, affirms, and often remains ever unfinished, ever revisable. Its work is not to critique, though it can through additive work, and the redrawing of lines, but its express role is to compose and affirm some existence, making another kind of knowledge possible.

Thirdly, the digital archive changes our relationship to documentation. Indeed Baron says as much, “no one as yet has adequately explained what ‘archival’ or ‘found’ documents are and on what basis we should make the distinction between them” (8). In digital collections, the document can be visual, textual, filmic or audio, which is how the archive’s “document” can be put into “documentary”—that is, a kind of non-fiction telling and “a representation of history” (10). Baron further notes that the word “document” persists because it refers to both material and virtual objects. “Archival document” in contradistinction to “archival materials” offers a “discursive space in which we may account for different kinds of documents” and their place in an archive. Yet, the document of the archive is now an intervention and collective project. Rather than being the “tomb of the trace,” the archive can collectively produce collaborative memory

and rhetorical intervention through the document. The archive becomes an aspiration rather than a recollection. In the words of Arjun Appadarai, “The creation of documents and their aggregation into archives is also a part of everyday life outside the purview of the state. The personal diary, the family photo album, the community museum, the libraries of individuals are all examples of popular documents and, of course, oral archives have been repositories of intentional remembering for most of human history” (Memory and the Archive). Thus, the document is at once a piece of history, a personal memorial, and each use and engagement, a repurposed and re-interpreted media, or as Simone Osthoff calls it in *Performing the Archive*, “an artwork” (12). The archive-as-artwork disrupts notions of representation in the archive, while also turning the archive into a dynamic and generative production space. Osthoff calls this an “ontological” change, “produced in part by the contamination between artwork and documentation,” which “positions history and theory neither completely outside the realm of art nor entirely inside of it, but in continuous relays. Thereby suggesting that history, theory and art can function as “dynamic media” (12).

Thus I re-theorize and practice the archive on two levels. The first being the intentional documentation left by people and communities documenting a performance of their identity or representation according to their collective and social realities. The second being, what the composer and practitioner makes or produces with those traces. In either case, documentation can be seen as intervention and as a move from repository to ontological medium, the latter being the role of the composer.

The composer, however, is always “one reflexive loop behind those they study” collecting at the vantage point of just past action (52), which is where the trace is activated. It is an act of following, collecting, and gathering one step behind the social event. The trace becomes

exemplified as the *prima facie* to the social. In this way, the composer's work is to follow, collect, then assemble the traces, revisably so. This means collecting the trace is activated as part of the role of composition, which can be mobilized in the composing of an archive<sup>13</sup> and along with that a composing of different kinds of historiographies. By drawing our attention to the pervasive act of digital collecting, I open up new possibilities on how we can approach the affordances of digital equipmentality and digital logics, which allows for, and even encourages, constant record keeping, accumulation, and storage, and thus contains myriad possibilities for collecting. Consider the recent work of Jody Shipka, who has taken her role as the collector seriously in her new scholarship on collecting the material remains at estate sales. She asks what these material remains can compose for futures, or how they can be potentially generative. In her own words, Shipka seeks to “honor, rival, revise” and “preserve, digitize and project” her material collections—objects, old photos, old home movies--and does so through interaction and animation by literally re-imagining their future, their use, in her own digital video compositions. While her collections do not begin as digital collections, her movement of collecting and recomposing offers a way to string together the practice of collecting traces of lives lived with potential outcomes, and her compositions usually end as digital re-animations of her material collections.

Of course, in digital environments what can be collected is greatly augmented. There are numerous traces of our personal lives coded as “data”—photographs, sound files, videos, and

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<sup>13</sup> At various times throughout this dissertation, I use archiving and composing interchangeably. In some ways, these are very similar terms in the logic and structure of this project. I'm composing the digital relations of murders; I'm archiving the digital relations of murders. In either case, I am making something seen. *I am making something*. Where I see the difference is that an archive is a receptacle or repository. It is bounded off and holds things, however tenuously. A composition is much more loosely bounded and can fall apart at any moment. In this way, my social archive is a compositionist's archive, ever open to revision and more and more re-articulations.

documents. We leave behind our own mini-archives. Even as we live day-to-day, the traces of ourselves online reminds us who we are, what we look like, what our family vacation felt like. We can daily perform our self and our personalities in communities of relationships. We are daily preserved. Archivist, Richard Cox, suggests that this renders us all archivists for better or for worse (8). The invention of screen capture and digital recording devices makes it easy to record our own lives and the digital traces of others. Yet I want to make a distinction between this kind of collecting and the business model of social media, where businesses use the so-called free platforms like Facebook and Twitter—the platforms for connecting to friends, to share ideas, links, and film preferences—as material for data mining. This could be considered “the new form of subsumption of our lives into capitalist production and accumulation of value” (Ernst 2). Corporations and businesses mine a lot about the public from our digital mini-archives. In this way, the act of digitally collecting carries with it a double bind of the potentials and pitfalls of storage. Data can be used for businesses and buying power or alternatively it can be used as Shipka suggests: to preserve, digitize, project, honor, rival and revise.

Yet it can be *used* in yet another way: toward the making of the social archive. Shipka’s work brings up pertinent questions regarding what exactly should be considered history. What should be preserved and collected? Who or what decides? She asks, do we have some sort of obligation to act as curators? When questions such as these are posed, we gain a renewed sense of the importance and responsibility of collecting, but also its *use* potential. We each have the capacity to collect and even curate, but the more important question involves what is made from the archives, which is a question of composition, a question for a composing artist, who begins as an archivist. As both Miller and Amerika note, everything is source material and so must be composed. This would greatly augment archival objects changing our relationship to what a

collection can do. The collection becomes a site for productive use and reuse and no longer a preservation space, bringing with it the new ethos: care as use. The responsibility of “caring for collections is translated into a question of use: how are collections used in productive practices?”-- and through *use*, what new knowledge can be made (48). Because collecting traces allows the collector to build, make, and complicate—to tell different stories—then the collection is in *use* and it is involved in a *user* relationship. As Presner and Johanson explain, “the humanist is critical at this historic moment,” because she helps produce “new modes of knowledge formation...as our cultural legacy migrates to digital formats and our relation to knowledge, cultural material, technology, and society is radically re-conceptualized” (2). I extend this new ethos of care to the social archive, which is the composed repository of more accounts and a larger relational story, but within it, there is also the composing of different digital historiographies.

### 2.3 DESIGNS IN THE SOCIAL ARCHIVE

In situating the *archive* and the *social* together, a more deliberate view and method of the archive emerges. This is at the level of design and collection and historical observation. The archive, as I’ve related, has potential to make new knowledge. The social, as I’ve articulated it here is merely one method in which to make that knowledge, merely one design for a collection. For an archive to be social, it must be heterogeneous in nature, made up of different traces, and there must be an attempt to capture movement between the actors involved in some event. I further define “social” here as a marker for the emerging participatory possibility of archival



work. Social—that is, individuals, interfaces, images, text, status updates, social networks, and digital inscriptions—all work toward the archivization of daily life, knowingly or not. Thus when I use the term “social archive,” I’m activating an entire network of people, things, and digital logics, who are held together by their associations, embedded within a network of distributed action and circulating around an event. Ubiquitously proliferating archives and storage practices make the tracing of these associations possible and a complete re-imagination of our relationship to the archive itself tenable.

Crucial to making new knowledge is an ethos of design at the level of building and thinking with the archive as apparatus. The social, then, is a rhetorical design. Rita Raley asks, in *Tactical Media*, paraphrasing fashion designer Serpico Naro, “Why save the world when we can design it?” (2). This is Raley’s epigraph to a manifesto-like monologue on the changing face of revolution and activism. Street demonstrations are no longer as valuable as they once were for our parents or even their grandparents. Popular opinion betrays as much: there is an overwhelming sensibility that protest has no efficacy. Indeed, this is why Raley points out the radical need for digital media social art projects similar to those of the Critical Art Ensemble (CAE). CAE is a collective of tactical media practitioners of different specializations, who bring together performance, computer graphics, art, photography, text and web design for the purposes of political activism and tactical media. Each of their projects inhabits the intersection between art, theory, technology and activism. One such project, *Underground Tarot*, 2011, is a series of freighted image/text constructions designed to elicit political free association among viewers. Like tarot deck icons, the images absorb whatever meaning viewers wish to project on them. While the images are clearly political, the politics represented are ambiguous. The images were repeated at ten minutes intervals throughout the day on the platform monitors of the Toronto

subway system. (Critical Art Ensemble). The most poignant suggestion CAE makes in their work is that the “streets are dead capital:” any revolutionary tactics must also shift their investments to correspond with the changing flows of power, which are located in the flows of networks (1). In this way, “designing the world, rather than saving it” is a political assertion about making knowledge, as I’ve suggested above, which functions differently than the more traditional critique of already existing knowledge or already existing ideologies. But it is also an aesthetic assertion concerning the possibility of designed media to reverse or interrupt networks. Digital disruption is much tinier than historical large-scale protests, but the micro-interruptions cause important ripples.

I bring up this theory of design and media to situate my argument and the social archive in the larger discourse on the politics of change and to express the importance of digital design in relation to our own created and collected archives. Indeed, even the act of collecting is a design choice. And collecting the traces of a social event, then assembling those traces into a digital archive to understand the connections, is a way of designing knowledge. For instance, Josh On and *Futurefarmers’ They Rule* (2001/2004) demonstrate a new media work that is aesthetic design, intellectual investigation, and political activism. On’s work offers users the ability to visualize the myriad and intricate connections among Fortune 100 corporations and directors. Users can choose from a list of institutions, people and companies and build their own maps from the data the artists have compiled from SEC filings and public websites. Or they can view the archived maps that powerfully document the concentration of wealth and power in the hands of the ten richest people and the magnificent seven (2). On’s work, then, illuminates a kind of social archive, collaborative with its users, functioning as a critique through its mode of design, and designing a relationship to knowledge. On’s critique is implied through its connections,

maps and design. The information and data come from public websites and public documents, and the connections are rich and varied, putting the user at the center of a network.

I come back to On's piece later in the dissertation, but I briefly mention it now because it foregrounds my own composed social archive, and because it demonstrates a productive example of Raley's epigraph. It is not an attempt to save the world, but an attempt, rather, to design another kind of world. If I may make another leap, this kind of design is also something compositionists are beginning to experience and notice in their own work. In taking on the task of multimodal texts and multimodal projects, we, too, have become designers. Jason Palmeri notes the changing shapes of composition as it becomes multimodal, and this multimodality lends itself both to public interaction and to design, which offers something back to the world and can persuade and function persuasively on many levels.

Putting this kind of design theory at the center of this project makes the social archive always that of artistic political engagement, yet along with this, it also highlights the creative as another model of political engagement. Creatively-designed media also suggests the importance of an affirmative construction, rather than a destruction of values or worlds. The practice of designing a world is affirmative: its goal to make or add something to the world. The social archive discussed herein is a composition—an assembled world of connections—and it is a very modest micro-interruption of flows of power. Yet this is not quite enough to ground the social archive, as it straddles media design, but also digital historiography, rhetoric and *social* change. To further explore these notions, I turn to the more concrete side of the social archive—its test case—and its specific intervention and style of engagement.

## 2.4 THE SOCIAL ARCHIVE'S TEST CASE: MURDER

In this section, I offer my experimental test case of the social archive as an emergent method toward doing something with the archival overabundance and new archival interventions. The social archive is part research, part artistic, part knowledge production, and is indeed the theoretical result of the careful work of building a digital historiographical project of my own making. By combining Latourian notions of the social—which is full of associations and relations, distributed and always in movement—with the archive as a knowledge production and artistic intervention, both in the digital humanities and in rhetoric and composition, I forge a new kind of archive: the social archive.

The social archive can collect and collaborate with all kinds of social phenomenon and social events, but specifically for this project, I have chosen murder events of the past three years. In this way, the histories being archived have only recently become history, their events barely past, and yet the observable traces just as palpable. For an archive to be social, then, it must also be collaborative because the researcher/artist/producer is always part of the making of the archive and the making of historiography. In this way, I am collaborating with those human and non-human actors involved in murder networks—their traces and practices allowing me to make and build their stories. This is a kind of “collaborating with the dead,” noting that to spend any time with past images, objects and fragments of stories is “to fall a little bit in love with the people who created them” and the more you “familiarize yourself with the stories, the more you want to know, forging a path beyond yourself” (Shipka). This “falling in love,” or engagement with the dead suggests that one might turn backward to the “traces of lives lived,” however recent, and be open to a vexing personal attachment; vexing especially because this archive’s dead are murderers or they have been murdered, which is altogether quite affectively and

rhetorically different from the dead in home movies, of Shipka's work, or the dead in the lesbian archive, of The Lesbian Herstory Archive, or the dead in almost in any other archive. Because to have a vexing personal attachment to the dead in the murder archive is to not only feel empathy for those who kill or for those who live in networks of murder, but it is also to see, however briefly, into the life of a subjugated person and subjugated network. However, the goal is still to account for and attempt to be transparent about that attachment (56). This figures prominently and troublingly into the social archiving of murder because the traces and the collaborations open up the distinction between analyzing murder remains and composing murder remains, where the difference is hinged upon and makes room for another understanding of murder. At stake in this distinction is the ability to somehow move, both the field's and the public's current engagement with murder, beyond it's current social composition. If I fall just a little bit in love with an ultimately Othered killer, his victims, his social performance, and his fragments, thereby implicating myself in the murder, then I have re-composed his history. When I merely tell the public about a murder or report on a murder, it remains what Latour calls, "the facts," whereas to compose murder, to render the stories and the traces of other people's lives, even if—*especially if*—they are murderers, is to move those engaging with the archive beyond facts to an entanglement with the people, actors and networks, conjuring notes of empathy or at least engagement in something that might otherwise be ignored, reduced or effaced.

Of course, this new style of engagement isn't possible without both digital logics and digital compositions. The digital allows for different kinds of preservation, larger publics, and the logics of networked and relational thinking. First, on the front end, Facebook allows those murdered and murdering to live irrespective of time or embodiment. Their digital remains live in an architecture, where "time can be skipped, reversed and begun again" (Schäfer). In this

way, the digital remains exceed their own bodies, left behind as a record or autobiography. And yet this excess contributes to the already prodigious accumulation of data, of excess, in short. I sift through and gather the remains into a social archive to “make a fundamental difference in the humanities because [digital technology] indeed serves as the vector that imports alien paradigms of knowledge...but the goal is for the humanities to engage, question, and adapt such paradigms” (Liu). Digital logics offer a way to collect, compose and collaborate with the dead and the violent. In fact, digital media invites the question, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, of what sort of obligation do we have to archive risky subjects, especially as the field moves toward digital and multimodal composing?

As gesture toward answering this question, let me situate the social archive of murder in relationship to another kind of murder seen in Judith Jack Halberstam’s work on the Brandon Teena archive, which is about the 1993 murder of a young Nebraskan transgender boy, the violence surrounding, and the eventual homicide. Teena’s death attracted a lot of interest and eventually an archive of materials. Halberstam was drawn to this archive, not as a preservation system or documentation of life and death, but more as a constantly reusable collection of the “details, stories, facts, and fictions of the cases...as a deep archive for future analysis about the many rural lives and desires that were implicated in the lives and deaths of these individuals” (32). The kind of archive Halberstam is speaking of goes beyond a collection of data, despite it being online and digitized, and is, in her words, a “Foucauldian archive,” which suggests it as a “discursive field and a structure of thinking,” or bank of potential knowledge (32). Thus for Halberstam, the Teena archive is a repository “for the multiple ideas about rural life that construct and undergird urban identity in the twenty-first century” (32). It exceeds Teena’s story in this way, also containing the stories of his girlfriend, his family, and those other teenagers that

died alongside him. In so doing, the archive is less of an “individualized drama” or familiar narrative of a crime. It is social. It carries the traces of the murder’s remains vibrating through social relations.

But even this is a particular kind of murder, spectacted murder,<sup>14</sup> different in some ways from the murders being discussed in this project. Unlike Teena, my murders often go unnoticed by media outlets and people outside of their communities, except for the passing “that’s so sad” or “there’s another one,” little is mentioned in regards to many of these inner-city murders: this is not the case, of course, for those people who are in the neighborhoods where the gunshots are heard, the murdered friends and cousins and brothers live, where the streets I might not walk down at night are the same streets the families living there must walk down. Yet our topography is not concerned with those murders that accumulate to more than all the wars combined. I suppose that’s why I place this genre of murder next to the Brandon Teena genre of murder, because this genre is not a hate crime or at least not easily categorizable as one, and murder, as grim as it sounds, has become a way of living and defining, a way of moving through the city, which many of us cannot understand and which remains illegible and failed, in the most acute senses. I don’t mean to suggest that this is just a problem of relative world-views and that we need to understand murder as a whole way of life, different but equal to other ways of living. Rather, I’m suggesting we can better understand the problem by delaying judgment and looking closer at the murder-networks. Murder as a way of life is difficult to grasp for those of us who aren’t subjected to it and nevertheless so real to those who do. And what’s more, this world-view

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<sup>14</sup> I want to qualify what I mean by spectacted murder here. The Brandon Teena murder, Halberstam notes, would have gone almost entirely unnoticed by the public eye had it not been for the victim’s ambiguous sexuality. That Brandon Teena was a young transgender male garnered attention from the public. By contrast, the murders in this project happen hundreds of times in a month with often only a passing notice by the general public.

is necessary to grasp before any kind of change in the problem of murder can be sought. This has become a relational system and development of living that we should be paying more attention to, and composing it as a social archive, will bring attention to it and invent new knowledge of this kind of murder, but it will also re-imagine our relationship to the role of the archive in terms of both method and composition. Of course, opposed to the “archive as a brute thing,” the archive in the 21st century is an organizing and structuring principal, which also “dictates what can be said,” which sets this particular archive apart from all archives methodologically and as a composition—namely, it is unique because it composes and allows the actors, however selectively (for any creation involves selection), to reveal their own practice of living and their fragmented representation.

While the murder archive is not queer in the sexual sense, it is productive to think of it as a queer archive in Halberstam’s sense, as creating another kind of knowledge, as well as offering a social account of a cultural phenomenon, which is necessarily incomplete and expanding and invisible. What is queer about the murder archive is that it’s a digital historiography of something the public easily forgets or maps over with “straighter” versions of history. There is a desire to see the murders in America’s cities as particular to demographics or to individuals, as belonging to violent people or crazy people. The real work of collecting remains of murders and the stories of people like Dane and Marc and even Tricia, must be to create an archive capable of providing a record of the complex relations of Facebook, social ties, race, class and gender that result in murder. The stories collected in the murder archive should exceed its subjects and the usual narratives of murder. This archive is precisely about things not seen or felt in our cities, and in the end, it tells us a different story of twenty-first century race, class, murder, and social networks.



Crucially, these practices are seen and gathered in an archive, which holds the practices together in one place. As a “system of enunciability,” which can define and project past itself; this particular social archive changes what’s available to be said about those murdered and murdering; it resists easy narrativization, offering instead more complete but still fragmented images, texts, discourse, lives, social networking and their relations (Foucault 129). And in composing it, I attempt to both preserve their constructions, and at the same time understand the imposition of any shaping and appropriating archival spirit, which ultimately contributes to a larger understanding of not only what and how something can be archived, but our understanding of murder.

## **2.5 WHY MURDER?**

But why compose murder as opposed to anything else? I see this as a way to begin composing all kinds of realities; I have chosen local murders, and there are obvious reasons one should care about this kind of murder, though I am not arguing that compositionists should run out and begin collecting the digital and analog remnants of murders in their neighborhoods. More simply, we ought to be looking at our own work and asking, “what do we make in the world?” I care quite a lot about those murdered and murdering; I care quite a lot that we begin to re-see murder through my re-composition of it, that we see these partial lives as more real and more empathic, but I also want to offer my practice of composing murder as something larger, as another possibility for practicing and doing rhetoric and composition, both now and in the future. In this way, the question latent in my project is: what does this kind of composition allow us to

do? To say? To imagine? For the murder project archive and this dissertation to be meaningful, it must be about more than the murders.

Indeed nothing so exposes the contradictions of American culture the way murder does—mediated and circulated in video games, movies, and TV shows—yet still a ghastly act, full of “contradictions, compositions and representations [which] tend to be overlooked in the more scientific studies which consider murder sociological, pathological, or criminological” (Haltunnen 780). Consider that in 2011, according to the FBI bureau of statistics, “43% of all murder victims were African American, 93.1% of whom were killed by African Americans.” It is in this way that murder may not be best thought of as a problem to analyze, explain or critique. Joel Black asks us to think of murder as an art, to reassemble murder as a cultural phenomena and cultural artifact, that murder may be studied through the same inquiry as “literary historians and critics of practice” (5). For instance, Thomas De Quincey’s 1827 essay, “On Murder Considered as one of the Fine Arts,”<sup>15</sup> proposes that murder ought to be considered from an aesthetic rather than an ethical or sociological perspective, “a study of murder, not of criminalization or sociological perspective, but as a cultural phenomenon that perseverates” (2). There are already a few methods by which we can study this problem: 1) There is the typical sociological pursuit, 2) the criminal pursuit, and both are laden with issues of 3) moral and ethical judgment. Yet, there is a pressing need to see this particular kind of murder—black on black crime, which comprises many of the homicides in urban cities—*anew*. I would argue all

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<sup>15</sup> Thomas De Quincey was a British Romantic author who began an inquiry into murder through a series of “murder essays” from 1827-1854. Most notably he began with “On Murder as considered one of the fine Arts,” and “A Second Paper on Murder Considered as One of the Fine Arts,” “Postscript,” and “A New Paper on Murder.” He first gained notoriety for his 1822 essay, “Confessions of an English Opium Eater.” De Quincey inspired a long line of crime writers, detective fiction, aesthetics and violence.

murders necessitate a perspective and approach separate from sociological and ethical endeavors, echoing De Quincey's argument that "murder should be examined from an aesthetic" rather than any other perspective, that murders like anything else, have their differences, "shades of merit, as well as statues, pictures, oratorios, cameos, intaglios, or what not" (2). De Quincey's aesthetic engagement with murder turns the murderer into a practitioner and artist, somewhat satirically, but insists that murder seen aesthetically liberates it from the "moral contingencies," wherein morality cannot undo murder (2). Seen aesthetically, murder as an event and object, which is ordinarily laced with ethical judgment, becomes more akin to what Aristotle described as art—that it is approached "through a suspension of moral judgment, which enables aesthetic appreciation" (12). As Black observes, "our reaction to ...murder may range from horror to admiration, but whatever shock we experience will consist of aesthetic astonishment rather than moral outrage" (9). De Quincey's part in this paradox "is the extension of his premise to cover not only artistic depictions of murder, but murder itself as an artistic act" which is both free of moral consideration and aesthetically exposed (2). This is not to laud murder or murderers, but more simply to proffer another relationship to it, a rhetorical and even aesthetic relationship, which asks and manifests questions of new modes of rhetoric as relationality and living practice.

It's safer to study murder through fictional and historical texts and their authors, like Black does, than to get one's virtual hands dirty in the composition of murder through collecting and engaging with the digital remains of those murdered and murdering. But this opens up yet another aesthetic engagement—one that neither De Quincey nor Black could have anticipated: the digital interface of murder. Certainly they clear one pathway into murder as aesthetically relevant, which lends itself to more and different engagements; engagements which demand we

put the literary murder aside and instead engage actual murders, both digitally and aesthetically rendered, but which give us new relationships to method, rhetoric and digital aesthetics as they interact with murder. Thus for my purposes, I update De Quincey's and Black's aesthetic openings and re-render them for a digital logic in two ways. First, I am interested in not just composing the murders but composing the networks of murders, where network "is a concept, not a thing out there" (Latour 31). Thus, to *make* murder-as-social-archive is to aestheticize the connections involved, to make them into accounts, and to visualize connections and people. In so doing, I turn the networked and social networked accounts of those murdered and murdering into material objects, which raises questions about the tendency of these material objects to become aesthetic objects. Along these lines, I am interested in what this new mode of composing murder allows as it transforms the murder remains into aesthetic objects.

## **2.6 SOCIAL ARCHIVE OF MURDER AS NEW MODES OF LISTENING**

The material collected in the murder archive has led me to continuously reflect upon my own interest in the murders. In collecting fragments and traces, and allowing different stories to be told about murder, stories that are nevertheless filtered through me, someone outside of the communities where these murders take place, I am suspect. When I began thinking, writing, and collecting the murders, I was driven by fascination and confusion. I wanted to *understand* how murder could be such a plausible and available means of living for some people and not others. Was it a matter of discourse and social communities where "murder" was a word and reality circulating in ways it was not circulating in other communities? These questions plagued me as I found myself saturated by the images and social networking lives of youth murdered in the cool

of summer nights. Seeing these murders through the function of the social archive allowed me to resist my own temptation to immediately re-narrativize what I found and collected. One could easily dismiss the murders, such as the ones in the murder project, as drug related or gang related, but the social, and importantly, the visual and textual remains of their social networking, forge another relationship, a listener relationship.

I call this listener relationship critical eavesdropping, which follows from Avital Ronell's ethical call to respond to the other in the archive with "boundless generosity," by refusing to make the other familiar to the I (xxvii). This is the most ethical response for Ronell. Of course, this becomes especially complicated in the murder archive because the Other, the "haunt," as Ronnell calls it, is wholly an Other in many senses of the word, being African American and a murderer. The act of collecting murder's digital remains offers, however, a method of listening in on the lives, subcultural practices, and under-life of those who are normally excluded and un-listened to. Indeed, we do already have newspaper archives of murders and murderers, but they are not "social" archives; they are documentation archives, rife with virtually indelible narrative shape(s) of what a murderer is. Haltunnen writes that murder is a reflection of our culture, as it becomes immediately grand-narrativized, made invisible or spectacular by news media. These particular murders present as untouched and un-composed actualities, even as reports reveal an inordinate amount of lives lost, much of their lives and murder networks remain ever decomposed. Thus my act of collecting listens "precisely to that which is excluded, to that which our modes of understanding have excluded, to that which —therefore—lies at the threshold of our understanding" (Ballif 152). In this way, my responsibility is not to write the history of murder as a grand or even petit narrative of our cultural past, but to "lend an ear," to follow the actors, to collect their traces to listen, learn from, converse, and finally compose a complex digital archive

and digital historiography of lives and networks involved with murder. Through this digital eavesdropping and attuned listening, I offer up new ways of looking more directly at one (an)other in the “safe space” of collection and archives. I assert that social archives can be spaces and modes of listening, because it is the practice of collecting living values, without the “panic effect of people who believe themselves to be in danger of losing hold” (Stengers 517). By collecting the public social networking remains of those murdered and murdering and placing them in a digital, public archive, I am admittedly haunted and admittedly implicated, but I am attuned and listening to an Other in a way that puts me at the “threshold of my understanding,” but which is possible only through digital modes of collecting, capturing and representing.

## **2.7 AFFIRMATIVE RELATIONS**

Along with critical eavesdropping, the social archive of murder also provides a space for identification and affirmative relations. Roger Hallas calls this the “archival imperative,” which is the “question of the archive is thus in the end not whether it succeeds in preserving the past from oblivion but how the past that eventually emerges from it can potentially produce a revelatory historical consciousness of the present” (435). Even in this case of the immediate past, to spend time with the archive is to bring the murders back into the present, but it is also to ask users to identify with or disidentify with someone perhaps wholly different than themselves, an Other, through both affective and emotional relations. Part of this affirmative relationship hinges on the medium through which the archive is created: social networking. By creating an almost imaginary world of others through the now very familiar interface of Facebook and Twitter, I ask users to feel something as they see the pictures and updates of those involved in

the murder events. A social archive thus creates virtual proximity affecting both me and other potential users, both of the online archive and this dissertation. Chapter 5 will fully explore the relationship between empathy and the archive, but for now I offer it as an intervention. Affirmation and affective relations are not new to the archives, but archives are usually made of people we might admit to wanting to relate with. The Lesbian Herstory Archive, for instance, was developed specifically to foster emotional experience and affective relations, and this is a positive space for those affirmative identifications. This murder archive presents a specific intervention in that I'm asking users to try to identify with *Others* and to be perhaps very unsettled by these identifications: the process of shifting, listening, and identifying with the Other is an important experience new digital archives can offer.

## 2.8 CONCLUSION

Thus, this social archive of murder is not only an intervention at the level of design, collection, and assembly, but also at the ways we are made to listen. Specifically, digital social networks accumulated into a social archive allow for new modes of listening that make new knowledge about murder in inner cities. Yet the social archive is faced with many ethical and political quandaries, and the challenge is to invent a practice-based archive that can respond to some of these quandaries. Thus the major project of this dissertation, as I mentioned in the introduction, is to more productively see actors bound up in the social problem of murder by delaying blame and re-inventing the archive itself. The following pages attempt then to develop and demonstrate, through actual events from the archive, specific areas of intervention into

murder, namely the practice of memorialization, the discourse of murder, empathy in the interface, and the complicity of Facebook itself in murders.

To argue for the importance of the social archive, I want to tentatively propose that any archive can be made social and that all social events can be archives. It is not my intention to generalize the archive, but more simply to rethink its function in a culture of rampant archivization. It is to employ the archive-as-method. This is the opposite approach of some trained archivists themselves who worry about the mass proliferation of their term and who seek, instead, to guard it and delimit its uses. I am tentatively proposing that we let it run wild for the sake of knowledge production and this dissertation, and ask how that changes what an archive can do, say, feel, and *make*.

What is at stake in the social archive is not an abstract theoretical quandary, but the possibility of somehow responding differently in our actual encounters in the world. This is the possibility, for example, of engaging with murder as something other than a moral problem or as something other than complete Otherness. In turning to rhetoric, Latour, and new work on archives, I have found a rich bedrock of concepts and practices through which to consider murder. And in considering the creative potential of digital pieces and digital composition, I have also found a productive and affirmative means of displaying and imagining other possibilities for the lives entangled within the murder networks. Chapter two provides an in-depth example of an actual murder while engaging questions of discourse, affect, and the social through the intriguing mode of archivization, which makes new forms of knowledge sayable. While I will stray from theories of the social archive hereafter, focusing more on the social relations, affects, and discourse surrounding murder, my theoretical concept—social archive-as-method—is what drives this inquiry into murder. The social archive-as-method is always just underneath the



surface of this work. Thus I move through the intrigue of the murder archive, delaying blame, all while tacitly re-considering what an archive might do and say in this new context, a question I will circle back around to toward the end of this dissertation.

### 3.0 MURDER’S NETWORKS: FORCIBLE AFFECTS AND CONTAGIOUS VIOLENCE

“How can the murderous subject’s story be told when his identity and even his individuality is not easily specified, when the presence of this virus lurking amid the algorithms of mass-mediated culture can only begin to be detected after a series of apparently random, violent eruptions in the systemic order?”

—Joel Black

“Violence and the Word.”

—Robert Cover

“The old playground chant of ‘sticks and stones may break my bones, but words can never hurt me’ was always notoriously untrue.”

—Denise Riley

While the social archive framework I offered in chapter 1 may outline the shape of the problem and a new perspective on the archive, it also avoids paying careful attention to the particular lives, particular language, particular affect and shades of Discourse<sup>16</sup> involved in the murder archive. This chapter begins slowly by walking through the collection method and discursive outputs surrounding two different murders, that of Dane “Strizzy Banger” Smith and Lauren Williams. Through a discussion of these two murders, I will begin working through the conceptual idea of the murder network, which holds and unknowingly sustains the discursive and affective practices involved in murder. My objective in this chapter is to get at the language

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<sup>16</sup> James Paul Gee demarcates ideological Discourse with a capital “D” for its totalizing affect.

involved in these murders, while also being attentive to how this specific case may lend itself to a more distributed and social sense of murder itself. Since I see the social archive as primarily a knowledge making apparatus, I will pay particular attention to what these discursive practices demonstrate in regards to the problem of murder more generally. I do want to retain the idea that this murder has its own unique style and complexities.

First, a quick preamble: in this chapter, and throughout the social archive and this dissertation, I have made a method out of using the actual images and indexical traces surrounding the murders themselves. Where I can use a screen captures of an author's post, picture, or representation, I do. This is a very decisive effort to both provide a kind of visual encounter whenever possible and to consider social interfaces as agents. Along these lines, I offer the actual language as said by the actors in the social archive. This tactic is critical for the *effect* it creates as a digitally archived document. As Jaimie Baron avers, there is an important distinction between the material archive, the documentary, and the digital archive. They each have the "potential to produce different archive *effects* as their constituent documents are found and appropriated" (emphasis mine, 142). Most specifically, the digital archive has the potential to create an experience and encounter of the digitally apprehended documents, encounters by which we are "affected on both an intellectual and emotional level" and which becomes crucial to the production of contemporary historical experience (174). This is contrasted to the effect of material archives because they are more conventionally tied to a specific place and location as material objects. One must go to the archive to touch and be touched by the archived objects. Yet our relation to the past also hinges on digital archives, and an experience outside of place and material object, no longer tied to location. This calls for a reinterpretation of the archive as experience, as it is received—"an experience of reception" (7). One must encounter the past

through its image, audio, video and digital traces, and thus be apprehended by a visual and textual experience of the historical traces. Thus the ability of technologies of mechanical reproduction to create and collect indexical traces are actually “valuable [experiential] counterhistories of the everyday, ‘*history from below*’” (emphasis mine, Baron 82). Facebook could be dismissed as an “insignificant byproduct of consumer technology,” but is actually more productively thought of as “found” documents or found footage offering self-authored histories (Baron 17). Indeed, many established artists and amateurs alike are “drawn to the endless storehouses of digital documents” so they can reuse and appropriate them in various ways (142). In this way, I followed Dane Smith, Marc Smith and Kerrese Lawrence’s traces into digital networks<sup>17</sup>, collecting any kind of public, “found” digital remains and indexical traces they might have left, looking for the “history from below,” treating their digital traces as found objects with the potential to tell a valuable counterhistory. As Robert Rosenstone notes, visual media like Facebook, YouTube and other Internet repositories, have become “the chief carrier of historical messages in our culture,” which means our work, too, must engage these documents and work to forge the encounter (3). Each of the actors’ public digital traces, then, offer a kind of recent pastness and self-authored history, and in rendering them here, I forge an encounter on the intellectual and emotional level.

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<sup>17</sup> Facebook’s policy on death: [How do I report a deceased user or an account that needs to be memorialized?](#) Memorializing the account: It is our policy to memorialize all deceased users’ accounts on the site. When an account is memorialized, only confirmed friends can see the profile (timeline) or locate it in Search. The profile (timeline) will also no longer appear in the Suggestions section of the Home page. Friends and family can leave posts in remembrance. In order to protect the privacy of the deceased user, we cannot provide login information for the account to anyone. However, once an account has been memorialized, it is completely secure and cannot be accessed or altered by anyone. If you need to report a profile (timeline) to be memorialized, please click [here](#). Removing the account: Verified immediate family members may [request the removal](#) of a loved one’s account from the site.

### 3.1 MURDER NETWORKS

Both the promise and the imperative of this digitally made *encounter* are best understood through the idea of the murder network. I use murder network as a framing concept, which helps name and conceptualize all the now apparent constellations of relations in any given murder. Digital capture making those relations more noticeable and palpable. Latour notes, “networks are no more than accounts and writings that trace relationships” (128). By using the term murder network, I can re-accentuate murder into a situation, rather than a stable thing, made of relationships which deepens the argument I began in chapter 1 about the social archive and its connections. A network is by trait social. The actors in the social archive are always variously connected in networks of actions, both a digital network of traced associations and a social network, like Facebook or Twitter, where even the platforms themselves can count as actors. In this way, network is deeply intimated in the social archive. This move reflects Latour’s plea that we should “follow the actors themselves,” that is, “try to catch up with their often wild innovations in order to learn from what the collective existence has become in their hands” (12). The actors<sup>18</sup> involved in murder must be followed and “made to talk...to offer descriptions of themselves, to produce scripts” (79). Yet it is not so simple:

When a criminal says, ‘It is not my fault, I had bad parents’, should we say that society made her a criminal’ or that ‘she is trying to escape her own personal culpability by diluting it in the anonymity of society’—as Mrs. Thatcher would

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<sup>18</sup> I use only one part of Latour’s framework for this project. I kept it simple, asking only, what would this work look like if I followed the actors to gain complexity of the literate acts and actors. Because these are youth I follow, Facebook and Twitter, are actors, too, though I don’t pay them the attention needed until later in this dissertation. They are still part of the rhetorical and material structures in this project.

have certainly commented. But the criminal said nothing of that sort. She simply said, ‘I had bad parents.’ Bad parenting, if we take it seriously, is not automatically translatable into something else and certainly not into society—and she did not say ‘castrating’ mother either. (13)

In using the concept of the murder network, I can allow as many actors<sup>19</sup> as needed into the relationships involved in murder, which then helps to illuminate murder as distributed through the murder networks, but which also renders each actor its own account (i.e. bad parenting). What’s networked about these murders, and not merely related or coincidental, is the interactions of human and nonhuman “cognizers distributed throughout” (Hayles 212); because whatever the content of the interaction is, the network itself, holding these interactions together, is the place where murder can continue as a form and distributively constituted situation. To call murder networked, then, is to name it as an account, which is always moving, but which is mainly given over by each accountant or actor. But is also to say that murder happens as a social production through many complex relationships.

Murder network, is, then, a concept within the social archive, which is meant to approach murder from a different angle than the three major disciplines traditionally pursuing the study of murder—sociology, criminology and pathology—and which helps describe how digitally found documents come together to tell a story. For murder now is a cultural phenomenon distributed through digital networks and digital actors and is further made possible as an encounter because of those digital traces.

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<sup>19</sup> In part, I use the screen capture method, too, as a way of capturing the actual expressions of the actors so I can resist the urge to use a known expression as a despotic map or illustration of what I think I see in the murders: “Will we have the courage not to substitute an unknown expression for a well-known one?” (Latour 13).

What follows is not so focused on the big line of relationships in the network, but on one actor and prime mover in the thick of the networks: language. And, more largely, what James Paul Gee names, Discourse. Discourse, with a capital D, persists in the murder networks; in fact, it helps form and hold together the murder networks. This Discourse is manifested in language, gestures and images. Taking Discourse as my entry point into the circulating language, my argument will also depart from Discourse to get at the more contagious and elusive aspects of Discourse: its affect and mimetic capacity. What will become important about the use of the term and concept network later in this chapter is the nagging question of how to interrupt and disrupt the social production of discursive and affective flows of murder.

In *An Archive of Feelings*, which will be my aperture into the rest of this chapter, Ann Cvetkovich tracks the affective experience of minoritarian lesbian cultures as a way of exploring cultural texts *as* archives and repositories “of feelings and emotions, which are encoded not only in the content of the texts themselves but in the practices that surround their production and reception” (7). Feelings and affects are themselves unspeakable and undocumented forms of cultural experience. Because of this, an unusual view of the archive emerges, where the materials and texts themselves, give rise to new kinds of expression that allow affect and language to speak in different ways than more conventional histories. Facebook, Twitter and other audiovisual documents provide a record where affective traces can now be seen and felt, but which were once largely ephemeral and invisible records of human experience. An archive of feelings is thus an indirect, unstable, but yet necessary pursuit in order to vitalize the histories of murder and the distributed sense of its problem. My goal, then, will be to suggest how affect, especially affect surrounding murder and referencing murder, can serve as a compelling actor in the making of a public culture and network of people, things and acts bound up in murder. Like

Cvetkovich, this argument will reconsider the more traditional distinctions between political and affective life along with the crucial relationship between language and affect. It is then, finally, the affective life in the murder networks, which suffuses the public life of these communities.

### 3.2 FOUND: DANE “STRIZZY BANGER” SMITH

Some background<sup>20</sup> particulars just to get going. Being among the first I collected, the Dane “Strizzy Banger” Smith murder carries my own special attachment because it was my first experience with the intimate parts I collected and gathered, because it happened nearby while I was working with youth who knew Dane, and because the alleged instigator to this murder shares my same name. This proximity is not something I want to dismiss<sup>21</sup>. I live in particular entanglements and environments as a scholar of rhetoric and composition, and directly engaging with my community means research might be infected and affected by proximity, which extends to the archive as well<sup>22</sup>. The archive has the capacity to incite interest and attachment at the level image or document. This particular murder happened in the middle of the day on a street in the

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<sup>20</sup> In 2012 Pittsburgh, there were 73 murders, 58 of them black lives and 51 black males, all of whom were shot by other black males. In the first three months of 2012, 109 people were murdered in Chicago; most them were reported murdered by other black males. The background for this project comes from what some people call an epidemic—black-on-black crime—but which few of us are paying attention to.

<sup>21</sup> Consider Jenny Rice’s demonstration in *Distant Publics: Development Rhetoric and the Subject of Crisis* that rhetoric can take up local publics, as she turns to Austin, TX as a starting place for an argument on “transforming how people think of themselves as public subjects” who care about gentrification and urban development (6). Also consider Jeff Rice’s book, *Digital Detroit*, which begins by situating himself in Detroit for the five years he lived there.

<sup>22</sup> See Michelle Ballif’s, “Historiography as Hauntology: Paranormal Investigations into the History of Rhetoric.”



Hill District<sup>23</sup>. Dane was seen running down Centre Avenue when Marc shot him with a sawed-off shotgun. Spectators dismissed it as a fight about guns or drugs, because even murder has its own dominant map; it's own despotic illustration. One black guy kills another black guy and it's a narrative of drugs or gangs. But murder, like anything else, is riven with contradiction and nuance, complexities we mask in grand narrative maps. Take Haltunnen's supposition that murder is "endlessly retold in the popular, contemporary and above all fictive mode," which obscures the cultural phenomenon and the inseparability of murder within a *network* of other phenomena, and that this fictive illustration or map of murder works to remove individuality, particular language, and identity from murder, thereby masking the killings as random, anonymous, and unreal (781). I set out instead to recognize murder as individual and particular though still rapt in affective and discursive flows through the networks. This is to color in the detail, as author of *Murder City*, Charles Bowden puts it, "that is the way of life...it's a detail if it interferes with the big picture," so coloring in the detail interrupts normal flows of life (xii).

Where to start re-assembling the social archive of murder? We can start anywhere, but it's best to begin in the middle of things. Will the newspaper do?

"Sure it offers a starting point as good as any. As soon as you open it, it's like a rain, a flood, an epidemic, an infestation. With every two lines, a trace is being left by some writer that some group is being made or unmade" (*Reassembling the Social* 27). The middle of things, because there is no act of finding the beginning, just the traces, which continually *defer*, and once started, one can hunt for those traces for making and unmaking. Seeking to *make* some other story and details of this murder, I begin on February 13, 2011 with the article that reads,

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<sup>23</sup> The Hill District was once a thriving neighborhood in the 1950's. It was also a distant model for "Hill Street Blues"

Pittsburgh police are searching for at least one suspect in the shooting death of man in the Hill District Saturday afternoon. Police said the victim, Dane Smith Jr., 21, of the Hill, was found shot several times including in the head, shortly after 2 p.m. in the 2500 block of Centre Avenue. He was taken to UPMC Mercy, where he was pronounced dead. Police said his assailant fired several shots at Mr. Smith while chasing him on foot from the 2300 block of Reed Street to Centre. The gunman then fled into a wooded area nearby.

One resident said she had been returning home from a shopping errand when she heard two gunshots. Rounding a bend, she saw a young man with what appeared to be a sawed-off shotgun running away. And then she saw the victim on the ground. (*Pittsburgh Post Gazette*)

These are the facts: Dane Smith, Jr., 21, The Hill District, 2300 Block of Reed Street, chased with a sawed-off shotgun, the resident who witnessed the shooter running away in broad daylight: "It was terrible"... "He was just barely breathing. Some guy came to him and was patting him on the chest and told him to try to hang in there." (*Pittsburgh Post Gazette*). This is a narrative many of us are already familiar with: a young man was shot in a black, poor neighborhood; a neighbor woman was frightened and outraged. This story could fall flat here as "told" by the newspaper. We can see that the victim is young, the neighborhood is poor, and that the writer refers to the victim as "Mr. Smith," a polite and customary title, but one that creates a mandatory distance—both the victim and the murderer are unreal. The question at this point becomes, what is the context of this murder? What happened in the relationship between these two men to produce murder as the outcome? Or, more specifically for my project, who and what is involved in the network of interactions? I began as a documentarian and journalist by

marching into the neighborhood where Dane was killed, The Hill, which appears at first to be abandoned, lined by houses with boarded windows, vacant shops, graffiti, and a vacant neighborhood center.

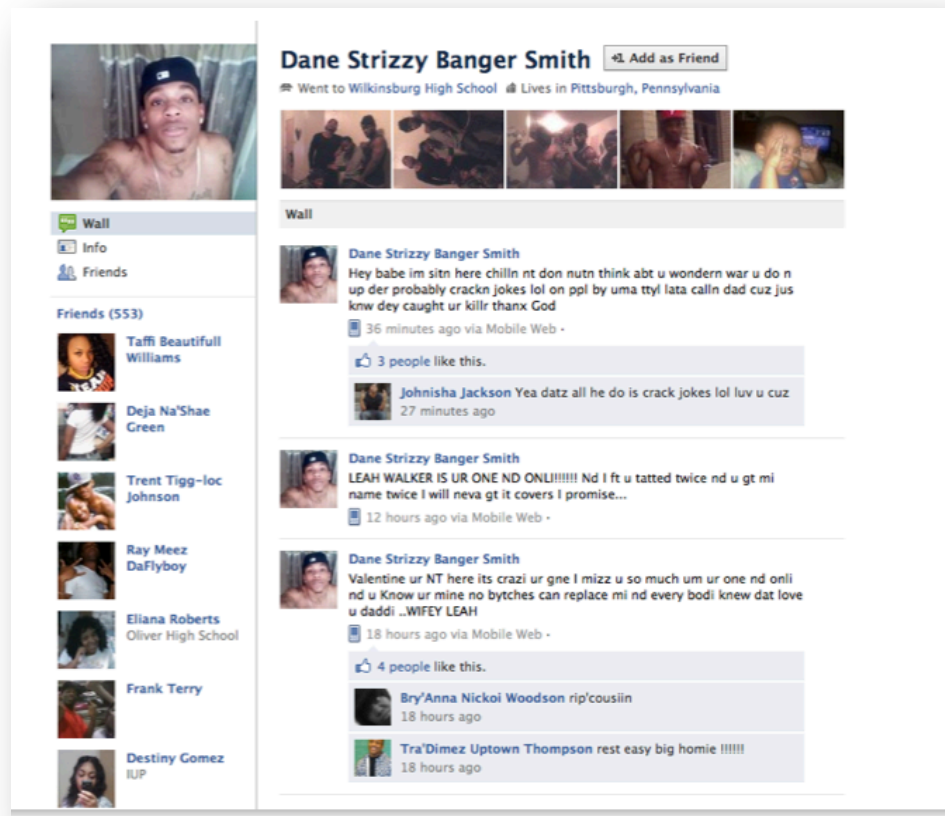


Figure 1: Dane Smith's Facebook Profile

which was preferred to his given name of Dane Smith. Strizzy, this is what his friends called him, sometimes “Strizzy Banger” or “Strizz.” What I sought to do was follow the “actors own ways” of living and being in the world (*Reassembling the Social* 27). In talking with the community I was able to hear a side of the story and glimpse into the problem, but Rita Raley’s edict still beset this process—“the streets are dead capital” (qtd. in Raley 1). In this case, the streets are literally dead capital,

<sup>24</sup> Often, instead of using the more commonly known AKA (also known as), participants in the murder network will use the less common BKA (better known as). My supposition is that this switch serves two purposes: It is less commonly uses, more insider-like for those involved, and it is aesthetic more appealing, but I can’t say for certain why that is.

the place where death happens, but also, the streets here only tell one kind of story, a dead -end story. There is the story of no snitching<sup>25</sup>, how good Dane was (“He was cleaning up his life,” according to his mother), the despotic map of murder as gang related or drug related, etc. But these stories are all tied to the intricate power of blame. I was after different story, the counter-history from below.

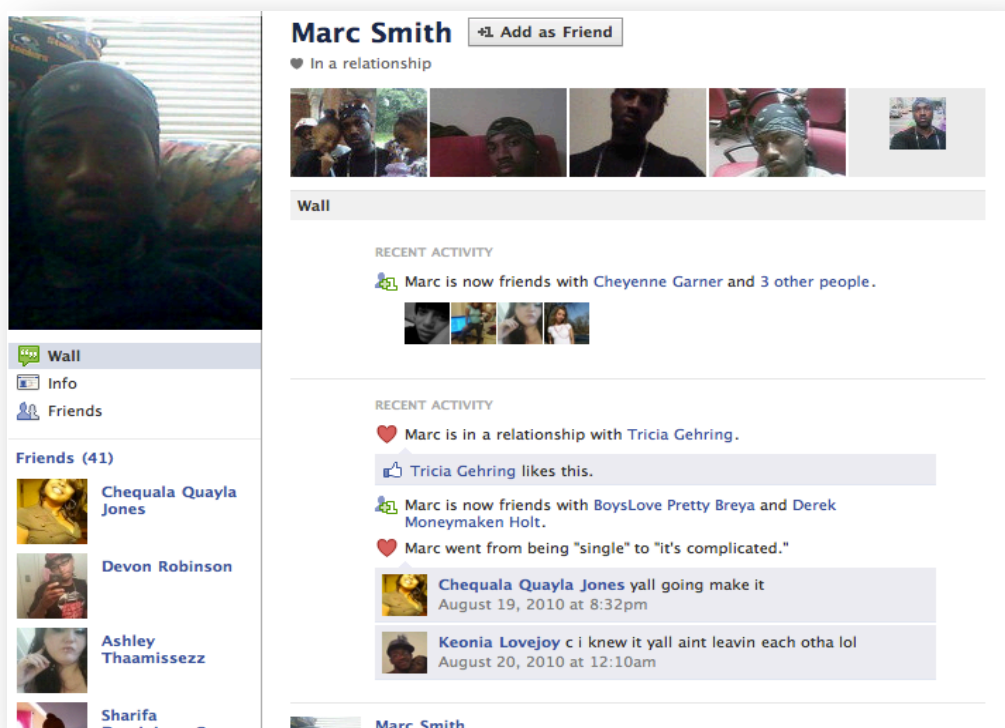
This is, then, a “found” visual representation and archival document<sup>26</sup> of Dane as left by him largely. Dane’s page might be seen as seductive as an image of a person, and of a life lived. The Facebook page, almost like an old pair of shoes at a garage sale, *lived in* and resonating with a life lived. Baron notes that the visual archive can be seductive in that it appears closer to the past or the person it represents; yet it also resists full comprehension. It is excessive and fragmentary all at once. Looking closely here, it appears that Leah Walker (see Appendix 2), Dane’s “wifey,” according to her, took over his Facebook page immediately after he was killed and began posting on his page. She seems very aware of her public audience as she makes a kind of claim on him as his “ONE ND ONLY!!!!” This is evidenced by both the his and hers tattoos she alludes to, as she exclaims, “I will neva gt it covers I promise.” Leah is both talking to him and those people in his social network. She is performing a kind of closeness to him. Just days after his murder, they did arrest his “killer” as Leah puts it (“dey caught ur killr,” thanx god”) (see Appendix 3).

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<sup>25</sup> “No Snitching” is the unwritten rule of the streets. It was popularized by a campaign in Baltimore in 2004, where criminals and gangsters launched a campaign to stop snitching. The words “stop snitching” appeared throughout neighborhoods, on stop signs, buildings, and other public property. The words “stop snitching” can also be found in popular rap songs, and it is not referred to as a culture of no snitching. This translates to no talking to cops or law enforcement.

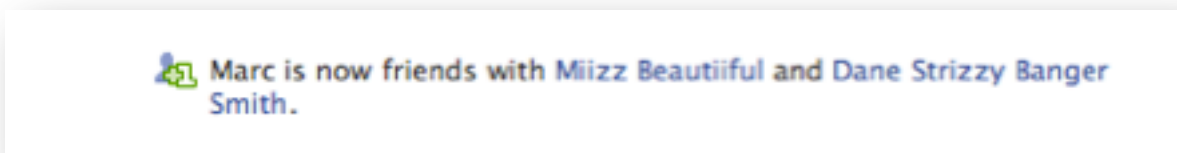
<sup>26</sup> The relatively recent situation, as mentioned in chapter 1, about the proliferating function of the archive “points to a breakdown in the distinction, which was never very stable between ‘archival’ and ‘found’ documents” (Baron 82).

His killer, Marc Smith, which newspaper outlets went to great lengths to clarify was not related to Dane, was actually Dane's friend[6]. Both Dane and Marc feature numerous Facebook pictures of themselves together "mean muggin" as it's called, holding their babies, and flashing gang colors and gang signs particular to the Hill.



**Figure 2: Marc Smith's Facebook Profile**

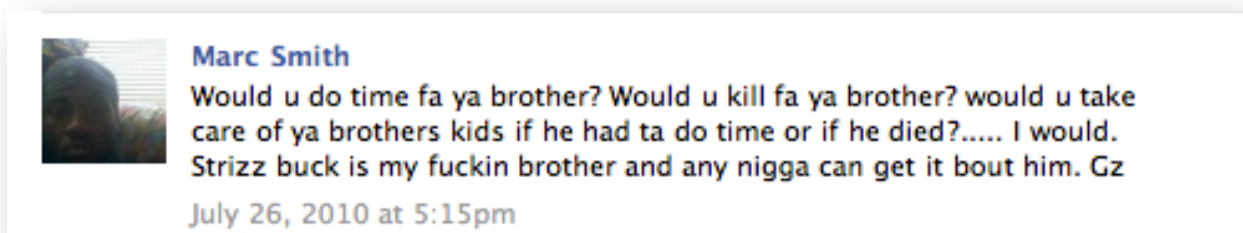
This is Marc's public Facebook page screen captured the day of his arraignment. "Miizz Beauiful" is Leah Walker, Dane's wife.



**Figure 3: Facebook friendship between Marc and Dane**

You can see that he is Facebook “friends” with both Dane and Leah. In fact, Marc and Dane seem to have been quite close, according to both reports from Dane’s family and Marc’s Facebook page. Marc had spent time that summer with “strizz and his wife” just after “strizz” got out of jail, further referring to Dane as his “brother” and “bro.”

Marc asks his social network a hypothetical question about Dane, “would u kill fa ya brother? Would u take care of ya brothers kid if he had ta do time or if he died?...strizz buck is my fuckin brother.

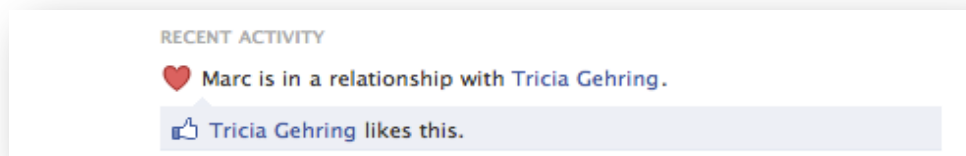


**Figure 4: Marc Smith Facebook post**

Marc is asking his paltry friend list this hypothetical question, not solely for the answers they might offer, but also for the performance to both Dane, other close friends and himself, that Marc is “down” enough—that is, Marc is loyal and tough operating here on a kind of code of behavior: this is how you treat your brother.

As I continued to collect traces and connections between those involved in the murder, I found yet another actor, Tricia Gehring,<sup>27</sup> a white girl, who had recently been involved with Marcus Smith:

Tricia (see



**Figure 5: Marc Smith's post from Facebook**

Appendix 4) started

seeing Dane Smith on the

side. In a February 26<sup>th</sup> *Pittsburgh Post Gazette* article, just after the arrest of Marcus Smith, they reported that Tricia came forward as one of the witness identifying Marcus Smith as the gunman. She reported that Marcus became angry over Dane's involvement with her. Tricia reported that Marcus said, "Dane needs to be gone. He is causing too many problems" (See Appendix 5).

In this way, Marcus was said to have killed Dane over Tricia with a sawed-off shotgun, in the middle of the day, just before Valentine's, in one of Pittsburgh's neighborhoods, The Hill. These make up the facts of the Dane Strizzy Banger Smith murder. All of this fascinates, arouses outrage, confusion, and yet in proceeding to compose the social archive, what gets collected is then composed thereby making the murder more real, archived, in the way that I have it here and elsewhere online. This kind of attention is different than a purely sociological or criminological study of murder; it is social, to be sure, but more along the lines of what is

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<sup>27</sup> It's hard to overlook the coincidence here, that the alleged catalyst of this murder bears my same name, and this murder being one of the first that hailed me, I must again and continually implicate my self and my interest in this project. Of course, using my self as an organizing principle reveals one kind of composition, and another person's interest might reveal an altogether different composition of murder, which is something I'm exploring in my method. This uncanny coincidence also discloses what Michelle Ballif calls a rhetorical "haunting," where my role is to listen and to "listen precisely to that which is excluded to that which our modes of understanding have excluded" ("Historiography as Hauntology" 153).

sociable, here, the sociability of language, is most apparent. Thus the social archive collects the found and indexical traces and puts them together again, *with care*, attending to what they hold.

### 3.3 MURDER, THE WORD

In James Paul Gee's article "Literacy, Discourse, and Linguistic: Introduction and What is Literacy?," he names Discourse as "ways of being in the world" (526). That is, discourses are "forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, beliefs, attitudes and social identities, as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes" (526). We are socialized into discourses, often learning how to say and when to say by being a member of a discourse community. Taking Gee's concept of a Discourse as a starting point, I want to begin by considering those involved in the Dane Smith murder as acting, speaking, gesturing, and expressing inside of a particular discourse, a discourse enacted in the murder network. The activated and circulating discourse in the social archive, then, participate in and help and form what can productively be understood as a murder network, where many actors and participants are involved in a string of actions, but also, crucially, that all these actors are part of and interacting within a particular discourse, a discourse, in this case, that always connects back to murder. The network is the informational design yet because discourses are also actors—discourses *act*— then they, too, are actors in the network.

These concerns are reflected in James Porter's 1986 work, "Intertextuality and the Discourse Community," which bolsters with my own attempts to postpone blame by foregrounding the role of intertextuality as a primary function of language. In it, Porter writes that in "shifting our attention away from the writer as individual and focusing more on the



sources and social contexts from which the writer's discourse arises," we can see the writer as entrenched in a discourse network. Both Gee and Porter track the consequences of discourse communities as ideological and identity building. These are functions of language that are alive and acting on their interlocutors.

Taking a closer look at Marc's language, he had just got gotten out of jail a few months prior, and appears to be rebuilding a network; his online friends are few, and his posts echo a kind of newness to the city as he asks if he is "the only nigga still puttin on fa da burgh" because he sees people in tight jeans and Mohawks to which he responds, "we don't do dat here." A new style emerged while he was in jail and he expresses his trouble at

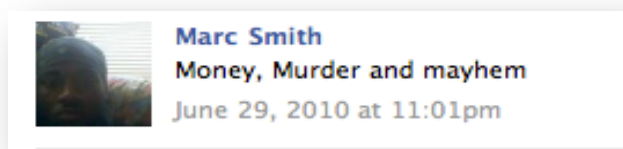


Figure 6: Marc Smith's status update

accepting this new style. Yet Marc's post asserting, "money, murder, mayhem," from that summer before the murder, is more graphic. Three simple words. Their utterance far more staying—or "staining," as Hegel describes language—than the ephemeral medium suggests. "Money, Murder and mayhem," a rhythmic phrase, already in dissemination in a number of outlets, music being the most immediate and accessible example of its circulation and sociability.<sup>28</sup> I'm not suggesting Marc had ever heard this song, nor that he is citing the song here, but that the particular phrase was already saturating the networks. As Wallace Stevens reminds, "When the mind is like a hall in which thought is like a voice speaking, the voice is

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<sup>28</sup> The album is called "Sex, Money, Murder, Mayhem" by the group, Against the Grain. A simple google search of "money, murder, mayhem" brings up over 10 different rap songs and groups singing about murder and mayhem in some context.

always that of someone else” (“Adagia” 901) Or, even more cleanly, “there’s nothing original about the language of attach” (Riley 47). This is not monumental, of course. Scholars of literacy and discourse have argued for some time that writers are a part of a discourse tradition and that “participants are in communities of discourse that create their own collective meaning” (Porter 35). What I am adding, however, is that both Marc and Dane are bound up in, and even partially produced by, a murderous discourse, and that social media remains render a surface apprehension of this discourse, while at the same time moving with “rhetorical velocity,” a faster transmission and current of that language, meant for re-composition (“composers anticipate and strategize future third-party remixing of their compositions as part of a larger and complex rhetorical strategy that plays out across physical and digital spaces.” Ridolfo and DeVoss). We are able to see the discursive trenches and the process of re-composition. Yet I want to be careful not to draw a causal relationship between Marc’s posts and his *act* of murder. While I do want to locate both his *act* and his *discourse* as bound up in social contexts, networks, and discourse communities, where authorial intent is less the concern, and language is one actor, I do not want to rely on causal relationships as simple explanation. It bears repeating that this project is never interested in who or what is guilty, but in the web of relations surrounding the act, the network of relations that eventuated in an act.

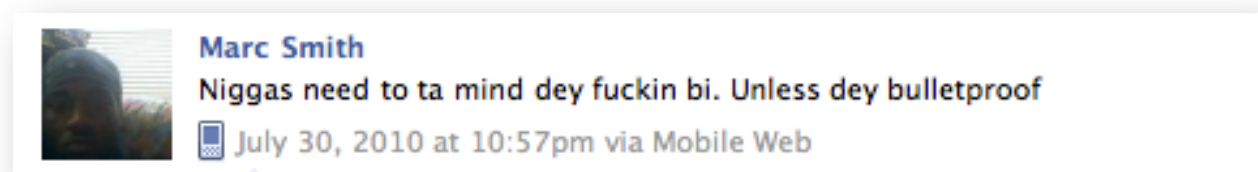
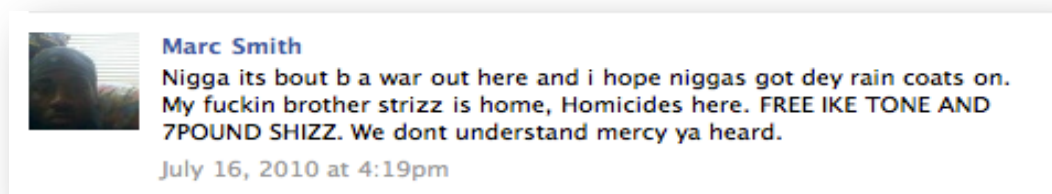


Figure 7: Marc Smith status update

Advancing further, Marc's comment here about "niggas" being "bulletproof" reveals yet another poetically violent infliction at the level of language. Or here where a similar sentiment is uttered: "Homicides here... We don't understand mercy ya heard."



**Figure 8: Marc Smith status update**

Again, Marc's language is eloquent and violent. This language is murderous. That is, this language becomes murderous Discourse at the moment it affects behavior, perspective, clothes, and ways of thinking, and thus begins to flow through the networks. The murderous tone spread and are saturated within the network of communication. Marc is textually, even performatively, at the level of the written utterance, practicing murder. Murder is a word and pronouncement of which he is familiar. This is not to say that Marc's killing was premeditated, nor even inevitable, but more simply, that murder—as an idea, phrase, thing and Discourse—was being practiced long before it was ever executed.

Consider as a means toward illumination how Gee continues to define discourse: it is "a sort of 'identity kit' that comes complete with the appropriate costume and instructions on how to act, talk, and often write, so as to take on a particular role that others will recognize" (526). Discourse always exceeds the language used, both written or spoken, because it involves a "set of values and viewpoints" (538). Murder can be seen as happening inside of a discourse—that murder can be a discourse itself—thus how one comes to murder becomes a more complicated

and distributive act. If I take this to its logical point, murderous discourse offers an “identity kit” and comes with a set of values and viewpoints. Indeed murder is not a value; rather, its discourse and network of relations offer values, viewpoints, identities and so on. Gee agrees that “individuals do not speak and act, but that historically and socially defined discourses speak to each other through individuals” (539). Of course, I am only speaking here of a particular kind of murder, and I don’t want to argue that all murder can be seen as productively in this way, but that this specific kind of murder between young African American youth, is happening inside of a network of discourse and relations, which is further inside of a digital network which allows for rapid transmission, and if we begin to see murder wholly wrapped up inside these more complicated flows, then human intention participates in, but is not solely the most “profound actor” in the network (Bennett 464).

What’s crucial, however, is the connection between discourse and identity. Identity, for Gee, is a display within a particular discourse, and discourse must be displayed or one can risk seeming like a pretender or an outsider to a discourse. “Failing to display an identity is tantamount to announcing you don’t have that identity” and you don’t belong in that discourse network (529). Yet identity is given over through discourse(s), thus rendering identity very unstable and contextual. Marc speaks often of violence and murder, money, and women. These are markers for him of identity. His utterances are modes of saying, I *am* this person, a tough man on the streets. As Ian Ang remarks on race identity, it is not stable or essential, but instead at the level of experience, identities “feel natural and essential” because they are functions of repeatable discursive acts (2). Individuals give body and voice to a discourse, making it their own and changing it through use, but the discourse first speaks and acts through them.

### 3.4 MURDER, THE AFFECT

It's easy to imagine the act of murder as violent and affective, rife with emotion and physical duress, and but still outside of language. But how physical are the words involved in networks of murder? Indeed, there are discursive flows in a murder network, as we have explored, but this notion risks the impasse of being merely an ideological problem or merely a language problem. More productively, insides of networks, we might think of language as hovering. As Denise Riley suggests, in *Impersonal Passions: Language as Affect*, murderous language lingers even more thickly. *Murder*. We like this word. It does something to us, showing up in popular music, popular TV, movies, video games and so on. And I continue to invoke its power here because "murder," the word, is what lingers in the murder networks. Murder<sup>29</sup> is what the actors<sup>30</sup>—both Dane and Kerrese but also many more—call it. And while I preserve its use and representation, I also want to illuminate its allure and affect<sup>31</sup> and even the problem of its hovering. Murder means something in the American imagination, but it means something else in the networks in which murder itself is a more common practice, both discursively and materially. Because murder is "both ordinary and a whole way of life," it is spoken and written often, used in the function of the everyday, but also carrying vast political effect (Williams 93)?. What, then, can this material everydayness tell us about murder?

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<sup>29</sup> "Call me a murderer" is what Kerrese Lawrence posted before he was arrested for the murder of his girlfriend in January 2014.

<sup>30</sup> I will float between actor and murderer/murderer because actor removes blame at the level of the word. So while I will continue to use murder for its powerful affect and connotation in this context, in these networks, I will also use actor to describe both the murderer, the murdered, as well all other entities bound up in the murder [ie. family, friends, Facebook, etc]. It is in this way that murder is an intimate part of the culture of the communities discussed here.

Murder, the word, is an actor itself, a conductor even. It is material in that it is capable of what Barad calls “agential realism” (32). That is, it has a partial agency. Language and any “apparatus” is “material-discursive” because it can make and unmake realities through its materiality (32). Murder practices “mattering” in a particular way with ethical and political consequences. Barad notes that this agency is not something one has—the agency to say murder, for instance—but agency is a relationship. When we say murderous things or enact murderous discourse, we enter into a relationship with *its* agency. This is what makes language “impersonal,” discloses Riley, “its working through and across us is indifferent to us, yet in the same blow it constitutes the fiber of the personal” (1). Language is both indifferent to its users, while also infecting its users. For Riley, violent speech and injurious language “indwell,” living inside of us in a joining together of the psychic and the discursive. How a word or phrase can dwell within a body and mind is a function of affective seepage or “bleeding between categorizations; it need not be allocated wholesale to an unconscious, or to a sphere of language” solely, but rather in-between (10). In this way, Riley observes, violent language hurts like stones, but also hovers both within and without the speaker and receiver. This hovering extends its effect.

Murder, then, at the level of language, is one such instance of an agential “reverberating autonomy” of injurious speech, but also the impersonally personal complexity (16). Inside of the murder network, murderous speech moves contagiously, spreading from user-to-user through recurrent discursive practices all along the social archive. More plainly, “murder” is written, repeated, picked up and circulated, in a casual, persistent rhythm. Of course, this word is alluring even while its power is impersonal, carrying with it a history and force—Haltunnen’s historical assessment, for instance, both horrific and mysterious—while also retaining a kind of cultural

stamina illustrated through popular media. Yet it is deeply personal with its “violent materiality” easily becoming flesh and dwelling amongst us, whether in the form of fear, allure, mystery or stark reality. Riley offers, “there is a forcible affect of [murderous] language which courses like life blood through its speakers” (1). Indeed, murderous language is “infectious” on an affective level (1). It exceeds its utterance and “its insinuations,” as Riley remarks, “the speaking of language is far more than its resonances...It can *kill*” (emphasis mine, 5). Words like this, violent words, can overrun their speaker and infiltrate networks. This is because of the affect that “seeps from the very form of the words” into its nearby users (2).

If, crucially, murder, the word, spreads and infects networks and users on an affective level, then the speaker or writer may not be wholly in control of the utterance. Language is impersonal in that it is “indifferent” to us, yet it is also, through this impersonality, how it composes who one is (2). In short, what is at stake is the consequences of an unexamined rhetoric. This is not to be confused with an independent language or a tale of the woe of language, but that, as Riley underscores, it’s much stronger, that language “as the voice of occasion can also inflect its speakers” (2). That is, we must let go of our “fantasied mastery” over language, seeking instead the complexities of linguistic influence, the hovering contagiousness and the embedded “I” (16). A murderer is then “produced by the script of rage” (17) running through murderous discourse; a murderer does not speak his rage, his “rage speaks him mechanically and remorselessly” (47). If this impersonal function of language continues unchecked, as unexamined discourse, it will risk being “obscured by the thick curtain of ideology” –or worse: it will become an unchecked identity and a capital “O” Other, so easily available for inscription upon those involved in murder. That is, murder will continue to be about

the violent aggression of the person who acted, rather than about the violent aggressive language who acted *with* and *on* the person.

At least two things are happening, then, within the murder network: the affective hovering of the word murder along with the discourse, where human actors are enculturated by and enculturating, murder as a word, action, and utterance. Between these two, murder operates on the complex level of infiltrating networks both affectively and as Discourse. Yet neither of these levels ought to remain buried in the “inherently ideological” predication. That is to say, murderous discourse *hovers*—materially, affectively, and communally—but it may be too far to say that its practice is ideological. Instead, it is more productive to say that murder, as word and material affect, is a live force, a non-human actor, in the social networks. By looking directly at the language used in the archive, we can both see the agency of language and the relationship between speaker, hearer and agential word.

This also complicates Joel Black’s question which began this chapter, “how can the murderous subject’s story be told when his identity and even his individuality is not easily specified,” when the murderer is treated as a “virus” or glitch in an otherwise smoothly operating system (781). Black’s concern is with the grand-narrativized representation of the murderer, the despotic illustration, which is something I have tried to take seriously as I collected Marc’s own self-representation and discourse. This is in contrast to the opening epigraph by Raymond Chandler, which suggests that murderers are unreal as soon as we know they are murderers because they are relegated to aberrations of culture and grand-narratives, rather than, as I am arguing here, part of us, produced by a discourse and circulating affects, which has the potential to make any body murderous. It is not that Marc is an aberration for his act; it is that he lives in a network of murder. Of course, the question still remains, have I specified an individuality, or I



have merely delayed that individuality by considering another kind of network or script? Chapter 4 will explore this question more thoroughly through a digital project designed to question empathy in digital space. For now, suffice it to say, I have made both Marc and Dane more and less real. They are more real through their images, particular posts, language and texts. They have faces and words, which makes them individual. However, in collecting and analyzing their own penned posts, I have also complicated any notion that they are subjects acting on their own individual volition.<sup>32</sup> Their identity is a function of murder networks, murder discourse, and the indifferent language agents flowing throughout, and so the real question is, if we want to make some kind of actual intervention into murder, how can one infect the discursive and affective flows through the network? Can murderous discourse be controlled? How does one gain some control over what language is used and how it uses us? This is, at least initially, a better intervention than the abstract cure of less poverty and more education. I think what I have made more real is the problem of murder itself. By revealing the language, pictures and stories of those involved in the murder networks, I have exposed real practices circulating inside of murder networks. Practices that we ignore or efface through standard reporting procedures.

It is striking that these moments of murderous language, which mark the habits of a community and a history, are captured, but are they reproduced and reproducible within the murder networks? This question can be explored at least initially, at least shallowly, with the claim that begins this project: social archive-as-method. One instance of murderous discourse means almost nothing, but an archive of discourse—that is, an entire collection amassed—becomes

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<sup>32</sup> As Hegel writes in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, “Just as the individual self-consciousness is immediately present in language, so it is also immediately present as a universal infection; the complete separation into independent selves as at the same time the fluidity and universally communicated unity of the many selves; language is the soul existing as soul” (430).

a place replete with patterns, repeatable rhythms, collective systems, and finally, networks. And so, allow me to deepen this inquiry through yet another murder.

### 3.5 FOUND: PRESIDENT KOLUMBO

The facts of the murder are thus: Lauren Williams (see Appendix 6), 20, was killed in Pittsburgh on April 30<sup>th</sup>, 2014. Her boyfriend, Kerrese Lawrence, 20, “waited in a vacant building until Williams came out of a home on Kincaid Street. As she and a friend were leaving, Lawrence approached them holding a gun,” the warrant said. “Williams’ friend pleaded with him not to do anything stupid, but Lawrence fired, hitting Williams” (Pittsburgh Post Gazette). According to reports, just a day prior to the actual murder, Lawrence had threatened the life of Lauren Williams and her unborn child. Williams called the police of Lawrence for breaking in with a stolen gun. Just 3 days later, May 2<sup>nd</sup>, police, after searching for Kerrese unsuccessfully, found him in a house in Homewood dead of a self-inflicted gunshot wound. Williams was 3 months pregnant, her mother reported that the killing was over nothing.

And yet, what sprang up immediately on Twitter and Facebook were a series of different perspectives by what appear to be Kerrese’s friends. Kerrese went by the name President Kolumbo on Twitter. Days before he took his own



Figure 9: Kerrese Lawrence Twitter

life, he tweeted about himself as a murderer:

“ Go watch da news/ I’ll be on dere”

“Show I smoked her”

and the his final tweet, “call me a murder.”



**Figure 10: Kerrese Lawrence/President Kolumbo tribute Twitter profile**

Surrounding his tweets, and just after the murder, were also a series of tribute President Kolumbo Twitter profiles (see Appendix 7). His network of friends immediately changed their cover images and handles to variations on Kolumbo, things like “VP Kolumbo,” “Kolumbo for life,” and so on. Other variations included Twitter handles that read “rip Reese” or “rwg reese.” Lauren Williams, on the other hand, does not appear in the networks much except for the scant mentions of her by family members or as referenced by Kerrese’s friends. What’s notable about this is that a more standard reaction to just the facts of this murder might reveal sadness for Lauren, disgust at Kerrese for killing his ex-girlfriend, who may or may not have been pregnant

with his child, and, indeed, this kind of reaction was present in news outlets and by the family of Lauren. While Kerrese's actions are deplorable from an outside perspective, Kerrese's network reveals sympathy for him and even a kind of valorization, but also the traces of an alleged understory and different community ethic.

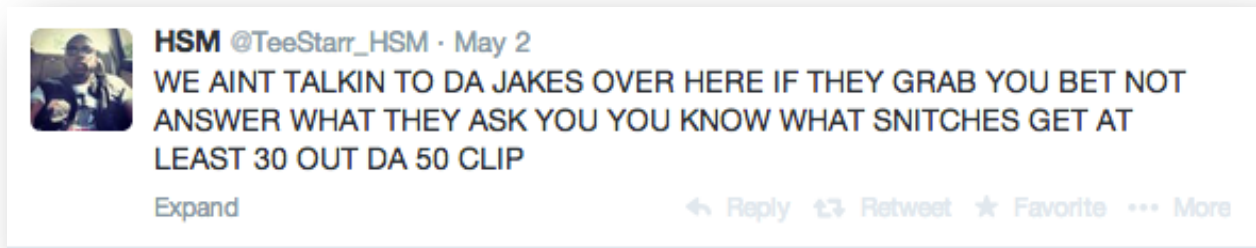
For instance, Bo Boy writes,



Figure 11: Twitter posts about Kerrese

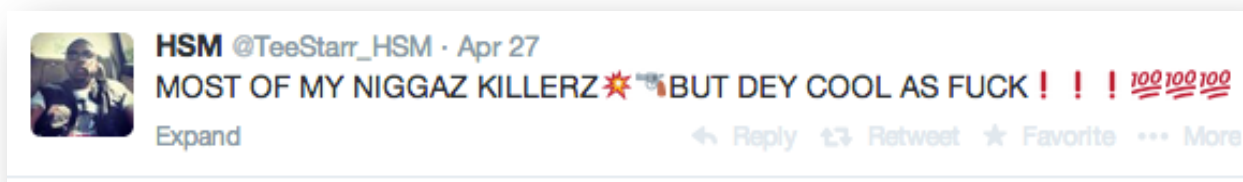
According to his network, Lauren Williams had “snitched” about something and that is why killing her garners sympathy for Kerrese and outrage at her. Or, at least, that is the circulating story.

Quite literally, adding injury to insult, Kerrese was also publicly proud of his murder because it was justified by the no snitching code, especially snitching by a girlfriend or ex-girlfriend—that’s worth at least “30 out da 50 clip,” says HSM.



**Figure 12: HSM Twitter posts**

This shift in registers, which relocates the murderer as justified and vindicated, might be understood again through the discourse network. Inside the networks murder is a real possibility,



**Figure 13: HMS Twitter posts**

and thus crafted reasons must be made to allow for ordinances of murder. Of course, those of us outside these particular murder networks have our own murderous reasons, as well. One can murder in war, in self-defense; one can murder if one thinks a soda bottle is a gun; one can murder if the other person is deemed evil enough, depending on who or what or which grounds define the evil; the terrorist can murder for her cause and this is just and right in her network. In each case, we have our reasons for allowing murder. More rarely is murder an entirely unreasonable act committed outside of a network of actors. Though there are those cases, of course, cases which are not the subject of this project. And so, here Kerrese is a murderer, not only by power of the state, but by the power of his network and Discourse, and the power of his own self-presentation. “Call me a murderer,” he declares. One of his friends, HSM, further announces, “Most of my niggaz killerz but dey cool as fuck.”

What live naming there is in this murder. The almost celebrated admittance by all that Kerrese is a murderer (or “killerz”) including most powerfully Kerrese’s own appropriation of the word he knows will be ascribed to him and yet also the word he appears to own. This is a blatant act of self-description, but where is the self in this naming subject? How to tell if the act of self-description here is broadly societal or privately felt?

First, let me briefly put this into the context of Discourse: Kerrese, being written by his Discourse community and network, names himself a murderer, along with his friends' naming power. His self-presentation, then, is part of how he can have an identity inside of this particular network. To be him, in this case, is to be a murderer. His tweets went up just prior to the actual murder, which reminds us of JL Austin's argument about the power of speech to perform the performer ("It is the power of speech, as that which performs what has to be performed" (69). *Call me* a murderer, though, is not the usual self-description of *I am* a murder; instead, he tells his audience, ( and here I think he means to speak to those both inside and outside his network), "*call me* a murderer" demanding this name, but also inheriting it or performing it just before the act. His self-portrayal a function of the discursive networks is thus made from borrowed diction, and borrowed selves, his personal speech cannot be "other than the most public" (Riley 62). Or as Hegel reminds, "everyone is a whole world of representations, which are buried in the 'I' or this case the "me" (qtd in Riley 69). So parsing this out a touch more and stating it a little more plainly. Kerrese call himself a murderer, and, indeed, becomes a murderer as a result of his Discourse networks. His social Discourse becomes his social self, which, in turn, and by the turn of the phrase, becomes his interior self. Here I think Lacan may emphasize what it means to be a subject in this fleshy network: "What constitutes me is my question. In order to be recognized by the other, I utter what was only in view of what will be. In order to find him, I call him by a name that he must assume or refuse in order to reply to me" (86). What I am suggesting is that *murderer* was an available subject-identity for Kerrese in a way that it is not an available identity outside of his network, and this identity then circulates through language, affectively.

The affect of his self-portrayal warrants more attention. The contagion of language itself is evident and well-studied. We borrow words and infect others with those words, but how they

come to “indwell”—as Riley poetically states—is the affective question. If affect is strung through words, and if “ideology is in part reiterated habits, then ideology, including the ideology of identifications, might be considered as an affective habit (35). And so the words, repeated enough, habituated<sup>33</sup>, also come to inhere in their speakers and listeners through not just the habit, nor the contagion of words themselves, but through the most contagious contagion, affect, which is shared through the networks transversally and across the rapid connection and proliferation of digital networks. The affect in Kerrese’s case is wholly bound up in the history and affect of the word murderer, and even its more active counterpart, killer. The violently charged word is historical and material. Murder, the word, as I have argued, is alluring, both in part because of its history and materiality, but also because, as Nigel Thrift’s writes, “allure” is the capacity and quality of human and non human fields of captivation to *allure*; that is, to be attracted to something or to attract. This allure helps to propel murderous and violent affects through the networks.

Yet the constituent and most communicable aspect of murder, in this context, is its rage and anger. These are the communicable affects that linger ambivalently until their speaker adopts them and begins to spread them through the networks. Rage, Riley laments, is so “dictatorial that it wont allow” its speaker any “conviction that he is voicing his own authenticity” (18). It is the

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<sup>33</sup> Charles Sanders Peirce in “What Pragmatism Is” writes that “belief is not a momentary mode of consciousness; it is a habit of mind essentially enduring for some time, and mostly (at least) unconscious; and like other habits, it is, (until it meets with some surprise that begins its dissolution), perfectly self-satisfied. Doubt is of an altogether contrary genus. It is not a habit, but the privation of a habit. Now a privation of a habit, in order to be anything at all, must be a condition of erratic activity that in some way must get superseded by a habit” (417).



anger itself transported through language (language like murder, kill, bullets, and so on) that possesses the agency infecting the lives activating this language.

What this brings me to, finally, is the agential capacity of rage and anger to live and spread through language in an almost dispassionate process. The speakers and writers in the murder networks, that is, grab onto and utter the words of rage, yet these words themselves are stock formulas, floating clichés and “linguistic impulses” (21), examples of language speaking the subject and the subject passively assenting. Rage, anger—and, yes, murder—are rife sites of language speaking its users primarily because of the affect that carries those word and phrases into the mouth and heads of its users. Indeed, the violent flicks of language are more susceptible to an unthinking speaker. Riley uses the apropos examples of stubbing your foot on a door; the words that come flying from your mouth are bad words, swear words, their forceful violence so perfectly expressive the pain of the body in that moment. Or, rather, the pain of the body so perfectly inhabit the affect of the swear word. In either case, what is so poignant of this view of violently affective language is its ability infect its speakers and its networks—“a expression flashes over me and it will have its way” (21). Of course, the speaker is not the flat unyielding receptacle this view of language makes her out to be. Instead, what I want to underline here is that the violent language has a great power to grip its users and this power can dwell within, but that the speaker, too, can resist the urge, can refuse to assent to its power. Indeed, Riley’s argument is that the angry speaker should grow angry with herself for being so mute and pliable to language’s demands and choose instead a more thoughtful response (20). And this will be the goal of my dissertation conclusion to offer some modes of reversing the flows of rage in the network, but for now, I just want to end with the consequences of re-seeing murder both as a network and as a linguistically and affectively charged agent in the act of murder.

My opening quotation came from murder historian and theorist, Joel Black, on the problem of painting the murderer with broad platitudes and grand narratives based upon a culturally inherited perspective of murder. The murderer is always unreal, his identity unspecified, because of popular images and depictions of murder. This only works to portray murder as an interruption in an otherwise smoothly operating system. What I have tried to show, instead, is how the networks in murder (which I see as not as totalizing as the metaphor of the “system”) work collectively through language and affect to co-produce murder and the murderer. This is to first and foremost admit to the socialability of murder. It is an act that occurs in a gossamer of social networks, both social in the sense of “Facebook is a social utility” and also in the sense of “social” is a collective, and should be understood as Felix Guattari insists as a “multiplicity that deploys itself...beyond the individual, on the side of the socius” and “before the person, on the side of the preverbal intensities” (9).

As I understand it, much of the work that is fundamental to allowing for affect and discourse in social science and social problems has sought a new space in relations as mediated encounters which cannot be contained or fully extrapolated in standard modes of critical thought or critical analysis. This chapter, thus, attempts the more philosophical move that draws on some of the most preeminent arguments to overcome the dichotomies of humans, culture language and non-humans. The network is one such mode. This chapter has also drawn on a form of affect and language to think more empirically and ineffably about the role of affect in networks while also trying to move past the sometimes route debates about blame and responsibility in murder.

As importantly, while I am not ready to pose an answer to my inquiry nor intervene just yet into the networks, I am interested in the work I’m doing here as the work of a rhetorician and

the work of rhetorics. Nathaniel Rivers, Alex Reid and Collin Brooke have argued quite persuasively that when Latour names the active act of composing, tracing and making flesh the networks of the social, he calls it the work of the compositionist, a word that means, as I've mentioned in chapter 1, putting together again. It is an affirmative word for making or bringing something to existence. Useful as I find this word, composition, I see it as the method for making new relations seen, felt, and acted upon, which is the work of rhetorics. Zooming out from the murder networks I've articulated above, rhetorics are the relations, both as Discourse and affect, which powerfully transmit and maintain the murder networks. That is, rhetoric unexamined in the case of murder, functions as the super hold glue holding all the relations together, making it possible for another murder and another. But first, I had to compose the relations in an archive to even begin parsing out how rhetoric is involved in murder.

Moving to a close, I want to highlight a more tacit part of the method here becoming more overt in chapter 3. My inquiry has been focused on the "practices or performances of representing"(Barad 49) and the effects of these practices, taken as meaningful in their own right. What Barad means is that we need philosophical positions that look at the effects and practices of representation, rather than the representation itself. This takes the shape of a more "performative" understanding of all those seeming representations surrounding murder because to know anything about murder does not come from "standing at a distance" but from more "*direct material engagement*" (emphasis original 49). What I mean by performance here, then, and this will continue to be elaborated, is an "abrupt break from representationalism" and a look at all the seeming representations as performative practices and effect, which help to rethink a whole legion of notions surrounding murder, like identity, discourse, causality, dynamics, digital interfaces, agency and affect. And what I mean by direct material engagement is that the

lives I have composed here, in this chapter, and further in my digital archive, posit their digital texts within a web of materiality, where what's being traced and responded to is not necessarily the very gritty material of murder and death, but it is the very gritty material of performing murder on a different agential scale, and this practice of performing has resonating material effects. Even the relations are material, for "any relation must count as substance" whether it be an object, body, or word, the point is that the human being is not reduced to expressing through the digital, but that she is "dwelling with/in" what is "intimately intertwined" with the digital, murder and the human (Heidegger 35).

## 4.0 UNSHARED TRAUMA

“We shall count as real what we can use to intervene in the world to affect something else, or what the world can use to affect us.”

—Ian Hacking

“I open with a story. I will never forget when I asked a group of 7th graders to draw a picture of themselves in 5 years, and Rhamod drew a picture of himself dead, in a casket, a man holding a revolver to the casket, and his family absent. When I asked about his picture, he replied so calmly, ‘I’ll probably be dead.’” (See Appendix 1)

—Interviews with myself

“What is at risk politically in thinking about embodied knowledge and performance as that which disappears? How, then, do we think about trauma, anti-archival by definition? [ . . . ] Whose memories, whose trauma, ‘disappear’ if only archival knowledge is valorized and granted permanence?”

—Diana Taylor

Attending—that is, listening—to the archive of murder has come to mean turning places and saying things I did not foresee at the outset. Because I am following the actors at one reflexive loop behind, and trying to allow them to show me what agents and social materials are feeding in and out of the production of murder, I turn apprehensively, but necessarily, to my next topic. Originally imagining this to be a chapter on the trauma involved in the networks, and the way in which the sharing of trauma allows for a space of healing, I am surprised to find instead that trauma is unshared and uncollected. To understand this—and sometimes to fight against it, to be sure—I turn to many different places. First I go to the ways trauma has been talked about and taken up already, as pathology, spectacle, or unrepresentable. I go second to Barad’s

productive notion of a performative approach to material, which focuses attention not on representations around murder, but on the processes and performances of those representations. This allows trauma to exist, be archived, and understood through the processes of performance surrounding it. I then, thirdly, connect trauma to these performative outputs through the matrix of materials surrounding the murder of Daniel Peek, a 16-year-old-boy shot in his own home. Therefore, spending the majority of this chapter with memorial<sup>34</sup> performance as the crux of traumatic energy. What I find is complex, bound up with processes of “claiming” and “witnessing” as processes of memorial (Taylor 43). But finally, what pervades the whole chapter, and what I want to implant at the outset, is this complicated relationship to trauma as socially unsocial. Trauma is both that which imbues and haunts the networks—putting death and the murders at the forefront of community through memorial—while also remaining selectively public<sup>35</sup>. The memorial acts become a way of privately performing and owning the hurt of trauma. This I largely blame on the logic of the social network, which, while radically connective in some senses, is radically disconnective in others. Trauma becomes, then, the decentralized agent of murder. Trauma is your own. It becomes privatized and owned by individuals, co-opted as a virtue. Finally, where I end this tragic chapter is that these communities are un-archived—their trauma un-archived, their memorials un-archived, their histories of murder un-archived—these things being rather difficult to archive in the first place. Thus, there is no aggregate of trauma, no repository to hold all these accounts together. To make an intervention into unshared trauma, I spring off of how other underrepresented groups (gay and lesbian communities) have

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<sup>34</sup> In the 20th century there was an American tradition of professional mourners common among Irish and Italian immigrants, wherein a grieving family would pay someone to cry at grave. Of course, memorial and grieving have long-standing traditions, but they resulted from longstanding trauma.

<sup>35</sup> It resists the tendency that both Mark Seltzer and Jack Halberstam call an important and problematic part of trauma: becoming public.

taken up trauma in their histories, archives, and public futures. This is where this chapter and the social archive intervene, to collect and validate an entire communities' same suffering, to reveal its self-sameness, to make trauma shareable for different public futures.

## 4.1 TRAUMA<sup>36</sup>

Emphasis here, then, is on the processes and performances of and around trauma<sup>37</sup>, but let me begin more simply by discussing the two primary ways that trauma has been excised in relation to black murder and violence. First, trauma, like murder, has been documented most often from pathological and psychoanalytical<sup>38</sup> perspectives written through those discourses. Take for instance, a recent study by Harvard doctors at the CDC who assert that 30 percent of US “Inner-city youths are affected by an unusual form of Post Traumatic Stress Disorder”

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<sup>36</sup> From a more cultural studies perspective, Mark Seltzer argues, we are “a wound culture” so obsessed with the violence and wounds of atrocious acts that trauma has become “an effect in search of a cause” (257). Indeed that trauma is a latent social and public construction of the embodied experience of violation, and that culturally we flock to its sites of exposure, obsessed with serial killers and the like. While this take on trauma does nothing to speak of the very real trauma in the murder archive, it does form a productive argument on trauma as the collapse of the public and the private, the psychic and the embodied. Lauren Berlant further names this collapse the “intimate public sphere,” which is the result of a different kind of citizen, defined as “a person traumatized by some aspect of life in the United States” (4). Both of these kinds of trauma, while important, do not speak to the communities of violence who daily live murder and dying.

<sup>37</sup> I resist universally defining trauma throughout this chapter because, in contrast to Caruth who offers trauma as a universal model of the unsayable, I assert that trauma is contextual and idiosyncratic according to each context and situation, thus allowing its own specificities and nuances. Yet, trauma *as* manifested—that is, as utterable and detectable— may remain unsayable and unrepresentable, but the performances, rituals, and practices around that trauma work as transmissions of traumatic memory and collective registers of trauma.

<sup>38</sup> See Ruth Leys influential history, *Trauma: A Genealogy*.

because of the frequency of killings, gunfire, and repeated trauma of their lives.<sup>39</sup> While the study sites valuable statistics from the U.S. Census Bureau<sup>40</sup> and the increasing rates of inner-city violence according to CDC data from 2006-2007<sup>41</sup>, along with important reports on successful prevention through conflict resolution groups and community outreach groups, which help to defuse violence and “change the community norms around violence”<sup>42</sup> (Dahlberg), the study does not offer anything other than an acknowledgement of its existence and a clinical diagnosis of PTSD as an effect of living in communities of violence. The trauma gets scripted as “an overwhelming event that produces certain kinds of symptoms in a patient” (19). The problem with this characterization and documentation is that trauma gets configured and framed as a clinical study, which lives outside of the contexts of the real lives lived, and its documentation and trace only useful to clinicians and other specialized personnel.

There is yet another way this particular kind of trauma gets documented in the public sphere: as spectacle. The massive media attention that the Trayvon Martin case received, for instance, while garnering much media attention and becoming representative of a particular kind of murder (“whites killing blacks,” and police killing) does nothing to consider the trauma associated with criminality and the more neglected problem of black lives lost at the hand of

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<sup>39</sup> Rather problematically, a TV news reporter, Wendy Takuda, for KPIX-TV in Oakland, California, gave a report about CDC’s study and renamed the PTSD in inner-cities as “hood disease.” She earned quite a bit of backlash for this coinage, and I only bring it up now to share a characteristic viewpoint. The term itself is problematic, but the study is relevant.

<sup>40</sup> “Gun violence escalated in the late 1980s and 1990s, fueled in part by the crack cocaine epidemic,” associate director for science in CDC’s Division of Violence Prevention, Linda Dahlberg said. “Even though the rates have declined since 1994, the proportion of youth homicides that are committed with firearms has remained consistently high.”

<sup>41</sup> “The years of the most recent available statistics” according to the CDC. The used the National Vital Statistics System and the U.S. Census Bureau to calculate gun murders in the 50 largest U.S. cities for 2006-2007.

<sup>42</sup> The information came out by Linda Dahlberg in a report she published called, “The History of Violence as a Public Health Issue” for the CDC.



other black lives. Trayvon Martin and the Ferguson incident further assume, as meme representations, that the problem of murder is a racial one, acting as if the media spectacle recuses itself by covering the Trayvon Martin case. The media spectacle and representational politics glosses over the other effects and affects of trauma, and doubly makes invisible what trauma and how trauma pervades violence and murder. The murders in inner-city neighborhoods claim more lives than our wars<sup>43</sup> and yet are left unrepresented in media or only scantily represented and thus “fly under the radar screen of national public culture” (16). Taking this a step further, when a victim of some kind of *unusual* murder does get picked up and circulated through a number public memorial practices, he or she comes to be a representation of violence and trauma. For instance, either privately or locally, a community will choose a violated representative to stand in for the atrocities of trauma making the once private murder and issue political, social, and public. These practices are transformations of private traumas into public memory through acts of memorialization. Judith Jack Halberstam notes that Brandon Teena becomes this representative for the queer and trans communities turning a “personal affront into a public one” through the Brandon Teena archive, memorials, tributes and protesting (16). This not to say that media attention would validate the problem; it would, instead, make it a pageantry of one trauma while negating another, which would give some attention, but perhaps not the careful, thoughtful, and deserving attention it needs.

What makes trauma a bit more complicated is the more recent literature (from the 1990’s onward), which suggests it as an unrepresentable affect. Both Ann Cvetkovich and Diana Taylor place trauma as the typically unarchived. It is that which has eluded the archive for centuries. Trauma does not live on the pages of traditional documents, audiovisual files, nor even in private

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<sup>43</sup> From Alexia Copper’s, “Homicide Trends in the United States, 1980-2008.” Published in 2012.

letters. It is either the subject of a medical and psychological research study, a spectacular media event, or it cannot be sourced—not for the larger public anyway. Part of this is because trauma was early defined by Cathy Caruth—in order to save it from discourses of pathology and spectacle—as “unrepresentable and unspeakable” (19). It has been characterized as that which anarchives itself because it is marked by “a forgetting and disassociation,” (7) leaving behind few records, if any. Yet trauma runs through many social historical accounts, identities, and communities—it is *there*—and while it may not live conspicuously on the page, it is material, living on the body, in the imagination, and in language.

In this way, capturing trauma requires some kind of trickery, some kind of way to trick it into speaking, being seen and felt on record or in a documentable history. There must be some kind of evidence of it existing *for* an archive to tell this part of history. It challenges conventional notions of the archive, putting pressure on “conventional forms of documentation, representation, and commemoration” (Cvetkovich 7) and thus lends itself to a new kind of archiving, an unusual archive, or what I have been naming the social archive, “whose materials, in pointing to trauma’s ephemerality, are themselves frequently ephemeral” (7). For trauma to be captured in an archive, then, it must also include the performances and modes of personal expression around trauma, which includes “affective language [and] affective responses and not just clinical symptoms” (19). Traumatic events, while affective and marked by a forgetting, still “refract outward” (19) to produce all kinds of evidence, and the murder archive, as it collects the paradoxically ephemeral traces left in social networking spaces, presents as the chief way in which to trick trauma into speaking.

## 4.2 A PERFORMATIVE APPROACH

Having said all that let me say a bit more about the method of a performative approach to this subject and what it allows. In truth, the murder archive collects the public, social, and user-created remains, and these are performative by nature without any **real** access to the intentions or “rear world beyond” (“Critique” 475)<sup>44</sup>. Indeed, the murder archive does not decipher between realities behind the performance of the actors, other than the brute fact of murder, which is distributed through the performative. Instead the archive takes each performance as reality itself. What I attempt to circumvent with this tactic are the problems of representationalism. Karen Barad notes that favoring performative approaches “calls into question representationalism’s claim that there are representations, on the one hand, and ontologically separate entities awaiting” or behind representations, on the other (49). Performative approaches refocus attention on the practices and processes of performing or representing along with the “productive effects of those practices,” sharpening arguments around “practices or doings or actions” (49). A performative understanding of cultural representations such as memorial, thus opens inquiry to dealing more directly with artifacts and traces. This is not “standing at a distance” from trauma or the representations of trauma, people, murders, the circuits of violence, etc., but it is rather a move to have a “direct material engagement with the world”—not hermeneutically, but directly, by looking at the practices and processes, the doings, the performance around trauma and what it can or cannot tell us. Of course, not all acts are performative, nor do humans instigate all performances. Indeed, trauma acts even while being acted upon, but we shall count as performative here that which shows up as a response to trauma and traumatic events. These are

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<sup>44</sup> Another echo on Latour, who argues along with Barad, that there is no rear world, no “privileged access to the world of reality behind the veils of appearances” (Compositionist Manifesto 475).

the memorial images, memorial language, memorial gestures, and memorial identities, which seem at first to be merely performative, in a dismissive sense, but following Barad, we can see that there is much more to be gained by refocusing attention on the processes of performing trauma, taking account of these practices as constitutive elements with further repercussions. A performative account here can be thought of as the online practices and doings through which representations of trauma are produced. In this way, the images and traces that follow are not depictions of reality, or representations of trauma, but are rather, more seriously, the “condensation” (53) of multiple practices of engagement around trauma that produce what we take to be evidence of trauma and the processes that activate it.

Using a performative approach to trauma, then, there is a range of work that suggests memorial practices are on going processes for communities of violence to cope with the trauma of losing a loved one. Diana Taylor notes in *The Archive and the Repertoire* that memorial practices are one way, among many performative practices, that trauma gets absorbed. What Taylor highlights is the idea that memorial habits and rituals “mobilize trauma” (17). The work of memorializing is a community shared and community activated ritual, which mobilizes and responds to trauma, while also turning trauma and traumatic events into that which can be excised performatively and prototypically (17). When trauma is “mobilized” in daily-lived experience, it emerges as “paradigmatic” expressions and everyday performance (19). Trauma is that which is performed through the everyday acts of memorialization and the lived experience of murder, which is actually “*trauma in transmission*” (emphasis mine, Cvetkovich 65). A performative approach becomes, then, a useful way in which to contend with the everyday apertures around trauma (187).

What I mean to suggest in this continual unfurling of trauma and performance is a vigorous nod toward Butler's notion of gender performance. As Butler asserts, gender is not an attribute of an individual, it is rather a "doing" constituted in the act of ritualized and normative practices. Gender is not located in the body, nor in some rear-world beyond, it is only possible through its continuous acts of which subjects come into being" (Butler 7). That is to say, similarly, trauma is maintained through its performative acts, like gender, and thus must be studied for its constitutive aspects. This is its "matrix"(7). By locating trauma in memorial performance, I can suggest it as something that persists, repeats, and is transmitted, echoing Richard Schechner's definition of performance, as the "twice-behaved" behavior (3). Trauma is maintained, in this way, through its doings and can thus enact and have agency through its performance.

As such, the memorial performances around trauma subsume Caruth's contention that trauma usually disappears or is un-representable, which translates it into a repeatable and transferrable enactment. In this way, memorial performance becomes a powerful way to engage social and cultural trauma through a set of "reiterated human behaviors" (Taylor 58) that are mimetic and contagious, like affect and language. Thus I mean to suggest the performances around trauma as "praxis, an episteme, a mode of transmission, and means of intervening in the world" (15). In this way, I submit that the memorial performances and practices can be considered alongside texts and textual fragments, the more traditional archival documents, as another agent in the archive, forging an important relationship between the affective and the

performatic (6)<sup>45</sup>. Because performance happens in contexts and situations, as reactions and actions, which means it eludes the conventional archive, the move to the practices and performances around trauma allow for archiving. How does one archive the process of gendering, for instance? One answer is through the processes and practices of performing it. How does one archive the process of trauma, then? Through the processes of performing it.

Finally, in removing trauma from discourses of pathology and the confines of representationalism vs. unrepresentationality, another possibility opens up to understand traumatic feelings not as medical problems, but as constitutive experiences that are mobilized in a number of directions, including "the construction of a social trauma," and a culture or a wounded public, but also, most poignantly, trauma, in this specific case, gets mobilized as a partial agent in the murders through the act of performative claiming, memorializing, and public witnessing, functioning as more than just reaction or reactive formations. As Eve Sedgwick and Diana Taylor have noted, the act of "memorializing" around trauma, in this case, the act of memorializing murder and the pain of the murder, becomes a "co-construction" (56) of murder and violence, through the repeated performance and ritual surrounding the also repeating traumatic event. Performance is then entangled with identity, social knowledge, and memory, acting as a vital act of transfer through its continued reiteration, "encapsulating the setup and actions/behaviors that predispose certain outcomes" (28).

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<sup>45</sup> I use *performatic* here as an adjective. Diana Taylor borrows this adjectival form from the contemporary Spanish usage of performance, "performatico" or performatic. The adjectival form of the word performance and performative is important for its ability to "signal the digital and visual fields as separate from, though always embroiled with, the discursive one so privileged by Western logocentrism" (6). I'm interested in using it here because the act of murder itself is embodied and non-discursive; it is performatic. Yet for this work, the discursive, the affective, the performatic, the embodied, the act itself, etc., are not separate or separable entities. They are each feeding in and out in tiny divestments. So I use performatic to signal another feed, another actor and agent in the network of murder.

### 4.3 “TOO CLOSE TO DEAD”

As a final point of departure into addressing the politics of trauma, I invoke Claudia Rankine’s darkly poetic portrayal of violence in her lyric essay, *Don’t Let me be Lonely*, which helps foreground the constitutive elements of trauma. When the TV comes on, she says, we switch it. We are so sad because we realize life cannot matter, or that “there are billions of lives [that] never mattered” (22). Cornel West thinks “this is what is wrong with black people today—too nihilistic. Too scarred by hope to hope, too experienced to experience” but Rankine insists, “too close to dead is what I think” (23). She speaks of a proximity to death that is not only about physical space and location, but about virtual space, imaginative and psychic space, more akin to space as identity defined by death or eventual death because not only do *I live next to those who die, but I live next to myself who, in my imagination, will die*; this is a self-embodied proximity. It is the young black man who walks around with this self-embodied proximity—so close to death, in his neighborhoods, in his social networks, in his friends, in the language used to describe him, in his own body. This proximity intensifies in online space, where literate acts used for memorializing and coping with recurrent murder actually evince death as even nearer.

#### 4.4 DANIEL PEEK

For the purposes of illustration, I turn to a particularly highly memorialized case in the archive. This murder is that of Daniel Peek, a 16 year-old-boy with radial club hands, killed on January 14<sup>th</sup>, 2012, (see Appendix 8) during a gathering at his house in the Hilltop Parkview Manor Complex<sup>46</sup>. It is reported that three men walked in and shot him, his brother Isaac, 14, who also has radial club hands, his



**Figure 14: Daniel Peek Facebook Profile**

mother and his aunt. Daniel died at the scene, while his brother, aunt<sup>47</sup>, and mother all survived with minor wounds. Both the grandmother and his brother, Isaac, were eyewitnesses to the shooting. They reported three shooters, but when the police came out with statement a few days after the shooting, they only issued a warrant for the capture of Eric “E-Bundles” Barlow, 21, who was then charged of the murder. The police were still looking for the two other men. However, in January of 2014, a jury acquitted Barlow of charges. Barlow’s attorney claimed, “whoever committed this crime, I submit to you, are people that knew their victim. This crime screams out of a personal nature. Whoever committed this crime had a score to settle” (*Pittsburgh Post Gazette*). Isaac identified Barlow in a lineup, but admits to never having seen him prior to that day. Isaac reported that when he opened their apartment door that day to go across the hall to buy some candy, he saw a man who resembled

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<sup>46</sup> This is a public housing complex in the south hills of Pittsburgh, known for over 10 shootings in the last 3 years.

<sup>47</sup> His aunt, Tamika Wright, did have to undergo emergency surgery the night of the shooting.



Barlow raise a gun and start shooting. Charlene Peek, Daniel and Isaac's mom, told police that there was no way Daniel could have been the target: "He was so young and got taken away from us for no reason," Charlene Peek said. "I don't want people to get the wrong idea about Daniel. People are going to see the news and think that he was in a gang or something like that. He was a loving person. He was so kind and wanted to fit in so bad with everybody. He just wanted a friend. He didn't run the streets. He didn't sell drugs. He's never been in trouble in his whole life" (WPXI news). Charlene further explains that Daniel was a "well-behaved Christian who loved to sing and dance"<sup>48</sup> (*Triblive*).

Charlene represents Daniel as both a "Christian" and a kind and loving person. She explicitly fears that "people" will get the wrong idea about him. They will assume as with many other black-on-black murder that he was in a gang or not Christian or good. Charlene is aware of these assumptions and attempts, in remembrance of her son, to change the public perception of this murder. She is looking for the value she knows will be withheld if she can't help her audience identify with Daniel. There are some tacit assumptions in her representation that if he did die because he was on the streets or selling drugs, his life would not be worth as much or worth the sympathy of the audience. While this says much about the nature of this murder and how aware Charlene is of usual narratives surrounding her son's death, it is the still on going and yearly memorialization practices of Daniel's friend, Delray Dockery, and brother, Isaac Peek, that I turn to next. As with any main event, it is not the main action, which so impinges, rather the traces and relations always live a longer and a more interesting life than the event itself.

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<sup>48</sup> [http://triblive.com/x/pittsburghtrib/news/s\\_776796.html#axzz3HHbWINwW](http://triblive.com/x/pittsburghtrib/news/s_776796.html#axzz3HHbWINwW)

## 4.5 CLAIMING

In the early January days of 2012 leading up to Daniel's murder, Delray Dockery, 16, a close friend to Daniel enters into the network. He wrote a series of posts just prior to

Daniel's murder similar in content to Kerrese's and Marc's, violent and charged. Posts such as:

January 12<sup>th</sup>: "cut throat nigga get it how u live"

January 12<sup>th</sup>: "i dont.trust these bitches"

January 13<sup>th</sup>: "we about to chris brown run it beat it beat it beat it till I feel it in ur stomach"

The still affectively charged posts about boredom below punctuate these characteristic posts:

January 12<sup>th</sup>: "im up bored as fuck chillin with my bros...hmu"

January 12<sup>th</sup>: "Who still even up im bores as death"

January 12<sup>th</sup>: " swear im bored as death that was some fluey shit niggas tried to do..."



Figure 15: Delray Dockery Facebook Profile picture

Delray also asks the persistent (and still affective) question recurring throughout many of the murders, "wat would ur first reaction be if u heard I was killed...comment." He is thinking about his own murder just two days prior to Daniel's murder, revealing a trope among

the networks, that murder and being murdered, is on the minds of many in the days leading up to a murder in their network, that murder lingers, both as the idea and its language.

With this in mind, I want to further diagram Delray’s comments and affects on the day of Daniel’s murder.

The two live in the same small complex, so it will not be surprising that Delray’s Facebook posts are happening nearly concurrent to the live events that Saturday. This post was up just hours after Daniel was shot.

Delray is immediately expressive of



Figure 16: Delray Dockery Facebook post

his recapitulated emotion of anger and being “mad”: “SWEAR IDK WHAT TO DO AT ALL NOW IM MAD AS FUCK.” His reaction is not sadness, but of being *mad* (“mad as fuck”)—this along with a note of being lost, of not knowing what to do, “SWEAR IDK WHAT TO DO.” Delray places his feelings inside the category of the emotion mad, making it a “qualified intensity,” while it is likely that he is also experiencing what Brian Massumi would characterize as an “unqualified intensity” or affect, but because of his writerly outlet, Facebook, he performs “mad” and qualifies it (Massumi 28). This is not a question of the real feelings felt, but of

Delray's practice of performance. Performing anger might be an imitation, a "refrain," and an act of "performative mimesis," of what others like him have exhibited in similar situations and whether or not Delray actually feels mad is not my concern (Taylor 14). Pointing back to Barad who opened this chapter, it is the process of performance and performativity—not the representation itself, but the performance of this representation—which can tell us more about how Delray uses "mad" here. The word "mad" here then is an attempt to be intelligible to his audience, while also reflecting a particular reality back on him, but it is also a word that chooses him in a relationship of "intra-activity" (Barad 150). By writing "mad" compared to any other qualified intensity, Delray reveals that charged intensity in the murder networks. He also admits to not knowing what to do, but this sentiment is more of a sensation. When his friends inquire about his post, he replies explaining that someone he grew up with was shot and killed.<sup>49</sup> Jarringly, Kara exclaims, "geez! Again?!? R u ok?" Delray insists he is okay and that he is going to "stay in the house and try and watch a movie r something." Evidently, Delray knows a number of people that have been killed rather recently, and has publicly mourned and memorialized them on Facebook. An hour after his first post about Daniel, he posts again, this time as tribute to Daniel.

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<sup>49</sup> This is interestingly contradictory to every news source and Charlene Peek's own testimony that the family just moved to Pittsburgh five weeks prior to the murder. Delray is saying that he and Daniel grew up together. Again, what is important here is not the truth, but the process of performance and representation. Delray is interested in claiming a closeness to the murder.

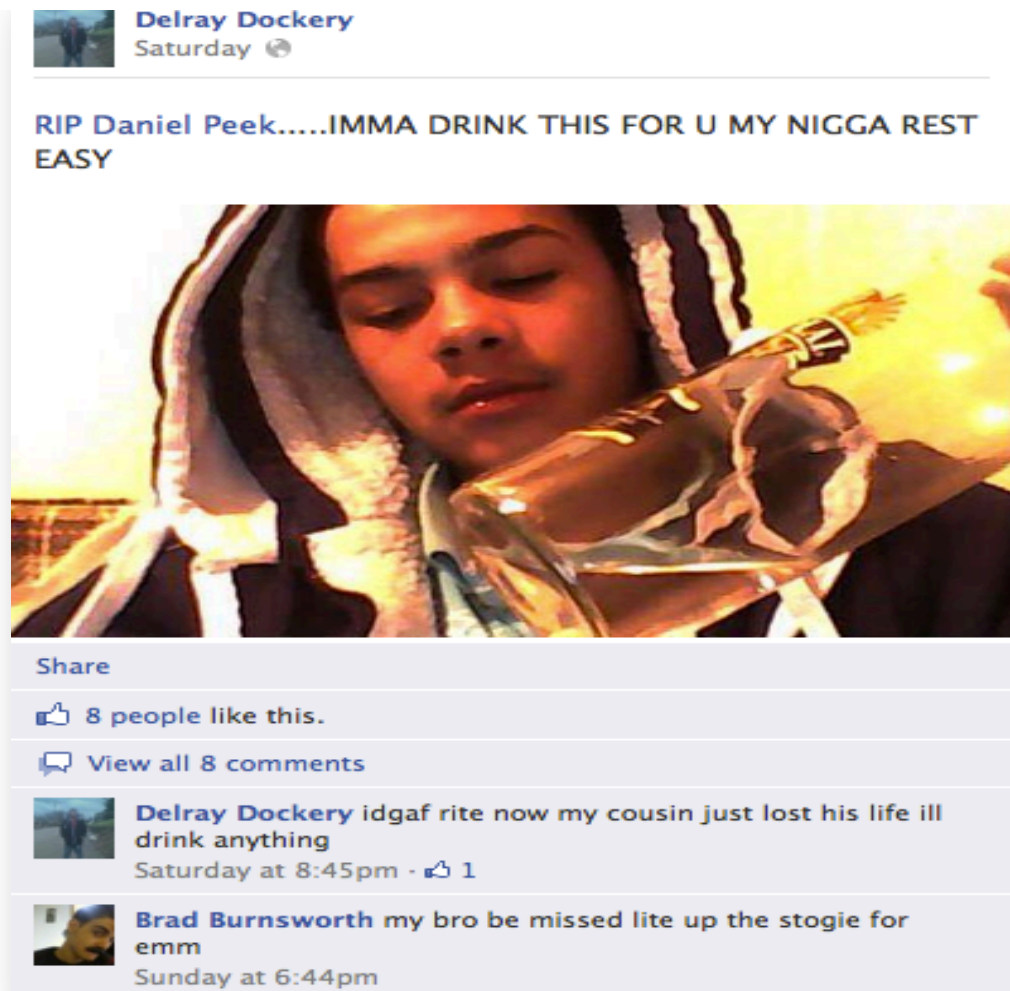


Figure 17: Delray Dockery Facebook tribute

Delray raises a drink to Daniel performatively, imagistically, and ritualistically. His hood is up; the vodka tilted to show how much is left. A comment was made about the brand of vodka, to which Delray replies, "Idgaf rite now my cousin just los this ill drink anything"--this comment, an appropriate response in such a time. Here, "cousin" just means someone who he is close to, much like a cousin. Another friend chimes in saying he will "lite a stogie" for Daniel.

The performance thickens throughout that first night as Delray posts yet another tribute to Daniel. Delray continues to memorialize through a repetition of phrases like “rest easy,” “R.W.G” (rest with god) and “Gone never forgotten” along with the performative acts of drinking to and getting high



Figure 18: Delray Dockery Facebook post tribute

to a person as a way of remembrance and mourning.

Here again, Delray calls Daniel “bro,” which a way of expressing their closeness, their friendship, but which implicates his him, too, that he suffering because of the closeness. The drawing is done all in red to symbolize the bloods. This is the gang both he and Daniel claimed

affinity to online, but Delray, when questioned, had no real association with the gang<sup>50</sup>, he said.<sup>51</sup> When I asked Delray if this online signification could result in a murder, he nodded tentatively.<sup>52</sup>

At least two things are bound up in Delray's performance of claiming. First, the trauma associated with what it must feel like to be Delray, growing up and living in a neighborhood, where more than one of his friends or neighbors is shot to death in a year, is subsumed by his practices of coping, performing, and translating his experience with the murder. The trauma is the unqualified intensity, the affect, and his output the practice of performing that trauma through an advanced ritualized memorial practice, which includes words, gestures, and other modes of performance. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, are how his practices mobilize the murder as his own, as something for him to claim and bear witness to, which ultimately becomes intertwined with his own identity. A claiming of experience makes him a "witness of the unacknowledged drama of atrocity, asking the audience to do the same" making the history and life of a lost friend or loved one "visible through performance" (187). Yet the act of claiming the

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<sup>50</sup> In reference to this, I want to make a brief statement. Increasingly gangs are not patrolled hierarchically by a leader and thus this kind of small and local affinity, both online and off, can happen with a leader to silence to performances around murder. I don't want to go too far into this phenomenon right now as it is the content of chapter 4, but I want to be detailed about the memorialization practices, and which gangs, affinities, and connections the murdered had, are important to memorialization, but the word "gang" and the way we commonly think of it is more apropos now to the logic of a network, an idea I will return to in chapter 4. Gangs, gang violence, and drugs are, however, not the concerns of this dissertation. Those things, on their own, have been studied from many different angles and are certainly agential actors within the interacting of each murder network, but they are not the focus of this study because I am after the other agents, the silent agents, the agents that do not have criminological and pathological discourses yet tied to them. The violence erupting out of these new networks is usually of a personal and interpersonal nature. It is not the result of strategic plots for mass rings of drug business; it is the result of a misfire in a network. All this and more will be articulated in chapter 4.

<sup>51</sup> From my own interviews with Daniel's family and Delray Dockery, the performance of the gang signs online is a way of showing affinity, but not necessary complete entry into the gang, though lives can still be lost over this online gesturing, Delray insists that neither he nor Daniel were really gang members.

<sup>52</sup> See *Wired Magazine* article, "Public Enemies: Social Media Is Fueling Gang Wars in Chicago" which I will come back to chapter 4.

murder also makes this Delray's experience. While he didn't die, he had just been thinking aloud about being killed himself, and the resonating effect the Daniel's murder has on him as a young and formative identity become evident as he practices claiming the murder as a traumatic event happening to him. Here both the digital and physical archive become secondary because while many criminal archives can contain the grisly and formidable record of violence (its documents, cases, and forensics), it takes a particular archive, a social archive, to allow some of these more [paradoxically] ephemeral embodied histories to surface ever so tacitly. In Delray's post is the tale of a survivor, including his own gestures, his own remembrances, and his own qualified psychic interruptions. These traceable outputs are his performance and his acts working as his own valid forms of knowledge. His performance in response to murder is political, as Taylor reminds us. While these kinds of typically unarchived outputs are often silenced in archival practices, Delray expresses his own archiving self, his own embodied archive, present as he transmits his trauma to his audience transferring memory and memorial, histories and values (193).



**Figure 19: Delray Dockery Facebook post**



This trauma, and the murders that have come before and those that come after impinge upon Delray's own identity construction so that even in his most recent-to-date post (from October 19<sup>th</sup>, 2014), he is still carrying the violence and trauma he has suffered, and this suffering further becomes how he defines himself, as a "souja," and more callously as stone: "I don't think anything phases me anymore." The act of claiming a murder makes Delray, the living and survivor, appear more tough or "hard." It gives him street credibility and street ethos as it shows his murder lineage and history to murder itself and those murdered. This is also true with those friends and loved ones who to go to prison. The act of claiming and repeatedly asking publicly via social networking to "free" those people reminds your audience of your commitment to your lost brothers while renewing your network and connections. Yet there is also an anxiousness with being forgotten and remembered within the networks of murder. Delray, actively and immediately remembers Daniel, enabling witness through his performance while also thinking of himself. He identifies with Daniel, yet unlike other survivor narratives and acts of claiming, the traumatic event is never passed for Delray. He lives in the continual state of murder's potential. As such, Delray's case presents an interesting pathway into trauma. He deals with Daniel's murder while also co-opting the event as his own, as a murder that happened *to* him. This identification does not necessarily, like Freud's<sup>53</sup>, end in the loss of the self, but in an identification as the self who could die, as the self of fragile life, as the self who is no stranger to the gun.

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<sup>53</sup> From Mourning and Melancholia

## 4.6 DECENTRALIZED TRAUMA

His performance suggests that the trauma is solely his own, performing it as an individual trauma, and not as a social or collective trauma, even while he speaks about the sheer number of people murdered in his life, and while his audience may see a collective trauma and a collective suffering, Delray maintains an individual suffering. There is, thus, a doubleness to his performance. He both claims the murder, a public act, but also individually privatizes it similar to survivor narratives, where the survivor seeks to tell the story of the event as a means of recovery and as a self-referring trauma<sup>54</sup> in public. I want to briefly put this in contrast to both scholarly conversations on trauma as a national, shared, and collective experience and political groups who perform community traumas on stage<sup>55</sup>, to honor victims of war atrocities and other mass-killings. There is a critical difference between Daniel's performance and those of the holocaust, and, indeed, as Cvetkovich reminds us, each trauma has its own performance and its own complexities. Trauma theorists have discussed the move from private trauma to public trauma, and indeed, many trauma studies are on the groups of people who claim and leave testimony of the atrocities. Yet In the case of Delray, while he is the "survivor" of this murder, his traumatic events (and those of inner-city) murder often happen one-by-one, and slowly, month after month, year after year, with the steady stream of murders in the same neighborhoods repeated on a loop. Mass killings [of white and black people] often garner more attention by media and communities, but these killings happen one at a time, more discretely, and thus their

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<sup>54</sup> Survivor narratives have often been studied from a social theory perspective centered on data and testimony collected from survivors of the Holocaust. This research suggests that survivors try to tell their stories as a means to recover. See: "Life of Pi as Postmodern Survivor Narrative" by Rebecca Duncan or the disturbing collection by Lawrence Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies* (1991).

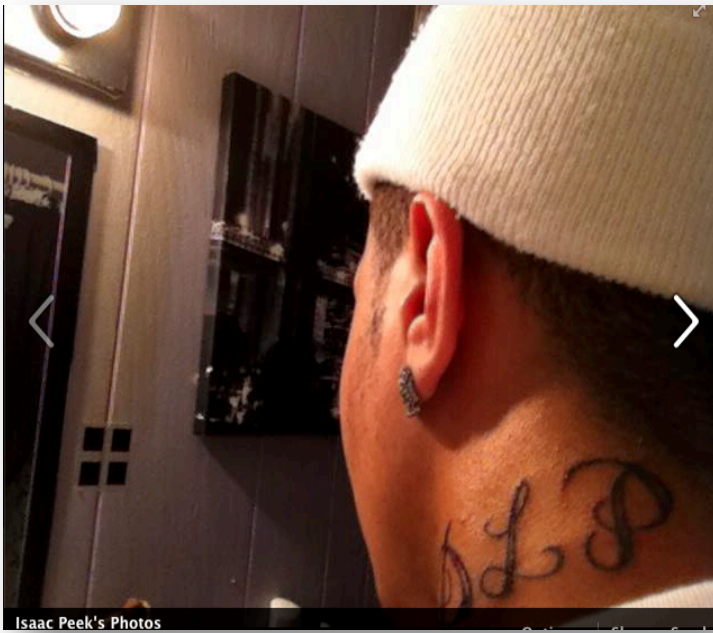
<sup>55</sup> Like the Yuyachkani theatre group collective.

trauma is felt un-collectively, un-socially, even while the network itself suggests that there is a deep interconnectedness in the murders through non-human agents and contagious affects.

What becomes apparent, crucially, is the decentralized function of trauma and how that decentralization results in repeated, similar traumatic events. Alex Galloway argues that the Internet has instituted the network, which has had a “stratified impact on the way in which social, political, and economic life are experienced” (xii)—an argument I make in chapter two. Murder happens now across networks, digital and analog, human and nonhuman. But one actor escapes the connectivity of the murder networks in a peculiar way: trauma. Trauma runs through the network as a decentralized effect/affect. This is the counter side of the network. One can both connect the dots and nodes, seeing connectivity amongst many actors, but one can also “disconnect dots, even delete dots (no path, no destination)...[one] can filter out which dots are connected to the network” (xix). Trauma, in this way, connects shallowly and selectively, it gets erased and disconnected, because in a network, “in order to instantiate communication, the two nodes *must speak the same language*” (emphasis original 12), and trauma, unlike violent language, resists sociality through “network disarticulation,” unshared connectivity, and individual appropriation (Hookway 77). In other words, the user does the connecting. Yet what is contagious and still made social at the level of practice is the memorializing. Delray uses route performances to publicly remember and mourn the death of Daniel, to claim the murder, and to make the murder memorialization a repeatable act, yet the trauma disconnects here remaining unshared even while the memorial performance is literally “shared” through the networks.

## 4.7 ISAAC PEEK

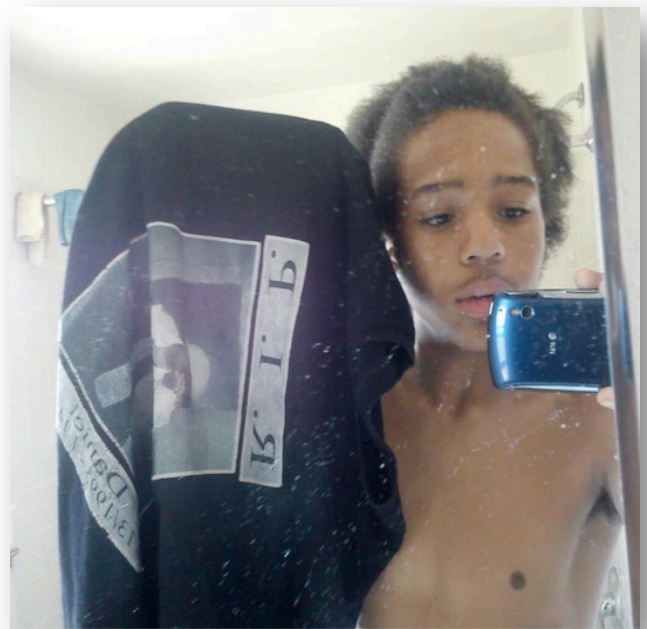
Of course I've forgotten someone: the only eyewitness to the three gunmen who barged in and began shooting that evening, Isaac Peek. Daniel's younger brother, whose leg was grazed that night, who went to court two years later as the key witness only to lose the case, and who had to ID several men in a lineup while recovering in a hospital bed just a day after he saw his brother murdered. But this is a narrative, one I've imposed upon you. It is true that Isaac saw his brother killed and we are to assume that this had lasting traumatic effects on him as a person. He recalls in a press interview that after the shooting, he got up and kicked the feet of Daniel saying, "you can get up now, it's over," but Daniel did not move and he died just moments later.



**Figure 20: Isaac Peek Facebook profile**

Delray in the days following, as we have seen, but also by Daniel's family in the years following. This requires, of course, the researcher to continually check in and follow her actors as they carry out the last vibrations of their events. Just a year ago in 2013, a year after Daniel's murder, Isaac, then 15, got Daniel's initials ("D.L.P") tattooed on his neck. This was a public event. He wanted his audience to see him memorializing

The social archive never stops. Even while one person may be murdered and one person may be in prison, if the archive it to be truly social, it must follow its actors past the temporal point of cessation. Daniel died that day, but the traumatic resonance and his murder lives on documented (and undocumented) by



**Figure 21: Isaac Peek Facebook post**

Daniel, remembering him and making him continually present through the tattoo.<sup>56</sup> Isaac practices memorialization again just months later with a selfie of him and the shirt he and his family made to remember Daniel.

Although it is crucial to think of performance inside the murder networks as a practice—and even praxis—that participates in the transmission of knowledge and identity for Delray Dockery and Isaac Peek along with others, it also underlines another issue, that of resisting disappearance through repeated images and practices of remembering. Here, performance becomes wholly constitutive. Both Delray and Isaac practice, for two years now, a continual remembering of Daniel. They post his picture in their feed, wear tribute shorts and make posters and multimodal tributes to Daniel in order to maintain the actual link, the place of Daniel, in the network. He is there, “visible and resistant” to disappearance (Taylor 63). What’s important about this practice is how it attempts to refuse the act of “surrogation,” which is Joseph Roach’s term for “how culture reproduces and re-creates itself by a process” of surrogation. In the life of the network, “the process of surrogation does not begin or end but continues as actual or perceived vacancies occur in the network of relations that constitutes the social fabric. Into the cavities created by loss through death [murder or prison] or other forms of departure...survivors often attempt to fit satisfactory alternatives” (2). For instance, the act of substitution apparent in the phrase, “the king is dead, long live the king” (2). When the king dies, the community finds a substitution King to fill the role of the one king or the position of one king. At the level of language, this forges a continuity from king to king while also erasing the “antecedents” (174). In contradistinction to this kind of memorial, both Delray and Isaac practice a continual reminder

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<sup>56</sup> Isaac has since taken to portraying himself as a drug dealer. “Trap or die,” he writes one day on a picture of himself. “Trap” is a street name for place of drug selling and it can be used as a verb for selling drugs.

of Daniel's life and his murder more along the lines of the "Never Forget" mantra, making Daniel a kind of live circulating person. This is because the network can scarcely distinguish between a living kind and dead king. If Daniel is kept circulating, he can continue to maintain his position in the network.

With this in mind, I add another actor: Charlene or Char Peek. This is Daniel's mother. She performs Daniel's life and death more regularly in the two years after the murder than both Delray and Isaac. Working backwards, her most recent post is a picture of an ornament with Daniel's face on it, posted on November 3, 2014.

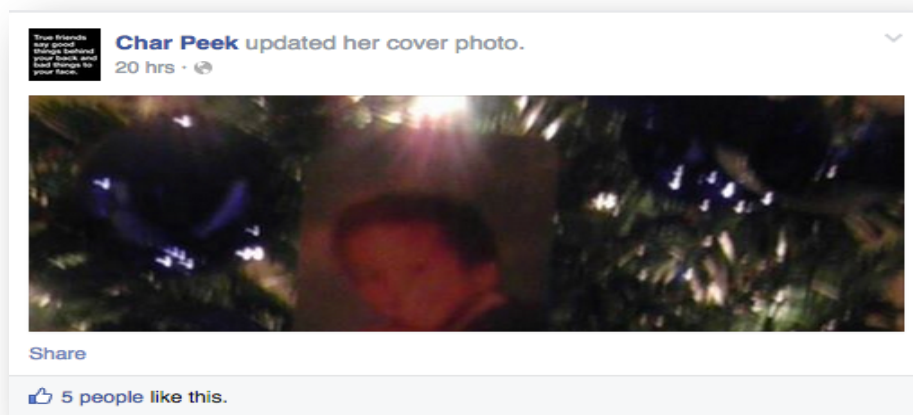


Figure 22: Charlene Peek Facebook cover page

Just days before this post (October 23<sup>rd</sup>), she put up an old family portrait when Daniel was still alive. This practice happens every few weeks, a new picture of Daniel when he was little or younger (see Appendix 9 and 10).



Figure 23: Charlene Peek Facebook post



Figure 24: Picture Collage shared by Charlene Peek on Facebook

Yet there is an image shared widely by Char Peek, Ray Peek, Sr (Daniel's father), and Isaac Peek. This is a characteristic image repeated throughout the murder archive in nearly every instance. It performs the remembrance of the most recently murdered along with any other family members. Here, the image seeks to *never forget* both Raymonn (AKA Marlo) killed in 2008 and Daniel killed in 2012.

While on the one hand, claiming the murders is a way to form one's own identity and ethos as an important practice. On the other hand, witnessing to your audience the people you know who are murdered, your friends and family, is also a complex way of garnering and enabling witness, a "witness of the unacknowledged drama of atrocity, asking the audience to do the same" making the history and life of a lost friend or loved one "visible through performance" (187). The pictures present a reminder and proof of the existence of Daniel and Marlo. Charlene, who began the circulation of this picture, archives and preserves the memory of Daniel (and Marlo) through her own internal practice of surfacing the picture (over 4 times in the last year). Her practice plays out over Facebook and through the networks connected to Daniel. Even



Delray, who is now friends with Charlene, leaves his own frequent comments to the pictures.

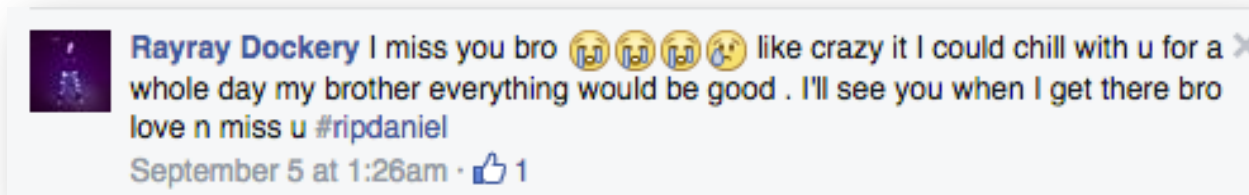


Figure 25: Delray Dockery Facebook post tribute

Charlene's memory and the persistent performance of that memory becomes a valuable historical resource, and her seemingly ephemeral posts stand alongside more enduring kinds of documentation to offer an alternative mode of knowledge.

The question I began with—  
what does trauma look like when you  
look for it in a performative approach,  
and secondarily, what does this tell us  
about trauma and its performance and  
practices—is partially answered in  
Charlene's practice. By circulating the  
images and photos of Daniel, She  
makes her audience witness to his life  
and death. Whether she does this as a  
result of the mimetic capacity of the  
memorial performance ("the twice-  
behaved behavior"), or as a

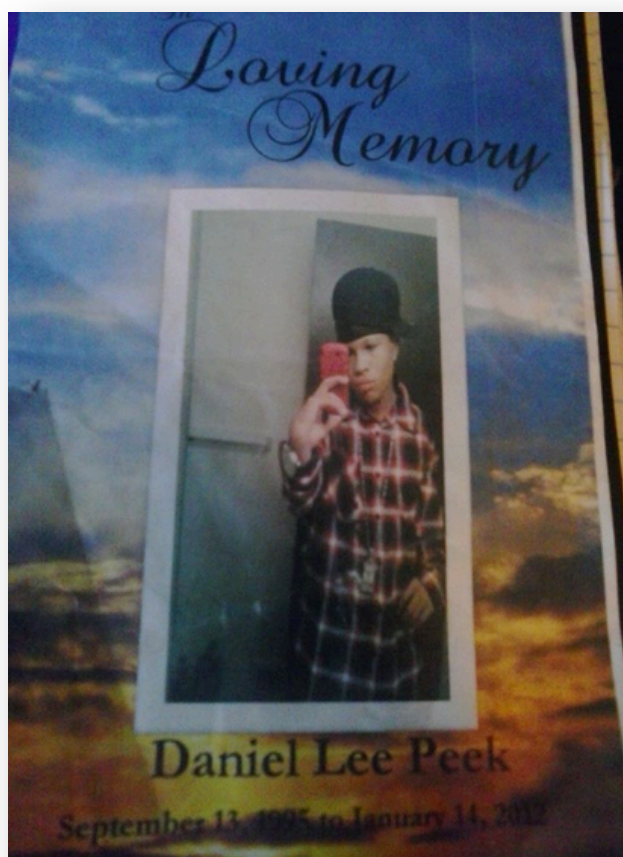


Figure 26: Daniel Peek memorial service cover photo

“marginalized tradition” (a counterpublic practice), or as a way of making public and even political Daniel’s death, her performance is an act of witnessing, making Daniel’s murder lasting and even preserved through a continual photographic practice—“images are not snapshots or depictions of what awaits us but rather traces of multiple practices of engagement” (Barad 53). While I think Charlene’s work and the contagiousness of the picture here are important methods of dealing with the trauma of that event and remembering Daniel, presencing him, her practice also suggests a different form of surrogation. Daniel, in memory, has become and been reduced to his Facebook image.

In each picture shared (other than the very few Charlene posts from pre-Facebook time), Daniel is exactly as I initially found him, in his Facebook form and almost always as this picture above illustrates. Delray, his mother, and his brother, remember Daniel, repetitively, through what he left behind on his Facebook page. This includes the shirts they made for him, Delray’s drawing, and the popularly circulating memorial image of him and Marlo. The news outlets, too, used Daniel’s profile image as their picture for him; an official memorial service at their church held to memorialize Daniel featured that same picture on their program. And, I, too, use his Facebook picture to archive him and discuss his life and death here. What, then, does this suggest about Facebook’s role in the performances around trauma? In memorial?

I will answer this by beginning a discussion of Facebook’s agency, one that I will finish in chapter 4, which is dedicated to the lurking actor in the shadows of this project: social networking like Facebook and Twitter. The performances around trauma have been hinged upon claiming, witnessing, and circulating the deceased through Facebook’s networks as memorial. Facebook allows an indistinguishable line between the living and the dead in social networking, which then feeds back into a new kind of memorial in which the networks themselves proliferate

under the guise of murder's memorial. While I will save Facebook's own memorial practices for the next chapter, I want to highlight that Daniel is immortalized through his last Facebook profile picture. This is how he is remembered. His material body is invisible and what is remembered—that is, composed and assembled—are his digital remains, his digital corpus.

#### 4.8 THE ARCHIVE QUESTION

Yet what is important about trauma, besides its agency and constitution, is its history. Critical race theorists, African American Studies, queer theorists and archivists have taken up trauma as foundational to a national history, which then gets passed down through generations. Yet it has not been taken up as part of everyday life, largely because of the difficulty in capturing or archive trauma. In Cvetkovich's project, trauma is particularly important to gay and lesbian archives because of their struggle to preserve their history, a history that has been effaced by institutional neglect and sewn through trauma. Because of this, she sets out to capture trauma in an *Archive of Feelings* as an important part of gay and lesbian historiography. Here I draw a productive connection between the contours of the unarchived gay and lesbian trauma to studies of trauma and the murder archive. Both are public cultures where forms of violence are forgotten, suppressed, or "covered over by the amnesiac power of national culture, which is adept at using one trauma story to suppress another" (16); and yet both have trauma sewn through their histories and identities. The difference is that scholars and citizen archivists have

already begun knitting the important history of gay and lesbian historiography<sup>57</sup>, where trauma lives largely and has thus become a figure in the archive for healing in gay and lesbian communities. Yet other communities of violence and murder have no archive, especially those who live their everyday experience and life around violence and “who make no claim to being *representative* citizens” (16). Their lives, as bound to violence and its trauma, are not the histories anyone wants to tell or collect, and yet this is precisely where archiving must happen, for new histories, but also, most importantly, new futures.

There is a crucial distinction, one that is written all over the pages of this project, but which I underline again now, between the murder archive, of my own making, and the social networking remains. The kind of ever-documenting that happens on the pages and walls of social networks, while it may be an archive of sorts, is not curated, collected, nor engaged at the level of a more intentional archive. I do not want to dispute the very complex intentionality authors have (seen acutely in all the indexical traces I have collected for the purposes of my archive), yet I do want to maintain a difference. I have collected, collated, curated a repository for new knowledge, and as such, I am theorizing that bank now, here, in these pages. This is a methodological move to reengage what an archive can be and say, but also a way of intervening on the digital’s capacity to leave traces everywhere at once, traces that are unwieldy, underground, unseen, and un-sifted through. I am, of course, sifting through, holding together, heterogeneously, these traces in argument about trauma. What I mean to suggest with this is that social networking lets us listen in (with IRB approval and citizen approval) to precisely those things that have typically eluded the archive: performance, trauma, and the language of counter-publics. In this way, my intervention, and I’ve said it already, is the social archive, which

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<sup>57</sup> See *The Lesbian Herstory Archives* (LHA), which has the world’s largest collection of materials by and about Lesbians.

collects these digital traces, and this time, this method, let's us see into the performances surrounding and transmitting trauma and traumatic memory, though this, too, is increasingly complicated.

Performance is, of course, not in opposition to the social archive, but added as accretion to what an archive can hold. To this end, what is performed through “ritual, witnessing, healing practices, memory paths and the many other forms of repeatable behaviors” enters into the archive (36-37). These performances are mnemonic transmission. In this way, they resist disappearance through the affordances of digital technologies, social media, and social networking sites, which provides authors and performers an everyday space through which to practice ritual, theatrical, or memorial acts. They can perform the rehearsed or conventional/event appropriate behaviors in a place where the trace—as I have argued—persists. From within this context, memorial performance itself—as processual and as a mode of transmission—becomes the archivable act, which lends that crucial presence to trauma, but also enters into the murder networks as a mode of transferring knowledge and social memory about these events. What's unique about this context, and why it is my focus here, is that what gets performed in relation to the murders is archivable, both as I talk about the acts, and as the authors and performers *perform* themselves in social networking sites. That is, the archiving occurs in parallel. Yet what is crucial is the primary and originary performance by the actors and its subsequent imitation. That is to say, the performances happening in social networking spaces are visible and perpetual, having a tendency to be reproduced in the context of murder. This is the moment the performance becomes ritual. The actors themselves record and capture their performances of memorial and remembrance through discursive, embodied, performatic and visual presentations. The digital further shifts what was previously only thought of as un-

archivable and instead asks us to consider the practices of the memorial performance, thus our understanding of “presence, the unlocalizable, the ephemeral, and the embodied” shifts (5). Indeed, the digital imposes its own system of archivability on performance around trauma, marking it as just as contagious and live as it ever was, yet also offering a brief look into the remembrance rituals of murder and how those rituals are picked up, repeated, and activated as performative practices of trauma. Of course, much is still disappeared, and I want to be careful not to argue that neither the murder archive nor the digital trace is totalizing. There is still much to say about performative practices outside of digital space in terms of what they can say about trauma, memory, and identity formations. The murder archive remains, for me, very productively and obviously fragmentary, but this fragmentation, this flip side to the archive, this history from below, makes trauma detectable as a set of practices, and thus connects it to constitutive elements, agency, capturability, and therefore, the possibility of a history and a shareable future.

## **4.9 CONCLUSION**

Here I return to and affirm again, that while attending to the trauma promises much for the archive and historiography, it is also simultaneously an imperative that follows from the recognition that trauma is registered in multiple modalities, one of which is the memorial performance I have laid out above. But whether trauma is a target for modes of memorial does not make it a smooth, normalized or instrumentalized at will affect. This is not to say, either, that trauma acts as a potential energy that gets signified in a manner of ways, but that trauma is a result of living the everyday acts of murder, and that memorial practices are one way of modulating that trauma, thus trauma is grasped as a diffuse potentiality instead of a fixed and

locatable endpoint. What it is and does varies. Trauma, then, in the murder archive is a daily feeling of life itself; it is part of how the survivors left behind define themselves; it is a function of the body in both virtual and physical space; memorial is a strategy of that perpetual feeling of trauma; trauma is alive in the act of claiming, witnessing, and remembering, but finally trauma is not locatable. Versions of what trauma is and does must coincide with performances around the trauma without becoming one kind of distilled trauma. What I mean is that trauma is indeterminate, but that it does come to figure into the act of murder itself. Trauma renders the young black man “too close to dead.” In order for the survivors to daily live the trauma, it has become a tool, a live agent toward defining, performing, and being someone who must confront murder—a “soulja.” This is, to invoke Mark Seltzer, a product of “wound culture,” (16)—we all become stones. Too many wounds make us numb.

Despite this, I have two conclusions regarding the relation between trauma and memorial practice. First, in the passage of time between Daniel’s murder and the Fall of 2014, almost 150 more murders have taken place in Pittsburgh alone, some of them so uncannily similar to Daniel’s murder that I am startled by the clear contagiousness of even the event itself. Delray has been arrested and released, involved in murder, had a child, and suffered more atrocities in his neighborhood, but what has really transpired is what Brian Massumi calls the effect of ritual performance: “virtual events.” (124). A virtual event is brought forth through techniques of both language and performance. What Massumi means and what I want to echo as I close is that Delray’s practices resonate with virtual events, events that trigger experiences of the murder and violent trauma. Delray did not need to kill or be killed (though he was recently acquitted of killing) to know killing in an experiential and virtual mode. Susanne Langer explains it as such, the ritual dancer “sees the world in which his body dances” (197). Delray sees his world in

which his body dances—the world of trauma, murder, and memorial. Here then ritual technique performs virtual events, virtual murders, where the body feels things happening virtually through ritual. This is the semblance of the event, Massumi confers. To see Daniel circulating through Facebook, looking as he did when he was alive, is to literally perform a semblance of his life, while also making the practice of memorializing the murders a ritual unto itself. This is a relationship between *seeing* Daniel and feeling again the trauma of the event.

Second, and in distinction from arguments that maintain trauma as social feeling, I want to cast a long shadow on trauma. In this chapter, the performances around trauma have become what Taylor calls a “repertoire” (3), so rehearsed and so ritualized that the memorial process itself has become a praxis and discourse unto its own. This repertoire and discourse does not, however, work only to remember the deceased and help survivors recover from the tragedy. It has instead proceeded as a kind of commodity practice, where the victim, your friend and son, is circulated as praxis. What this practice perpetuates is trauma as an integral way of self-defining. Trauma defines Delray and Isaac. In this way, what the performances of representing murder tell us is that 1) unlike other communities of trauma, this trauma remains privatized, unsocial, running through the small networks of people involved in each murder, but not anywhere else. Charlene is defined by her trauma, but this comes as an individual experience rather than a social, political, and community trauma. Daniel’s murder remains then in a small individual trauma network. This, even while the murders themselves are produced by a number of networked agents and connectivity through Facebook and other social networking, the trauma itself remains largely unconnected, even if the memorial repertoire is repeated in large volumes throughout the murder archive. This leaves the murder of Daniel and the trauma suffered as an isolated experience. The irony here is obvious. There are so many murders like this one that I



have built an archive of a proliferating type of murder, yet the trauma, while it is indeed collectively felt (“too close to dead is what I think”), is not collectively discussed. It is a decentralized agent in the networks. The consequences of this are vast. When I asked Charlene in an interview for this chapter whether she felt that her trauma was shared and collectively articulated, she offered, “not really.” She has lost her cousin, Raemonn and now her son, and she was aware of the many more shootings nearby, but Daniel’s death, she insists, was rather different and this is why her trauma is more localized.

Yet there are, have been, and will be others. There is then a long genealogy of murder, trauma and memorial, but the question of how to make these murders united as a social trauma and social discussion remains. As a last move, I will close with how the archive makes an intervention into trauma. It has struck me again and again how privately the Peek family felt about this murder; they seem to want to maintain it as their own trauma. I know there is some concern that Daniel will be remembered as a “gangster” or someone bound up in the kinds of relations that produce murder, and I think that is one possible explanation for resisting to enter Daniel’s case into a conversation of social trauma, but there is something else, too. There is a lack of history. Crucially, Charlene, Isaac, and Delray make their own online historiography and Daniel remembrance, but there is not a larger institutional or official repository, nor even a grassroots effort, other than what I have collected here. There is not even a local and unofficial repository save for my own and Charlene’s frequent memorials on Facebook. Thus, I end by positing something I will come back to in the conclusion to this dissertation: the social archive as I have been developing it, can render histories of groups of invisible people as a method for intervening in social problems. The social archive can hold together the digital remains of not only people like Daniel, but also those who may have killed him, as one and the same, in order to

illustrate that nearly all the murders in the archive are not because of gangs or the narrative illustration we cast onto murder, but for many other reasons, and the trauma itself can be *shared*. The social archive, then, offers a mode of reflection and listening, not just for the scholarly, but also for Charlene to see that there is a social trauma. If distributed systems and networks are responsible for murder, as they are here, then how do those who suffer the murders recover when the killings themselves are the effect of a network? Who is to blame? Even in my own formulation, I have asked for the postponement of blame, yet how does that also postpone healing? Trauma cultures often heal through the recognition of a perpetrator, but in an ontologically collapsed archive and method, where binaries are not upheld, there is no perpetrator. In recent events, these same communities, the ones in the archive, have united against police brutality—an important movement, to be sure—but one that still does not confront what are other very real realities of murder. That it is committed because of a network of agents, that putting a white face on the problem makes it easier to share and heal from the trauma, but this is still not the trauma of the murder archive, which accounts for thousands more murders than police killings, and that indeed the hashtag #blacklivesmatter has been shared widely, but this does nothing to intervene in the mattering of black lives in the face of other black lives. Trauma, a crucial actor, remains unconnected in part because of how selectively connected the actors' networks are. Even while my own work is to make them more radically connected, trauma persists as the actor requiring connectivity, as the crucial actor evading connectivity. This marks the trauma as truncated. For all this and more I stay my course.

The social archive seeks to be a moment of reflection so as to make the trauma shareable. Sons and daughters are lost at the *distributed* human and non-human hands of other sons and daughters, and this fact, however problematic, can be and should be held in common. The

archive then has the potential to forge a connection between the trauma that remains so deftly clipped that no conversation can spring up about it and the actors bound up in that trauma. The only shared practices are those of memorial performance and the act of killing itself, but not that of its trauma. This is the next crucial step in intervening into the problem of murder. We must all become witness to make this particular trauma social.

## 5.0 DARK FACEBOOK: HOW SOCIAL NETWORKS PARTICIPATE IN THE ACT OF MURDER

“The dynamic unfolding of human lives and practices, we argue, transpires within a rich, robust conception of time and situation. We are always enmeshed in a world of involvements. While this includes language, it also includes in a decisive and pervasive manner forms of engagement with the things and people that make up the world.”  
—Collin Brooke & Thomas Rickert

I begin by asserting the unbelievable: Facebook *murders*. Not all on its own per se, but in a web of relations where its algorithms and informatic structure foster, connect, and participate in the act of murder. I will make this argument through one murder, in particular, though many more exist within the same informatic pattern. This murder began in the networked flow of Facebook itself. The bodies it infected and affected enhanced their power through and with the heterogeneous network, rendering Facebook partially responsible—a partial actor—in the murder that finally ensued. What this suggests is a re-consideration of agency as distributed through a field of actors. This murder-event and all its actors took the life of Omar Islam, 21, who was killed at a busway in Pittsburgh by three human actors (Jordan Bey, 16, Jacquan Frierson, 21, Desmond Young, 21), one gun, Facebook connectivity, their relations, and 7 bullets on an October night in 2013.

In this dissertation I have thus far elaborated on new materialism as a way to reconceive of and re-imagine the partial agency of murder and violent events. It is distributed, I have argued, and we can see how violent affects and discourses circulate and gain agency through social networks; we have seen how trauma is both connected and disconnected in networks of murder, but we have not yet looked more particularly, more closely, at the digital mediums themselves as agents. In this chapter, I move toward the specificity of the social actors lurking underneath and through each murder, the archive, and even the method for procuring and eavesdropping on murder: Facebook and Twitter. They have been here all along, but have seemed thus far so innocuous as not to be noticed, at least not as agential forces, but through the method of collection and the theory of the social archive-as-method articulated in chapter 1, I have been led somewhat accidentally to Facebook, Twitter, and other social networking sites tricked into hearing their agency. Indeed as I began first collecting for the digital archive, I collected, too, these actors, without realizing at the time their impact, role, and agency in violence and murder. I saw them as either receptacle of a person or as representation of identity. However, in activating the methodological changes of the social archive as the framework for analyzing the collections, I was reminded that “no one thing is reducible to another” (*Pasteurization* 56), and that “no actor, however trivial, will be dismissed as mere noise” (Harman 13). If nothing can be reduced and every actor must be taken as a force of some kind, relating and unrelating in different contexts, then Facebook becomes an actor in itself entering into the network and constellation of negotiations creating the armada of forces involved to murder. Add to this the other partial agents that are irreducible to human will and intention and a host of new actors come into the fore. Without getting too far away from the main thrust of this chapter, I want to briefly emphasize the importance of the social archive for collecting and documenting not just

human actors, but the nonhumans that so pervade our everyday life and the everyday murders of this project. I was not merely collecting Facebook pages, then, I was collecting Facebook-as-actor, and its human-user assemblaged outputs, where the two are not reducible to one another. In this chapter, I argue that Facebook and Twitter have agency and play a complicit role in the act of murder. What makes this a bit more complicated, however, is that in certain circumstances, Facebook plays a more active agential role in murder. Seeing these relations and understanding their impact is crucial to an efficacious political and social intervention into how violence and murder work in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## 5.1 NEW MATERIALIST RHETORIC

In “Tracing the Missing Masses: Vibrancy, Symmetry, and Public Rhetoric Pedagogy,” Nathaniel Rivers begins by asking for a public rhetoric that has an “expanded scope, that views rhetorical action as emergent and enacted through a complex ecology of texts, writers, readers, institutions, objects, and history” (188). He is joined by other thinkers who have lived largely on these pages, thinkers such as Marilynne Cooper, Karen Barad, Bruno Latour, and Jane Bennett, who all help me to elaborate a concept of public rhetoric as the relations between human and non-human bodies in the context of any event. To see and hear an *expanded scope* of actors involved in murder, I first review some of the language and concepts of new materialist rhetoric, which allow us to methodologically listen in on these other missing rhetorical actors.

As Latour famously proclaims, “we are never alone when are acting” (*Reassembling the Social* 56). Mysterious forces act on us and with us and we are made to do things by other agencies over which we have no control and that seem plain enough, invisible enough, so

innocuous as not to be mentioned” (*Reassembling the Social* 56). For Latour action is always uncertain because we act inside of what he calls “actor-networks” or “collectives” and while we may never know the true intention of action, we can at least trace the missing masses (*Reassembling the Social* 56). Bennett expounds on what this means through her turn to John Dewey as a way to trace the attribution of action to something other than the human body or individual rational-choice agent. As Dewey notes, “a public is a confederation of bodies, bodies pulled together not so much by choice (a public is not exactly a voluntary association) as by a shared experience of harm that, over time, coalesces into a ‘problem’” (qtd in Bennett 100). A public, then, does not pre-exist its problem, but emerges “intra-actively”<sup>58</sup> in response to it. A public is delicate, able to be made and unmade, territorialized and deterritorialized, through a process of connectivity and disconnectivity, crystallizing and dissolving. What’s more, there is no action “that is not conjoint,” that does not become part of the assemblage of relations (Bennett 100). Any action “can only take place in a field already crowded with other endeavors and their consequences” (Bennett 101). Thus the initiatives that cause “harm” or acts are not entirely human. Bennett explores this philosophical stance through her analysis of the 2005 North American Blackout, which she argues is the result of a “cascade of [human and non human] effects” that includes electricity (451). She asks, “what difference would it make to the course of energy policy were electricity to be figured not simply as a resource, commodity, or instrumentality but also and more radically as an ‘actant’” (viii). Actants are those non human actors that interrupt the space between “the idea of action and the idea of human intentionality” (*Reassembling the Social* 103). Action is not a one-to-one in configuration; it happens in a “collective,” actor-network or “assemblage,” which helps illustrate the ecological and

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<sup>58</sup> This is Karen Barad’s word for the mutual co-constitution of action.

distributed set of relations that go into action. Bennett posits, then, that the field of action is really an ecology—no one owns the action—but it emerges in a complex web.

Barad, building on Latour and Bennett, further illustrates that action is always mutually constitutive, coming into fruition *with* a number of other agents, asking us to re-consider intentionality altogether: “perhaps intentionality is best understood as attributed to a complex network of human and nonhuman agents, including historically specific sets of materials conditions that exceed the traditional notion of the individual.” In this way, public rhetoric gains power as we listen to its network or assemblages, the group of actors constituting any event, and thus any intervention requires the particularity of those actors along with an inventory of their agency, and *all things have agency*.

On the tails of these thinkers, I bring another set of actants into a vibrant ecological analysis of how murder happens across, through, and with digital environments. This is the specific role and agency of Facebook itself in the act of murder, where “the locus of agency is always a human-nonhuman working group” (xvii). To get at this, I will employ the concept of a “digital-murder assemblage” as a way of describing the complex, gigantic web of relationality in digital environments. An “assemblage” is an important conceptual intervention, which emerged as a reaction to globalization and the observation at the end of the twentieth century that the world was becoming a “space of events” (Bennett 23). What was needed at the time were new concepts to describe the relations of parts functioning inside of an event or whole, both as “intimately connected and highly conflictual” (23). Deleuze and Guattari named this diverse structuration an *assemblage*. An assemblage is made of heterogeneous elements or objects that enter into relations with one another. “These objects are not all of the same type, consisting of physical objects, happenings, events, but also signs, utterances, and so on” (Bryant). Bennett



further applies this concept to her argument on the role of electricity in the North American Blackout. While I have thus far been using various other terms and concepts in this dissertation—network, primarily<sup>59</sup>—to describe murder-events and their interconnected relations, by activating, instead, the concept of the assemblage, I move to invite the digital network itself into the web of relationality.<sup>60</sup> What results is a hybrid of Deleuze’s term, “assemblage” and Ganaele Langlois’ notion of a “technocultural assemblage” (13) to illustrate and capture both the role of the digital networks themselves in murder and the agency of the digital material objects that come into being as part of a digital-murder assemblage<sup>61</sup>.

## 5.2 DIGITAL-MURDER ASSEMBLAGE

A digital-murder assemblage describes the murder-event not solely as the act of shooting or killing another, but the space of events and actors surrounding the resultant action. It also

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<sup>59</sup> I have been using the term “network” to discuss how many agents feed into murder, and I will still maintain that these murder-event are happening inside of digital and non-digital networks, I will stray from this term for the argument of this chapter in order that I may invite the social network into the action and to highlight relationality between networks.

<sup>60</sup> Various terms include: network, assemblage and empire. See Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2001) and *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin, 2004).

<sup>61</sup> Bennett defines her assemblage as: An ad hoc grouping, a collectivity whose origins are historical and circumstantial, though its contingent status says nothing about its efficacy, which can be quite strong. An assemblage is, second, a living, throbbing grouping whose coherence coexists with energies and countercultures that exceed and confound it. An assemblage is, third, a web with an uneven topography: some of the points at which the trajectories of actants cross each other are more heavily trafficked than others, and thus power is not equally distributed across the assemblage. An assemblage is, fourth, not governed by a central power: no one member has sufficient competence to fully determine the consequences of the activities of the assemblage. An assemblage, finally, is made up of many types of actants: humans and nonhumans; animals, vegetables, and minerals; nature, culture, and technology. (Bennett 445).

further delimits the study to only the digital actors feeding into the murder-event itself. Digital material objects are those contagious, shareable outputs of social networking, things like hashtags, images, articles, sentiments, videos, and so on, that can be transmitted because of and inside of digital environments. In the space of the social network, however, it is not just that actors and actants are irreducible to one another, but that they are also hybridized, resisting clear separation between human, social networking, algorithm, interface, identity, and so on. Without downplaying the importance of the brute materiality of murder itself, I also want to broaden an understanding of what goes into those acts we typically think of as solely individual or solely embodied or solely “offline,” as it were.

Digital assemblages are heterogeneous elements organized and brought into fruition in sets of relations, “relations that constitute forms of territory and expression” (Sharma 54). Digital assemblages can be thought of as dynamic because they are constantly being composed and decomposed, in Deleuze’s words, “territorialized and deterritorialized” (257), made and unmade. Understanding murder as happening in an interactive set of assemblaged digital relations also asserts that those relations could be otherwise because assemblages are constantly re-constituted, ever-sensitive to new actors and stimuli. This is the hopeful part of the digital-murder assemblage—its propensity to be affected by new actors, affective agents, and interrupted relations. It can be unmade. It can be made again *differently*. But first, murder must be understood as happening through an emergence of connections between bodies, other elements, and digital processes such that the digital-murder-assemblage itself gains agency. There is no central command, and power is unevenly distributed amongst the parts, but taken as a non-totalizing whole, the assemblage gains agency as a thing, as a vital material force made up of so many powerful interacting parts. From a machinic perspective, murder is not only

something inscribed upon or referring to bodies, but a particular emergent disciplining and charging of those bodies themselves. As Sharma explains, in digital space “bodies *collectively* behave as aggregates” (54). The act of murder is stratified in the digital assemblage, messy and tangled up with the networks and expressions of identity fostered by the network itself, and through these aggregates commits the act. A digital-murder assemblage can be understood best by considering how murder *acts* in social networks. That is, how murder is manifested in social media platforms.

The question becomes, how are digital networks, murder and violence changed by their mutual encounter? In this chapter, I offer an argument, which situates murder as a technosocial production. Digital networks are generative spaces. My argument is that a move toward a new materialist understanding of digital media and networks opens up new possibilities for rethinking how murder happens in part through, and as a result of, these online environments. Taking a cue from Lisa Nakamura and Peter Chow-White, who intimate that “race itself has become a digital medium,” I move toward how violence itself has become a digital medium, where the materiality of the digital and the materiality of the violence collide. What this privileges is a move away from online identities and online discursivity as merely signification or representation and toward the materiality of these actors as irreducible to mere representations.

Marianne Van den Boomen et. al thinks a notion of digital materiality “as configured by human actors, tools and technologies in an intricate web of mutually shaping relations...[T]he lines separating objects, actions, and actors are hard to draw, as they are hybridized in technological affordances, software configurations and user interfaces” (9-10). Their research underlines how identity, representations, and meanings are produced by the material processes proffered in online environments. Social media proliferate identity, interactions, and meanings

at speeds and magnitudes, which appear to defy traditional hermeneutic approaches, yet a new materialist approach interrogates the networked environment which makes possible these speeds, representations, and meanings as having material effect and agency. As Langois critically contends,

Rather than asking the question ‘who speaks’, it is better to ask the question: “what kind of techno cultural assemblage is put into motion when we express ourselves online?...We have to take notice not only of what users are saying at the interface level, but also of the involvement of different types of processes...not only the content of a message online, but the informational logics that make such a content more or less visible...” (3-4).

Thus the phenomena of status updates and hashtags around each murder are not merely representations, but are material in the sense that “particular groupings of users machinically connect with the technocultural assemblage of twitter and Facebook constituted by the informational logics of: user names and profile pictures, trending algorithms, interfaces, processes, data flows and networked relations, inclusion and exclusion, contagious vernacular humor, meanings and affects,” and so on (Sharma 55). But also in the sense that Jane Bennett intimates, material is not passive, but vital; material as in “having the capacity...not only to impede or block the will of humans but also to act as quasi agents or forces with trajectories, propensities, or tendencies of their own” (viii).

In thinking of what happens in these environments as material—as in, the environments themselves are material—I want to highlight the digital-murder assemblage, which includes those digital networks, social platforms, and humans constituting the event or activity of murder. In this way, I argue more strongly now that we should conceive of the particular murders in this

project as an assemblage, encountering the force of digital networks as a powerfully agential actors in murder.

### **5.3 FACEBOOK CONNECTIVITY**

Before Mark Zuckerberg, founder and CEO of Facebook, first conceived of what we now know as Facebook, he was working on something called “course match.” The idea was that students at Harvard could take classes based upon who else was taking classes. As an example, if a cute girl was in your Geometry class, you could use course match to see if she was in differential equations next semester and then register based upon that information. As Zuckerberg later remarked, “you could link to people through things” (Kirkpatrick 20). In the years before Facebook, he worked on a number of projects whose primary goals seemed to be “seeing how people were connected through mutual references” (Kirkpatrick 26). Zukcerberg, being an introvert, was said to have had a vested interest in this kind of connection. He wanted to invent a way to help people “see more of what’s going on” at Harvard (23). “I wanted to make it so I could get access to information about anyone, and anyone could share anything that they wanted to” using an online network database (29).

Years later, in a 2012 fireside chat with Zuckerberg, the word “connectivity” was uttered over ten times in the twenty-minute interview. Facebook’s mission, he clamored, excites its programmers, “Facebook’s mission is to give people the power to share and make the world more open and connected”—it is a mission to “connect the world.” Wild connectivity is what Facebook is after. Facebook’s programmers spend their time programming and debugging for increased connectivity across the world improving and developing platforms like Haystack,

Memcached, HipHop for PHP, BigPipe, and Cassandra among others to increase speed, connectivity, image storage and image sharing<sup>62</sup>. Recent initiatives have been launched to improve the speed and connecting power with a new programming language, called D, created by developer Andrei Alexandrescu. D is said to forge simplicity and speed in a highly adaptable language, which can work seamlessly with a number of platforms thus making users' ability to connect more seamless.

While Facebook's platforms, software, and algorithms can be thought of as deeply embedded in an information capitalist system, driven by stock markets and advertisement analytics, I am more keen on highlighting what takes place on the front end, where users are persuaded to connect through the rampant affordances of Facebook's interface and language, asking and enticing users to connect, share, like, and relate through Facebook. Facebook's urging to find friends and make connections also makes Facebook harder to live without, harder to leave, because one's life become deeply entrenched via Facebook's affordabilities rendering the idea of leaving or committing what some call "Facebook suicide" or "Seppukoo"<sup>63</sup> begins to feel impossible. A Facebook user spends many hours and labor making connections, fostering friendships, capturing life, essentially creating a kind of autobiography of one's life and data. Of these connections, users were reported to be "friends" with and connecting with either friends or family or often those people with which they have "weak ties." According to Nancy Baym, "for the most part, [users] are probably keeping one another posted. Some may interact in order to

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<sup>62</sup> According to techblog, Royal Pingdom, Facebook serves 570 billion page views per month (according to Google Ad Planner). There are more photos on Facebook than all other photo sites combined (including sites like Flickr). More than 3 billion photos are uploaded every month. Facebook's systems serve 1.2 million photos per second. This doesn't include the images served by Facebook's CDN. More than 25 billion pieces of content (status updates, comments, etc) are shared every month. Facebook has more than 30,000 servers.

<sup>63</sup> <http://www.seppukoo.com/>

convert weak ties into strong ones (Donath & Boyd, 2004; Ellison et al., 2007). Facebook's infrastructure grants exchanges "more emotionally risky than people would brave face to face" (135), because of the way in which Facebook allows many users to communicate and connect through the subtle function of "liking" and sharing. A user can become "friends" with a colleague or even someone with power, like a boss, and begin building a relationship through these designed methods—sharing, liking, and status updating—which simultaneously work to convert weak ties (acquaintances) into strong ties (friendship) through the affirmative function of the "like." Baym further suggests that as people connect with weak ties through Facebook, it "increases their access to bridging social capital" (Ellison et. al., 2007).

Combined with this increased incentive for connectivity, many researchers have begun to analyze how interactions on Facebook effect dopamine and oxytocin levels. While my work here is not necessarily on the direct effects of Facebook on the chemical reactions of the body, I share this research as an indication of not just how the body may interact with online environments, but also the kinds of questions researchers are asking about the body *on* social media. Shares and likes, according to Krista Peck, release dopamine into the body. She asks,

"have you ever noticed the rush you get from checking your email, googling a subject of interest, browsing your Twitter feed, receiving a text from your love interest, peeking at what your friends are up to on Facebook, or other similar internet-fueled activities? Did you notice that the anticipation of receiving the information you had sought out was often more gratifying than receipt of the information itself?"

Facebook 's capacity for connectivity interacts with our bodies and neuro-chemicals. There is, in other words, a "biologically-based need for seeking" that can be amplified in

Facebook use. What researchers have noted is that this surge of chemical reward is highest during the moments of searching or seeking—the hunt—as it is called. This is the hunt for new rewards and not the reward itself. My work here is not to go into the effects of Facebook on self-esteem or lifetime happiness, but I’ve cited this research as a way of exposing the architecture of Facebook as both a highly connected space and as intimately tied to the processes of the body. As an agent in the world, Facebook further perpetuates a culture of connection, of posting, of liking, of sharing because of its infrastructure and interface.

The structure of Facebook operates on a social network graph, which Facebook adopted as a concept and idea in a May 2007 conference, where they explained how Facebook would “take advantage of the relationships of individuals” through a complex mapping of all their relationships. Furthermore, Facebook’s social network graph shows connections between more than just human-users drawing information about more objects than simply people, including photos, events, and pages, and their relationships between each other. This expands the social graph concept to virtual non-human objects between individuals, as well.<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> "Graph API". Facebook. Retrieved July 11, 2010.



## 5.4 VELOCITY/SPEED

Seeing Facebook as an agent with connectivity affordabilities, also invites its specific machinic velocity<sup>65</sup> and duration. The speed with which Facebook allows connection also enters the assemblage. The connection is instant, with increased Facebook-to-phone capacity via the Facebook app<sup>66</sup> and daily upgrades on the speed with which users can share and post. Facebook, Twitter, and other social graph networks help to render our current notions of 24-hour daily segments into a different measurement. In 1998 Swatch attempted to re-organize our sense of time around networked time by making “internet time,” which was life divided into “swatch beats,” where each beat equaled a little more than a minute. While this corporate venture failed, the idea was that the users could meet at beat times, rather than Eastern Standard Time or Greenwich time, etc. As Tiziana Tirinova points out, “one of the most fundamental aspects of communication lies in the ways in which it forms and deforms the fabric of space and *time*” (emphasis mine 40). Just as roads, trains, and airplanes modify the speed at which goods and people “modify and transform” each other, so, too, do networks and online pathways. (40). In *Still Life with Rhetoric*, Laurie Gries highlights what many scholars have settled on as a new concept for measuring time, called “timescapes of network society,” or “internet clock time,” known most often as ICT. As Gries notes, along with Castells, Adam, and Virilio, it is not just

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<sup>65</sup> Rhetoricians, Jim Ridolfo and Daniel Nicole Devoss, unpack a notion of rhetorical velocity as a term that describes an understanding of how the speed at which information composed to be recomposed travels—that is, it refers to the understanding and rapidity at which information is crafted, delivered, distributed, recomposed, redelivered, redistributed, etc., across physical and virtual networks and spaces. Using their term, an analytical measure might talk about the velocity of a rhetorical piece rather than its pathos or ethos.

<sup>66</sup> Zuckerberg has issued several statements about how much effort Facebook developers are not putting into the Facebook android/iphone app in order to increase speed and sharing from one’s phone.

that the network modifies speeds, it transforms time into real-time, where everything can happen at once or nearly at once, layered, and simultaneous to something else: “the passage of time is distorted, as information—conceived as flow—converges toward simultaneity with no past or future (30). I can talk to my mother and my friend at the same time. Here time reaches what Tirinova calls the limit-point—history has been marked by a constant acceleration (from horses to cars to airplanes), but the network is the apex of acceleration allowing simultaneity over rapid succession. Continuous efforts are made to increase network speed, but not to go faster, necessarily, but rather, to make more things happen at once. And yet, if you were to freeze-frame the internet, Tizinova argues, we’d see “layered and overlapping topologies” in a single communication space suggesting that time is more complicated even still (53). What this suggests is that for each discrete event happening on the Internet, it is also “carving out space in various dimensions and at differing temporal intensities” (Gries 31). None of it is truly measurable, echoes Terranova. What I want to emphasize here is that 1) the nonhuman speeds at which the network operates are outside of the human control—“when there is no discernible sequence, and when the speeds involved operate outside the capacity of the conscious mind, then the control achieved over clock-time processes is rendered inoperable” (Adam xi). What I take this to mean in a new materialist framework is that the speed is nonhuman—it may have always been—but now it is even faster than clock time and that difference produces uncertain effects. Gries is direct about what this means, “our conceptions of time influence how we orient ourselves, how we attune to other things, how we communicate,” (31) and especially our actions. As Jim Ridolfo and Daniel Nicole Devoss assert, since digital objects continuously move and transform, we aren’t certain of their audience, effects, delivery, and so on. As such, speed enters the assemblage and changes how quickly or slowly an action or event happens. Discussions of

ICT highlight digital objects' resonant life of continued circulation and "ever-changing enactment" and the propensity to connect simultaneously and immediately (31).

## 5.5 CONTAGION

The discussion of Facebook's architecture underlines that connectivity is part and parcel to living within Facebook's structure. When I post a status update, for instance, I do not myself send it to my friends. Facebook's programming sends my update to my friend list for me. It serves as actant to my expressions. Yet what happens culturally within these publics when rapid sharing is happening? The flip side of rampant connectivity is the rapid contagion of digital material objects and affects in online environments. A mood, for instance, can be spread swiftly through the machinic drive and velocity of Facebook. Steven Shaviro explores networked contagiousness in his *Connected, or What it means to live in the Network Society*, where he speculates that connection may not be entirely desirable because selfhood is depicted as an information pattern as the individual becomes a host of information capitalistic patterns. Jussi Parikka, in "Contagion and Repetition," further picks up on the effects of radical connectivity, arguing that the network "induces mass replication on a miniaturized scale and that I myself am only an effect of this miniaturizing process" (292). Contagions and mimetic processes are at the center of Facebook and social networks. Gabriel Tarde names this phenomenon the "laws of imitation" regarding "the contagious characteristics of networks in relation to the boundaries between the individual and the crowd" (291). His point is that society is an imitation illustrating that the individual is not always consciously acting; she may be acting, instead, inside of an "unconsciously driven crowd" (61). Such that agency again fractures along the distribution of

the individual and the public in digital networks: “Breaking down the division between apparent voluntary (individual action) and involuntary (crowd behavior)” leads to a characterization of the potential force of collective group behavior inside of social networks (Sharma 61). This kind of behavior has a long history and set of terms, “mob mentality,” for instance, or “crowd contagion.” Crowd theory touches both on how crowds must be controlled in order to fight mass behavior<sup>67</sup> and that crowds can have democratic propensity<sup>68</sup>. Yet in describing the charged political history of crowd theory, I want to consider it more directly as an increased affordability of Facebook and other social networks like it and thus an actor in the digital-murder assemblage. As Teresa Brennan asks, how does the “environment literally get into the individual? How can one person feel another’s feelings? (1). Her questions become especially potent when considering how the imitative is intensified in digital networks, where crowds and collectives amplify across the increased velocity and computational connecting power of Facebook’s architecture. As Zuckerberg admits early on, while he didn’t think of Facebook as a political tool, nor did he program it as such, its early users tested its potential to organize, protest, and politically express, to which Facebook’s programmers responded with better interface to foster more seeing and sharing toward group organization.<sup>69</sup>

We can characterize status updates, pictures, and videos as intentional expressions of identity, but also as formative in structuring an imitative and contagious environment. Facebook is then both a social network made of “intentionally acting individuals” and a public or crowd of

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<sup>67</sup> See for example Gustave Le Bon who argues that crowds must be controlled for the safety of the population.

<sup>68</sup> See the counter to Le Bon in Christian Borch’s “Body to Body: On the Political Anatomy of Crowds.” *Sociological Theory* 27, 3 (2009): 272.

<sup>69</sup> The first instance of this happened during the first few weeks of Facebook’s life as students began broadcasting their political opinions by changing their profile pictures to a block of text or image that expressed a political statement. A custom still practiced in 2015.

agential digital contagions all feeding into social events, wherein the logic and architecture of the network itself foster particular kinds of speeds and slownesses, connections and disconnections.

Facebook, of course, offers a useful example of an assemblage already. It is a constellation of computation, humans, affects, words, news, images, videos, music, identity, ideology, and so on. It offers a “cluster of charged parts that have indeed affiliated, remaining in sufficient proximity and coordination to produce effect” (Bennett 24). Each part of the cluster works together. And while it’s important to note that the assemblage contains the human actors (their social and linguistic traces), it is more important, for this analysis, that the assemblage also include the very active and powerful nonhuman: Facebook.

## **5.6 FACEBOOK MURDERS**

Every day on Facebook (and Twitter, Instagram and YouTube) you can find pictures of young African American teens flashing gang signs, money, drugs, and handguns. These are openly shared and easily locatable expressions of violence and “gangbanging,”<sup>70</sup> and once inside of a network such as this, the same pictures and actions are repeated throughout from friend-to-friend and post-to-post. Criminal activity is advertised, commodified, and spread in this way through social media. As Ben Austen writes in “Public Enemies: Social Media is fueling Gang Wars in Chicago,” in neighborhoods where “shootings are common, the use of online tools has turned hazardous, as gang violence is now openly advertised and instigated online” (*Wired*).

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<sup>70</sup> In the network, there are very few gangs. Violence, drugs, guns are all procured and produced through the decentralized network. I only use the term here because of how the youth openly perform “gangsta” in social media, even while they are likely acting in very localized, small groups and publics.

Online posting and its relationship to murder is so common there is a phrase for someone who stirs up trouble on social media: a *facebook driller*.<sup>71</sup> A Facebook driller may begin by performatively gesturing toward violence or threats online, only to be later realized offline, either as an instigation or as a direct result of the online behavior.

This is not simply about how behavior online has lasting effects in offline environments. What this emerging cultural practice around murder begs is a look at how events like murder happen as a result of the agency of a complex digital assemblage, thereby enabling me to question theories and explanations of intentionality and human action and to, finally, hint at some of the practical implications for a new theory of responsibility which widens the scope to include human and non human actors and there deeply embedded assemblages.

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<sup>71</sup> From Austen's Wired article: A Facebook Driller "rolls out of bed in the morning, rubs his eyes, picks up his phone. Then he gets on Facebook and starts insulting some person he barely knows, someone in a rival crew. It's so much easier to do online than face-to-face. Soon someone else takes a screenshot of the post and starts passing it around. It's one thing to get cursed out in front of four or five guys, but online the whole neighborhood can see it—the whole city, even. So the target has to retaliate just to save face. And at that point, the quarrel might be with not just the Facebook driller a few blocks away but also haters 10 miles north or west who responded to the post. What started as a provocation online winds up with someone getting drilled in real life." (*Wired*)

## 5.7 THE MURDER OF OMAR ISLAM (SEE APPENDIX 11)

Just over a year prior to the murder of a young African American man named, Omar Islam, Jordan Bey (“Young Livin Savage Bey”), 16, and Desmond Young (“Real Souljalife Des”), 20, became friends on Facebook. Soon after they began to frequently chatter there. On November 9, 2012 Desmond announced on Facebook that he lost his job.

On November 11, Desmond put out a call to his Facebook friends

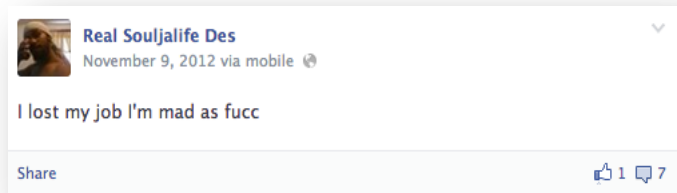


Figure 27: Desmond Young Facebook post

looking for a “crew” willing to get money and “shoot anything” in the way. Many people liked this status, which solicited from Desmond a clarifying question “everybody lik my status is y’all on DA crew?” In response, Jordan Bey offered that he was in—“me nigga definitely.” Seven minutes after Jordan’s response, Desmond told Jordan to call him ASAP and then gave out his number.



Figure 28: Desmond Young Facebook post



Figure 30: Desmond Young Facebook post

happened within two hours in the middle of the day on a Sunday. Unsure of what happened that night between the two, it can be seen publically that in the months after this cursory conversion of weak ties into strong ties, their friendship grew considerably closer. Desmond begins to refer to Jordan as his “yung nigga,” and

reciprocally, Jordan refers to Desmond as his “big bro.”

On July 18<sup>th</sup>, 2013, the year of the murder and 7 months after their strong ties conversion, Jordan tags Desmond and another actor, Raymone, in a picture of money, papers, and marijuana referring to the p.g gang.

Thirteen minutes later, once numbers had been exchanged, Desmond impatiently asks Jordan to call him “right now.” This all

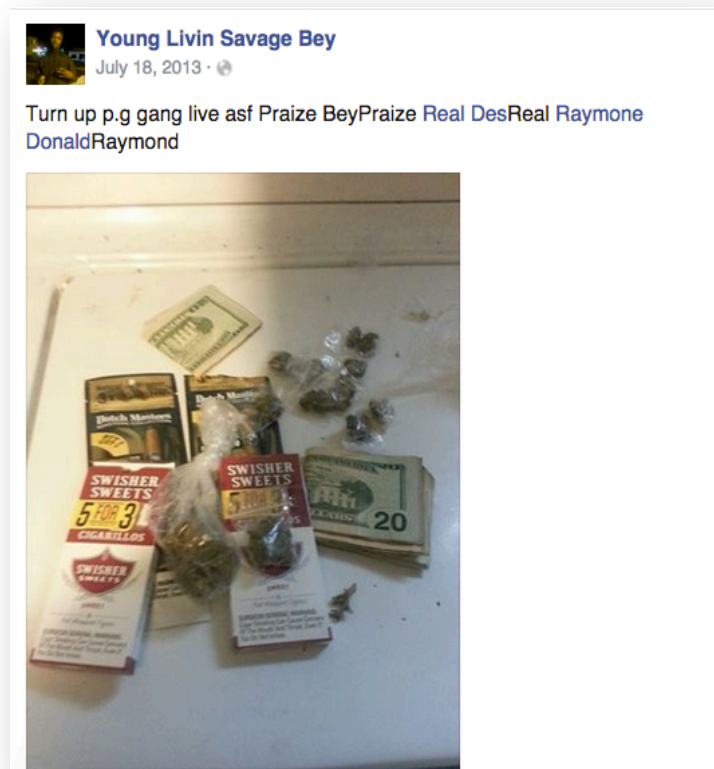


Figure 29: Jordan Bey Facebook post



The weeks and months after this expression, the two begin appearing in each other's pictures, being below imitating an earlier picture that Desmond had taken of himself holding a performative gun. That picture was later replaced with the two of them holding the performative gun simultaneously and imitatively. This is what social media theorist and researcher, Nicholas Christakis, calls the tendency toward convergence and imitation as the subtler effects of our online social connects. We can see a synchrony of facial expressions, words, postures, and movements with those of another person revealing this tendency for convergence.



**Figure 31: Desmond Young Facebook photo**

Jordan reports in his video-taped confession, which has since (as of Feb 2015)<sup>72</sup> been recanted, that he and Desmond and another person named, Blue, began planning the robbery on Facebook and then started looking for someone to rob on Facebook—he calls it “the book”—on October 8<sup>th</sup>, 2013. Jordan says, “so him and Desmond was going on the book, planning to look for missions, people to rob” (Navratil) and when that wasn’t successful, they went to a nearby ATM. When that further proved unsuccessful, they went to the busway where they targeted Omar Islam. In Jordan’s confession to the murder, he begins by saying how sorry he is: “I just want to start by saying how sorry I am for what I put his family through and what I put my family through and myself” (Navratil). He then reveals that the gun came from Blue, the third suspect, who was upset that night about a fight he had with his girlfriend and that he had lost his phone. As the three went down to the busway, Blue served as lookout while Desmond and Jordan walked up to Omar. Jordan said that when he pointed the gun at Omar, “he had grabbed the nose of the gun. Desmond punched him. He was beating him up on the bench. That’s when I got close, shot one time in his leg.” Then, there is this moment, a moment I find repeated again and again in the archive of murders, where the accused actors says they blank or black out—they don’t know what happens, they shoot, they take the life of another, and it’s over. Jordan says it in his confession, “He had thrown his phone, so I grabbed the phone. Desmond grabbed the bag and we started to walk away. He started to approach, I blacked out and I fired some more shots” (Navratil). Jordan fired 7 shots in total, but only recounts two in the confession relegating the others to happening when he was blacked out. This could be an excuse, sure, or a way to shirk responsibility. This could be the fevered possession of the gun over the person, perhaps. But these explanations are too simple, too singular. Instead, to the new materialist rhetorician, the

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<sup>72</sup> Jordan Bey withdraws his guilty plea. See Pittsburgh Post-Gazette [article](#).

persistent report of *blacking out* or *blanking out* is better understood as evidence that the actor was subject to a “slight surprise of action” (Latour, *Pandora’s Hope* 266). Let us say that this is the moment where we can see and hear the breakdown of one-to-one intentional action, where the actor cannot even account for his actions: “There is no object, no subject...but there are events. I never *act*; I am always surprised by what I do” (*Pandora’s Hope* 281). In the act of shooting, many things come together at once, nothing precedes the action, they all come together, and taking Karen Barad’s definition of agency, as a *relationship* and not a thing that one has, murder can be understood as intra-actional, inseparable, and co-produced by its assemblage. At the end of the confession, Jordan again tries to account for his own surprising actions as he says, “I just wanted to say that I was very *influenced*, like I just wanted to know that I was their friend. I didn’t want them to think I was against them when it came down to this situation like that. And I’m very, very sorry about it. I really am.” (Navratil).

## 5.8 VIRALITY

Violence, Cristakis avers, “can spread either in directed fashion or in a generalized fashion” (4) and this is amplified when the speed and connectivity of the network enter into the assemblage because the spread of violence is then faster and has more actors to affect. In the days after the murder and before Jordan was arrested, he posted regularly, seeming to refer back to the murder. On October 12, he said “Boyz don’t trust none of these fake ass niggas period.” And on October 13, “I got 50 shots in this tec big bro said aim for his chest or neck.” The seventh shot that finally killed Omar was, in fact, to the neck. We also see the agency of the gun come into Jordan’s language. “This tec” (see Appendix 12) as he refers to it here is actually the

Intratec TEC-9, which is a blowback-operated semi-automatic handgun, chambered in 9×19mm Parabellum that was designed by Intratec. The gun actually used in the murder was a .22 caliber revolver (see Appendix 12) belonging to the unknown suspect, Blue. Two very different guns and one might say that this is the trouble and difference between performance and representation versus action. How can we distinguish between performance and action? At what point does the performance with the gun become the action with the gun? I am suggesting that performance, in this case, working with the digital assemblage, becomes part of the assemblage—part of what eventually leads to action. There has been some resistance by early social media theorists to see the outward performances happening online as merely that, a performance, with no rear-world beyond. Indeed, a performance is a performance, but in the space of social networks, the tyranny of the image is what gains agency and can spread, and so the performance ceases to be an inert ineffectual actor. It, too, must be considered as part of the acting assemblage.<sup>73</sup>

In the months leading up this particular murder, we can see a connection made on the digital grid; we can see the speed of connection and interaction because of that grid; we can see an imitation and convergence of words and behaviors; and we can see, too, that the human actors who finally did enact the murder began that night by planning it through “the book.” When “the book” failed to give them anything, they went to the anonymous yet hidden space of the busway—and the digital traces stopped—but by that time their relationships, identities, and connections had been composed and solidified long enough to “influence” Jordan Bey’s eventual

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<sup>73</sup> For a poignant and recent example, take the shooting by a Cleveland police officer of a young African American boy, Tamir Rice, age 12, in a park holding a toy gun and performatively shooting. “Rice had in his waistband an airsoft toy gun with the orange safety indicator removed, and police said he reached for it after officers told him to raise his hands. Officers did not know the weapon was a toy at the time of the shooting, according to police.” Here, the boy was performing, but what seized the officer, wrongly or not, was the image and the performance itself. The performative act of shooting has collapsed into the act itself: <http://www.vox.com/2014/11/24/7275297/tamir-rice-police-shooting>

action. (This is and always will be a partial account; we can never trace all of the actors, but in this case, we trace the actors not usually seen.) As Bey admits in his confession, “I was *influenced*” and indeed he was, but Bey cannot figure out what quite possessed him. Was it what we have historically called “peer pressure” or was it what can be called by the new materialist rhetorician a kind of “actor-pressure”? A pressure to act by and through mysterious forces. A pressure to act by the agency of the assemblage: Facebook, their relations therein, speed, Desmond, identity, performance, the architecture of the city, and so on. Jordan, confused by his action, puts the blame squarely in his effort to try to please his new friends. He mentions, I just wanted them to know that “I was their friend” (Jordan Bey, “Confession” WTAE<sup>74</sup>).

Even while this murder may seem difficult and hard to understand, this murder is not unique. There are imitations and iterations of murder that look so similar to this one. This is the duality of social networks. A friendship is formed, performative displays ensue and spread, imitation multiplies, an actor blacks out and a life is taken. This replication, too, is a key feature of social networks. Murder gets turned into a viral contagious object through the resonant affects of the language and images made and spread in online networks. An image, an act, a lyric, an affect, a discourse can be propagated quickly throughout the social networks increasing the potential for contagious effects to take hold. This is the principle of virality, as Gries puts it, which is a necessary principle in a new materialist rhetoric approach to murder. “Virality is the tendency of things to spread quickly and widely—as a consequence of a thing’s design, production, distribution, circulation” (87). This murder appears unique and singular (and I do want to maintain its nuances) but the repetition of particular effects and affects is intense, infecting bodies, vernacular styles, and social ideas. This is because contagion is amplified when

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<sup>74</sup> <http://www.wtae.com/news/local/allegheeny/video-confession-played-teen-held-for-trial-as-adult-on-murder-charge/22637512>

the digital objects work to “propagate affective desires and unconscious imitate feelings, thoughts and behaviors” (87). As Bennett pokes, “why speak of the agency of assemblages, and not, more modestly, of their capacity to form a culture or to self organize or to participate in effects?” (34). Her answer is that human agency remains somewhat of a mystery: “if we do not know just how it is that human agency operates, how can we be so sure that the processes through which nonhumans make their mark are qualitatively different” (34).

## 5.9 AGENCY

I want to maintain the brute fact of murder here, a murder did happen and someone did die, but intentionality when posed in this way suggests that moral judgment is not to be based either on actions or on intentions alone; rather the very binary between interior and exterior states needs to be rethought. What I am inviting then is a complete re-consideration of agency in light of digital-social networks. If affects, ideas, and indeed, normative acts, can be spread contagiously because of the coding logic and algorithms of Facebook, then these acts also collectively contribute too and must be re-considered as actors in particular kinds of murders. Thinkers like Bennett are forthright about what this means: in a time and space of radical connectivity, a “hesitant attitude toward assigning blame becomes a virtue ...yet outrage will not and should not disappear, but a politics devoted too exclusively to moral condemnation and not enough to a cultivated discernment of the web of agentic capacities can do no good” (38).

What is required is a re-imagination of agency in the age of the network, in the age of Facebook. Many of our lives happen across and through its various elements of agency and thus action and event must be re-considered through those agential forces and not outside of it. Those

who live largely in this chapter—Bennett, Barad, Latour, Rivers—have already contributed important work in this area, work that demands we re-think responsibility and blame, but it is work, nevertheless, that I move to extend more directly to the agents of murder and other social problems. It is work, further, that I seek to continue to put squarely in the domain of rhetoric via the new spaces in which persuasion happens. The new materialist rhetorician is concerned with a rhetoric, which attempts to “trace and understand the relations of bodies—human and nonhuman, organic and inorganic, vegetable and mineral—in the production of rhetoric” (3.1). This new materialist rhetoric asks, “How do all things (objects, constructs, bodies) relate, and how do those relations produce effects?” (3.1). While we often think of murder as a study for sociologists or criminologist, we need another kind of study of murder that doesn’t repeat histories we have already rehearsed. Murder is, then, a rhetorical problem, a question of communication, persuasion, and distributed events. While it is not often that murder happens between strangers. Research suggests that 75% of the murders that happened in 2013<sup>75</sup> happened between people who knew each other, and thus inside a web of relations, which often involves a dispute, an argument, language, and now the nonhuman digital actors in which our lives daily interact. Gries’ important work lays a groundwork for defining rhetoric in the framework of a new materialist agency along with other contemporary rhetoricians thinkers who are wrestling with agency. Karilyn Kohrs Campbell defines agency as “communal, social, cooperative, and participatory” (3). Carl G. Herndl and Adela C. Licona further describe agency as arising “from the intersection of material, (con)textual, and ideological conditions and practices (14) along with Carolyn Miller who calls agency “the kinetic energy of rhetorical performance” (137). Marilyn Cooper further invites us to “experience ourselves as causal agents” impacted by other

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<sup>75</sup> Statistics obtained from M. Planty, *Third Party Involvement in Violent Crime, 1993-1999* (Washington, DC: Bureau of Justice Statistics Special Report, 2002).

nonhuman causal agents (437). Gries follows these developments of rhetorical agents and makes a move to characterize it as a more of a “dance, in which material entities and humans project towards each other and can be construed as effecting and extending intentional states” (69). What I want to add to this long list of important work on rhetorical agency is a motion to see murder<sup>76</sup> as happening in a collective of digital-rhetorical agents, like Facebook and Twitter, where each is able to persuade and resonate as a part of the assemblage, and that to see murder and violence, in this way, is to listen in on a host of new actors that may otherwise go silent, if we maintain old models of rhetorical study.

Politically, rhetorical agency is hard to prove, messy and chaotic, suggesting no concrete human to convict or put in prison, but we must “embrace the uncertainty” (Gries 2) of this new materialist method—if researchers wish to understand a world or event in the world that is complex and messy, “then we’re going to have to teach ourselves to think, to practice, to relate, and to know new ways” (Fleckenstein et al. 2). In particular, if we want to understand how deeply embedded something like murder is, especially in networked culture, then we must do so openly by resisting interpretation and certainty.

## **5.10 RESPONSIBILITY**

As I close, I want to posit a few uncomfortable notions. First, whatever killed Omar Islam that night did so in a collective of actors, human and non, each with their own set of histories,

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<sup>76</sup> For more like this, see Bruno Latour’s “On Technical Mediation—Philosophy, Sociology, Genealogy.”



theories, ideologies, and relationality. While I have barely begun to scratch the surface of how an assemblage comes to kill, and while many questions remain or persist, I still want to maintain that seeing murder in this way, as an assemblage of actors, is not just a scholarly activity for its own sake. As Isabelle Stengers so adamantly reminds us “goodwill is not sufficient,” for we are scholars in a university and for Stengers that means we should more seriously take up “the task of a university” whose role is “the creation of the future, so far as rational thought, and civilized modes of appreciation, can affect the issue” (“A Plea for Slow Science”). For Latour, Rivers, Barad, Stengers, Bennett, Gries, and now me and my work, this challenge is hinged upon the present new materialist rhetorical concerns and its rapidly evolving sensitivity to more and different actors. Right now, I do think the task is to describe and to do so slowly and openly. An openness that is not just merely an exercise, but that has a method toward being able to see more actors in their relations.

Second, as our lives are increasingly lived in participatory online media environments like Facebook, we must consider not only how this changes identities, relationships, and daily activity, but how these digital actors participate in and become consequential to violent or political events<sup>77</sup>. Murder is not only manifested online, but made more possible through the informatics and networks of sites like Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, etc). Indeed Alex Galloway has warned of the perils of online protocols, networks, and coding. Even while these new cultural informatics are decentralized, control still exists, contagiously and agentially so. He uses the example of terrorist networks. There is the more recent example of terrorist recruiting through online Twitter networks, where organization prey on popular or specific hashtags in order to more widely circulate their visual and digital recruitment propaganda (another book entirely).

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<sup>77</sup> See “The Role of Digital Media: The Upheavals in Egypt and Tunisia” by Phillip N. Howard and Muzammil M. Hussain for a look at how digital assemblages contribute to political change.

John Arikquilla and David Ronfedlt have written extensively of what they call the “hierarchy-network conflict,” which is the ineffectual legal and political clash between networks and hierarchies. Governments or bureaucracy vs. distributed networks and distributes assemblages, which includes those networks. What they suggest is that “hierarchies have a difficult time fighting networks” and that “it takes networks to fight networks” (qtd in Galloway 205). Networks are not villainous and dark even as this title has suggests, but rather our attempts to interrupt networked events and structures must also be networked; they must intervene in and flow through networks—networks fight networks.

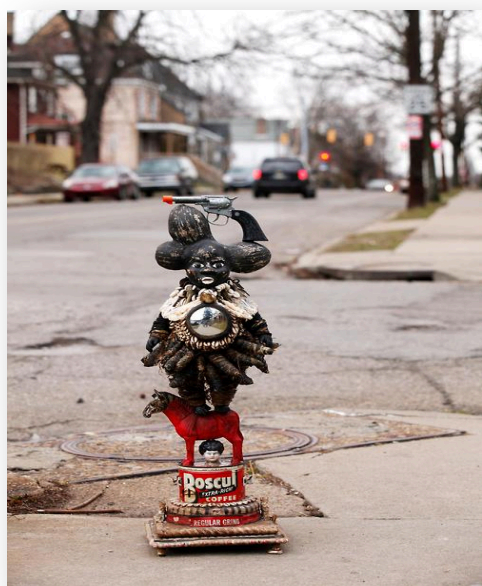
I close, then, with a recent example: Pittsburgh Mayor, Bill Peduto, was cornered on a live news broadcast asking what he plans to do about all the murders in Pittsburgh. “Do we have a murder problem” one journalist asked? Peduto said, “we do not,” he replied. There is violence in some localized neighborhoods because of gangs and drugs, but we have hired a gang task force to remedy this problem. Yet, as my research illustrates, in a network culture and digital murder assemblage, there are no gangs patrolled hierarchically by a leader who issues commands in an organized top down kind of structure. The system of violence is decentralized. Even the word “gang” and the way we commonly think of it is *outmoded*. The violence erupting out of these new networks is usually of a personal and interpersonal nature, carried out over many years through a deep set of actors<sup>78</sup>. It is not the result of strategic plots for mass rings of drug business; it is not even the result of a misfire in the network; it is a sign that the network is running smoothly. In this way, this chapter opens up possibilities for responding to murder, by methodologically rethinking, re-collecting, and re-assembling the participatory actors of public

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<sup>78</sup> See “The Killing Years” for their data on murder in Pittsburgh as “peer violence.”

events and thereby blurring distinctions between what is civic, public and private, human and non, intentional, personal and political.

While I have focused mainly on the agency of networks and high-traffic sites like Facebook, there are many more actors to trace and re-assemble. The gun, for instance, plays a deep and complex role in the formation of violence. It is both an idea that seizes the



**Figure 32: "Pistol Unwhipped" by Vanessa German**

assemblage, but also an image and discourse that is spread vibrationally through the networks. Indeed, the gun is talked about long before it is ever in the pocket of the boy who uses it. As local Pittsburgh artist and activist, Vanessa German, writes, "we must unwhip ourselves from the pistol" (German interview) As a creative and critical response, she designed the sculpture "Pistol Unwhipped." I first encountered it sitting alone, as it sits here, on a street corner in Homewood, a

forgotten neighborhood in Pittsburgh. German regularly placed it on sidewalks in neighborhoods of violence to see what conversations and chatter might ensue around it. She named it "Pistol Unwhipped" because she had hoped that the sculpture would "unwhip" someone—that is, she hoped this sculpture might imbue the gun with some other meaning, something lighter, sillier. Right now, she said, many of the young men in Homewood are "whipped or whupped by the pistol." They are in love with, she said, "it's shiny"—the sleek, curvature, and the power it grips over them. German called the gun a juju or fetishized gun-object, so powerful, dawned in all black. The gun is made and composed as an

object of allure, and, as a fetishized object, a magical object. In our conversation about the gun, German began talking about a murder that had just happened on her street, which would have been in 2012. She said, referring to the gun involved that it became like a “kind of fever, and then a second limb,” a phantom limb. For German, the gun has become inextricable to African American male identity, which is why it is reached for, caressed, always-at-hand, and there for the taking.

Another still silenced and powerful actor in the murder assemblage is drugs. This powerful non-human agent also seizes the assemblage in ways objectified and visualized in digital networks, but also in ways physical and mental. While I think a study of how drugs become aestheticized and alluring, materially resonant, is important, I shy away from here for the grand-narrative it so easily induced about inner-city murder. If it’s not gangs, it’s drugs. In a new materialist framework, drugs are one aspect of the assemblage, but there are still many more, and I take those “missing masses” up as the silent actors.

And yet, Stenger’s plea haunts me still, “goodwill is insufficient.” Once I traced murder as assemblaged, the question was, what could be done? If I cannot change the laws and cannot myself re-imagine human intentionality for the whole world’s understanding—what can I do? While I do think new materialist rhetoric is wildly important for upsetting and re-creating diagrams of our worlds and events, and more scholarship is merging each day to open pathways into this important work, I also want to emphasize rhetoric as looking for the alternative response to public and social problems. In my next chapter, I proceed from two impetuses: 1) Galloway’s insistence that networks must fight networks and 2) German’s creative-critical response to the young black man’s relationship with the gun. In forging these two, I ask, what can be done if we are to take seriously the idea that our work can do something affirmative in the world? For me,

this began with the making of a digital object that can circulate in the murder networks as an affective interruption to the assemblage. I call this digital object radical practice in rhetorical empathy, and while I will talk at length about its importance as a practice, I want to emphasize here that it also function as an object for and toward the network to interrupt flows and to be a new response to the violence. What I have meant to highlight throughout this chapter, then, is our own responsibility—as in, our *ability* to respond. Through looking at the digital murder assemblage, I have tried to increase rhetoric’s ability to respond through intellectual engagement. In the next chapter, I will take on this response-ability through affective engagement.

## 6.0 “CALL ME A MURDERER”: USING DIGITAL MAKING TO PRACTICE RHETORICAL EMPATHY

“According to rumor, Demosthenes copies Thucydides’ history of the Peloponnesian war eight times. But what has happened here? What form of relation has been formed in the movement between Thucydides’ writing (the model) and the body of Demosthenes (the copy)? Has Demosthenes internalized certain stylistic or ethical virtues of the work? Has this copy provoked him in a fashion that overcomes distinctions between the imitator and his models and inspires in him a capacity to respond.”

—John Muckelbauer, *The Future of Invention*.

“But put identification and division ambiguously together, so that you cannot know for certain just where one ends and the other begins, and you have the characteristic invitation to rhetoric.”

—Kenneth Burke, *A Rhetoric of Motives*

“Place is a story, and stories are geography, and empathy is first of all an act of imagination, a storyteller’s art, and then a way of travelling from here to there.”

—Rebecca Solnit, *The Faraway Nearby*

In the last chapter, I examined relays of agential influence between non-human actors like Facebook and Twitter, on murder and violence, and how they then play a complicit role in the contagious spread of other material actors like affect and language. The relationship between the act of murder and the digital-social networks is essential to understanding how murder-events happen in distributed environments and through new digital logics. However, as I move toward this fifth, it is the reversal of that relationship I am after through a question of *intervention*. If

certain kinds of murder-events happen through distributed online networks, and thus online networks are important agents in many murders, then should the intervention also take the form and logic of those online networks? Put differently, if the streets are dead capital, as Raley suggest, then our interventions must also turn way from the street and into the network.

## 6.1 PRACTICE-BASED RESEARCH

To this end, I present a practice and theory chapter; by which I mean, this chapter speaks mostly of an interaction between the *practice* of working with and inhabiting public archives through digital media production, and the subsequent *theory* of rhetorical empathy that develops and emerges out of that practice. I see this practice-theory relationship, or as Mark Amerika calls it, “practiced-based theory,” as both a method for producing a new kind of scholarship in relation to digital media and archives, and as an articulation of *rhetorical empathy*. Together, these work towards an intervention into the murder networks. What is happening to theory, asserts Amerika, can be found in the “efflorescence of innovative, practice-based research projects” conducted in the digital arts and humanities (Amerika xiii). I have tried to take seriously the idea that the hybrid between theorizing and practicing can expand our concepts of what it means to produce scholarship in our digital culture. Practice and theory reciprocally advance, apply, stretch, and remix each other.

I began this chapter, then, long before these words were written with the born digital performative and conceptual piece I have since called “Rhetorical Empathy: An Imaginative Inquiry,” which was made in an attempt to both intervene in the murder networks and to think,

through practice, rhetorical relations anew. The piece itself was produced in collaboration with James Broadnax, a convicted murderer, myself, and his niece, and it unfolds over a single interview where James recounts why he committed murder, and his niece recounts how she viewed her uncle. I use my own voice to performatively inhabit James' voice, which began as an experimental practice in how to use digital methods and digital affordances to redraw rhetorical lines of division, and which resulted in rhetorical empathy, an idea I will more fully explicate later in this chapter. By beginning this chapter with the making of the digital piece, both at the level of writing and at the level of invention, I also want to highlight my practice of using digital production as a way to extend inquiry. By inquiry, I mean a question or investigation to which I may not have or ever find an answer to, but I also mean it as a Latourian "inquiry" into our modes of existence. For Latour, inquiry becomes a positive or affirmative reaction to a question. It is to ask and then additively to wonder about the inquiry through practiced-based production. One way in which Latour does this is via technology and digital art or digital innovation<sup>79</sup>. For him, art and science or art and politics are in collaboration, especially as affirmative modes to inquiry. The digital has the capacity, in this case, to explore the question through the affirmative act of making and digital production.

When I began digitally experimenting with my voice and James' voice, I did not listen for an underlying meaning or purpose. I listened more emergently for the inquiries our voices could extend, perform, or respond to through digital modes. I listened at first in real-time, then I listened more slowly using playback and pause narrowing in on one syllable, words, or breathe. During the listening process, I, almost

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<sup>79</sup> See his companion website to his book: *Modes of Inquiry*. <http://www.modesofexistence.org/> where he usual digital-visual modes and digital web presence to more fully advance his inquiry in modes of existence. This not only invites and experiential relationship to his inquiry, but it also invites users to participate and contribute to his opening inquiry.

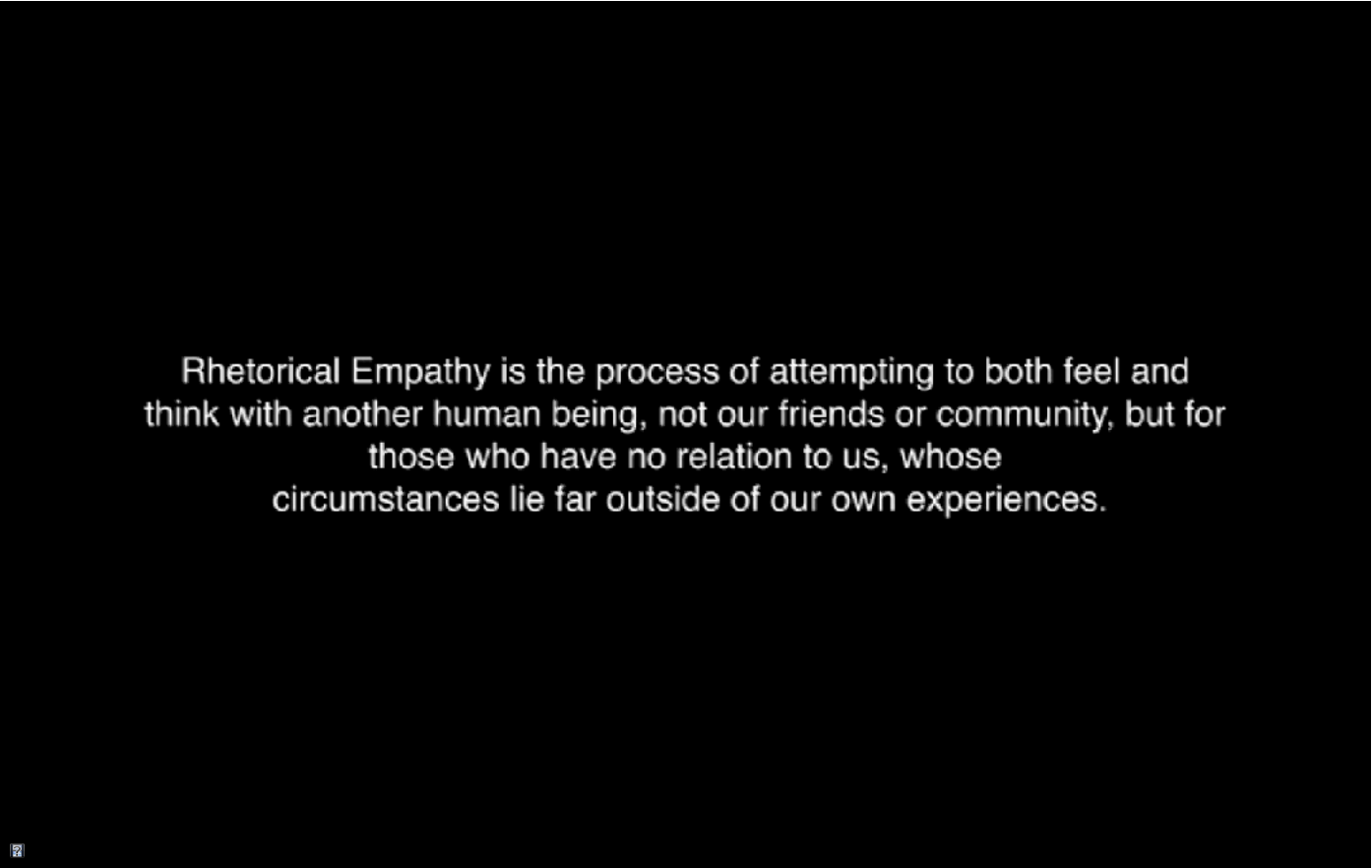


intuitively, began to mouth the words and syllables in James' style of speaking. Then I began to record myself speaking *with* James while he spoke into my ear. Repeating the process of real-time speaking, slower speaking using playback and pause, and finally, repetitive speaking to capture on breathe or one syllable. When I began listening, then, I did so with two interrelated inquiries: 1) how can I make an intervention as a digital rhetorician<sup>80</sup> and digital producer? 2) What affects can be felt, experienced, and composed *through* and *with* digital production?

And so this chapter moves quite differently than most because it began first with the making of the digital and performative piece, and it was only in that making and composing that I was able to come to the argument that follows. This, of course, while unusual, is not necessarily a new method. Following other maker theories and compositionists, it asks what happens when we begin with making/composing—digital making—as a mode for thinking and extending humanistic inquiry? Having said that, I invite readers to listen to the digital piece before proceeding in what this digital inquiry helped to co-produce.

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<sup>80</sup> Digital rhetoric is ever-changing and expanding, overlapping with the digital humanities, but at this moment I'm defining "digital rhetoric" as the use of digital production and digital composition to extend, supplement, or invent rhetorical inquiries. My own experimental project here is both digital and rhetorical. Digital because it uses the digital to make and extend a rhetorical inquiry about the redrawing of lines of division and identification. Being rhetorical it also touches the ethical, the political, and the human.



Rhetorical Empathy is the process of attempting to both feel and think with another human being, not our friends or community, but for those who have no relation to us, whose circumstances lie far outside of our own experiences.

Figure 33: Video | Rhetorical Empathy: An Imaginative Inquiry

#### RHETORICAL EMPATHY: AN IMAGINATIVE INQUIRY

In this digital conceptual piece, I speak repetitiously *with* James as he recounts why he committed murder, and I bordered it with layered echoes of his niece's voice. This makes the piece multi-voiced and multi-layered inviting different narratives and different affects at each level. I used public archival materials, my own voice, an intimate interview with his niece, and digital technologies, to re-imagine how my voice, her voice, and James' voice could interact. In digital production, we must first ask questions about who or what is archived in public spaces and online databases, then we must ask who and what is not archived in public spaces, and why? Whose voices and whose images do we regularly encounter and whose are silenced? As Paul D. Miller suggest, "we're only as good as our archive" (046). This is a simple concept about how our source material directly influences what can be made or reused. This also harkens back to Michel Foucault's sentiment about the archive making what is sayable enunciable—the archive

dictates what is sayable, in Foucault's formulation. I am reworking the archive as not a prior determination of what's sayable but an inventional practice re-working what's sayable.

In Miller's formulation, through practices of reuse we can make different future enunciable. In the "Rhetorical Empathy" piece, I took a recording that was archived publically through many news sources, and asked, what happens if I try to inhabit, reuse, or remix this piece into something else? How does this retain and activate cultural memory and public history differently?

## 6.2 RHETORICAL EMPATHY

What this practice helped to develop—through minute divestments in making and thinking—is a new practice of what I have called rhetorical empathy, which asks, how can one feel *with* and *think* with another through the strategic rhetorical and pedagogical use of digital recording and digital affordabilities? Before answering this question more fully, I want to highlight why I chose empathy and how I'm using empathy and the different ways other mediums and genres have previously tried to think about the ethical act of empathy.

First, I want to foreground empathy as a particularly fecund modality precisely because it shows up often in the scholarship<sup>81</sup> as a causal explanation for inner-city murder. It is lack of empathy, many scholars remark, which causes youth to devalue human life. "If they could just

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<sup>81</sup> See: C. Jason Throop, "Latitudes of Loss: On the Vicissitudes of Empathy." *American Ethnologist*. Vol 37, No. 4, pp. 771-782; Nils Bubandt's, "From the Enemy's Point of View: Violence, Empathy, and the Ethnography of Fakes." *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 24, Issue 3, pp. 553-588; Douglas Hollan and Jason Throop, "Whatever Happened to Empathy? Introduction." *Ethos* 36(4) 385-401.

feel with those they are killing, they might not be so eager to kill,” (May 2) thinking of their subject as themselves. This thinking has philosophical roots as well. The reason, Rousseau said, we don’t all partake of killing is because we don’t want to be killed ourselves, “I am, so to speak, in him, it is in order not to suffer that I do not want him to suffer. I am more interested in him for love of myself, and the reason for the precept is in nature itself, which inspires in me the desire of my well-being in whatever place I feel my existence” (qtd in Birmingham 2006: 42). The conclusion has been, then, in communities where murder happens often, empathy must also be absent. Yet, as this dissertation has suggested, our narratives for understanding murder are no longer sufficient, especially in the age of the online network and a distributed understanding of responsibility. In the same breath, we can see that empathy, as causal explanation for murder may, too, be insufficient. Denise Hawkins<sup>82</sup> notes that 40% of Pittsburgh inner-city murders happen between youth who know each other. They are interpersonal killings, between friends, lovers, and in-group community members, where empathy is thought to be strongest. The murders were not that of an Other, of a rival gang, but of a friend or community member, and so as I began this inquiry, I also began by assuming that I should speak to empathy or its lack in the space where I saw it and felt it most: in those communities distant from murder. “Distancing” is something many empathy scholars cite as a problematic indication of being unable to understand another, and it may lie more distinctly with those of us who consider ourselves outside of the lived experience of inner-city murder. Put differently, Kristi Ratcliffe asks a somewhat similar question in *Rhetorical Listening*, “Why is it so hard to listen to one another? Why is it so hard to identify with one another when we feel excluded?” (3). She names this a “cross-cultural” distance (1). There may be, as Renato Rosaldo has argued, “particular ways of being in the world

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<sup>82</sup> “The Killing Years” by Denise Hawkins in *Pitt Magazine*, Summer 2014.

that are foreclosed to people who have not first had access to similar such experiences in the context of their own lives” and which thus work to draw lines of division around us (771). These lines can be difficult and even impossible to traverse, which is why I turn to the marriage of rhetoric and empathy. Rhetorical empathy is not all or nothing affair, nor is it necessarily based on analogous experiences or easy identification. It is instead “a process that is temporally arrayed, intersubjectively constituted, and culturally patterned” (771).

Because of this, empathy is a striking modality, as Jody Halpern makes clear, in that it is not based simply on assumed shared feeling states. It is, instead, an imaginative, cognitive, affective and communicative process that “involves discerning aspects of a [persons’s]...experiences that might otherwise go unrecognized” (94). It is in contradistinction to sympathy, which the OED has defined as “an affinity between certain things by virtue of which they are similarly or correspondingly affected” (qtd in Halpern 568). Contemporary uses of sympathy assume similarity between people. In sympathy, one shares the feelings of another person by focusing on oneself, on how he/she would feel in the other’s situation. Yet rhetorical empathy demands something else. It can be applied and practiced in non-analogous contexts, where affective states, discourses, and experiences are dissimilar. It proceeds on a sentiment of “non-similarity” (568). Because of this it requires an “imaginative inquiry” (568) or *imaginative leap* into the individuality and particularity of another person. One must leave oneself and attempt to imagine another’s life. This requires an act of imagination on both the affective and intellectual level, and it bespeaks a long and difficult process, which begins by feeling with and thinking with someone who is not our friends or loved ones, but those who have “no relation to us, whose circumstances lie far outside of our own” (Landsberg 223).

Scholars of cinema studies have pursued the imaginative leap empathy requires in light of

technological developments in the last half-century. Alison Landsberg has written extensively on the value of “prosthetic memories” made possible through mediated representations like film and experiential museums. These mediums can offer viewers an experience they did not live through and thus invite them to take on a prosthetic memory, which becomes like an “artificial limb worn on the body” and can work to effectively produce empathic connections through those memories (222). In Landsberg’s formulation, there are two chief reasons why film is the more useful experiential medium to museums or literary novels for pursuing this imaginative aspect. First, film particularly presents as a more commodified form that makes the experiences widely available to those who may live far outside of the characters or lives being portrayed, and thus offers a memory or viewing experience of another, that may otherwise not entered the imagination of the viewer. Second is the element of cinematic identification, where a film can ask a viewer to identify with someone through the “point-of-view” shot, which is actually two shots taken together. The first shot shows what the character is looking at, and the second shot, the camera is inside the character’s eyes, so we see exactly as she sees. “Point-of-view shots force us to look at the world through someone else’s eyes, from their literal perspective, thus pulling us into the action of the film, and into the mental and emotion life of the protagonist” (225). In doing so, film, for Landsberg, gives viewers access to another’s mind and motivation.

Literary theorists have similarly argued that the act of reading trains empathetic ethical thinking as well. Martha Nussbaum asserts that the act of reading a novel can also be a mediated representation in the training of ethical thinking. Pointing to Dickens as the best of example of this, she says, he takes us into “the lives of those who are different in circumstances from ourselves and enables us to understand how similar hopes and fears are differently realized in different social circumstances” (66). Both Landsberg and Nussbaum posit that the act of ethical

thinking and empathy lies in the audience's reception of the filmic or literary piece. Nussbaum does further extend this ethical experience into one that can be first felt by the writer. She says of Henry James, "The artist can assist us by cutting through the blur of habit and the self-deceptions habit ebets; his conduct [the artist's] is ethical conduct because it strives to come to terms with reality in a world that drinks from reality" (59).

Without downplaying the importance of both of these mediums and genres for eliciting ethical thinking from their audience, I would like to make the case that rhetorical theory married to emergent digital production can offer a perhaps more powerful intervention towards ethical thinking. What makes amateur digital production and practice so fecund for ethical thinking, and its relationship to rhetorical empathy, has to do both with its broad access (we have more and more amateur or DIY makers), and its capacity to turn those makers into what digital cultural theorist, Mark Amerika, calls "artist-mediums" (4). The subject of amateur / DIY pedagogies and theories has received more attention lately, both in and outside of rhetoric and composition. Yet little has been written about how increased access and increased digital production repositions, or at least, helps us re-conceptualize the relationship as one of artist-medium. Understanding how DIY producers position themselves and how they have the potential to enter into relationships with different fictional or non-fictional subjects is crucial to a larger understanding of how digital production might shape individual relations, social interconnection, and a larger practice of ethical thinking.

Spectatorship is being re-thought through contemporary digital-cultural theorists, because in current digital media production, the audience is no longer inert receiver of a fully formed artifact, but enters into a relationship of co-maker. What this enables, further, is the element of practice-based research, which is the "second-tier" mode of co-production and reflection. It is no

longer simply about how the audience is affected, because the audience is no longer passive, and so it becomes about how the audience is affected through the process of co-production. The artist, student, or researcher undertakes a practice of creatively and critically working with the media and digital technologies, and chief among this practice is that the artist becomes the medium. He or she inhabits through her own voice or body, practicing with the media, recording and editing, in order to see what output or thinking might emerge from this practice. E.L. Doctorow reminds us that we write “to find out what we are writing” (qtd in *Amerika* xii). Similarly, we digitally produce to find out, not only what we are making, but who we are becoming. Crucial to this process is that the digital producer works partly performatively and partly as a medium to figure out what he or she thinks, is “becoming,” or inventing (xvii). In this practice, the artist-medium chooses a person or character, just as the logic of cinema or novels works, and inhabits parts of their language, images, video, text as an improvisational performative practice recording or otherwise capturing this inhabitation. In-between the “transliminal space” of inhabiting the character, the artist herself might spill out, and the result is the inventive importance of that in-between space. This process is fluid, the producer might move in and out of identifications, forging some kind of creative act through the interstices.

The particular qualities of working with digital technologies—the recording, re-recording, the hours of listening, the editing, the zooming in and out for a particular breath or sound of the character, the way the rhythm of the voice of another can inhabit the rhythm of your own voice through repeated listening—all work together to situate the producer in a particular position in relation to their subject’s story. Speaking particularly of the method and process that began this chapter, I used audio editing and recording software, Audacity, to listen to James’ voice repeatedly and then record my own with his on a different audio editing track. Along with



this, I used post-production software, Adobe After Effects, to match our voices to a soundwave. In other words, while digital technologies themselves can be employed in multiple ways and towards multiple goals, it is still the case that digital recording and editing, along with the vast amount of audio visual public archives, create a particular vantage point from which to not only see the world, but embody different perspectives in the world. I am arguing for an account of digital production that enters into a rhetorical figuration, where the goal is to literally reimagine rhetorical lines of division and distinction, but also that the digital itself can be a potent rhetorical instrument for positioning scholars, makers, students, and DIY practitioners to confront the lives of others through their own digital production practice.

So while watching a film or reading a book can allow us the experience of seeing from someone else's eyes, the experience of composing with digital technologies and our own self can make that experience even more acute in several ways. First, there is an intimate process of what I am referring to as rhetorical identification that happens as a result of long hours spent with the voice of another. Second, there is the role of performance the artist-medium takes on in working with the voice and images of another human being. Third, the "imaginative leap" that empathy theorists have argued is the hardest, and sometimes impossible part of empathy might become more literal and more embodied—that is, more able to be imagined—through the process of working with the self and digital technology.

### 6.3 PERFORMANCE + PROCESS

As a way into theorizing rhetorical empathy, I'll start with the practice of performance. Performance has become a fecund method for working with digital technology. As Miller suggests, digital technologies invite us into relationships of live performance and on-the-fly improvisation. In seriously playing with James' and his niece's voice, I was interested in what could be done with their voices beyond simple playback. I saw a potential to enter into a new form of relationality with their voices. Through performance, practice, and my own embodiment, I attempted to redraw lines of relationality between me and James and me and his niece. Performance, in the words of Della Pollack,

“is a promissory act...not because it can only promise possible change but because it catches its participants—often by surprise—in a contract with possibility: with imagining what might be, could be, should be...performance is one way of practicing the interdependence of human selves and of seeing through the past into an as-yet unspoken future” (2).

Exploring performance as an embodied and promissory act, then, which can practice new modes of pathways to memory, identity, and digital potential, I employ digital technology performatively as a conceptual attempt to redraw lines of intentionality, individuality, and community through our voices and the collusion of our soundwave outputs. This has the potential to extend performance and invent new theories of performance through practice. In speaking *with* James, I performatively inhabit his words, sighs, winces, breaths, and statements through my own body and digital recording affordabilities. The embodied experience and transmission of James' confession into and through my own voice is an interaction between voices that might otherwise not interact. The nature of audio and digital editing requires that I

spend long hours interacting with James' words, replaying, and re-recording, in order to try to speak and breathe with him. It is through this new notion of digital performance that I imagine a contemporary relationship to archival materials—one of reuse—where archival materials can be re-animated and performed for different futures.

Part of what performance allows me to do is take seriously that in including my body and my voice as part of the practice of empathy, I can know my subject differently, perhaps even more intimately. Or at the very least, it allows me to ask questions about the relationship between digital technology, embodied practice, and knowledge. Performance, in this way, becomes a critical methodology for reusing archives and re-inhabiting archives. It presents as another way to know, as Diana Taylor opens up, through performance as a way to discover how voices might speak to one another and myself for new forms of relationality, creativity, and care (xix).

Performance, then, and the digital technologies used to enable the performance, help open into a new concept of rhetorical empathy. I call this empathy rhetorical because I mean it as more than just the ability to feel with another, alone, but as the rhetorical practice of both feeling and thinking with another through and with the strategic use of digital technologies. I also maintain that this empathy is rhetorical—in a traditional sense—because it contributes to and emerges from a process of making. What I think this new practice of rhetorical empathy can do is open another pathway into how scholars can imagine the practice of digital rhetoric. Through Kenneth Burke, who thought rhetoric to be both that which can kill, but also that which has the capacity to heal, we can further develop rhetorical empathy. He endowed it with the qualities of union and human collectivity. He writes, “while the order of killing is an aspect of rhetoric, rhetoric must also “lead us through the scramble, the wrangle of the market place, the flurries

and flareups of the human barnyard, the give and take, the wavering line of pressure and counterpressure, the logomachy, the onus of ownership, the war of nerves, the war” (Burke 56). As Burke explains, alongside divisive rhetoric, there must also be a rhetoric of cooperation and union—what Burke called a “rhetoric of identification,” which comes from, in his view, the possibility of the word—or, in this case, the voice—as a counter to the world. In Burke’s framework, identification shifts from what cinema scholars refer to as seeing from the same point of view as a character and thus identifying to making a rhetorical choice with the interests of another. Rhetorical identification, then, is the strategic rhetorical act of “identifying with,” which is to become, “consubstantial”—that is, to remain as two substances—me and James or me and James’ niece—but conjoined, separated, as two, and yet still joined through the digital and rhetorical drawing of lines and composing of voices. To begin the practice of rhetoric with identification, remarks Burke, is to “confront the implication of division in the first place” (22). It is to think of rhetoric, and specifically, in this case, digital rhetoric, as the work of confronting division, and through means both creative and critical, to try to create unity out of division.

With the addition of the third voice, his niece, I invite a multi-leveled identification process. At various moments throughout the piece, one must struggle to hear and struggle to choose whose voice to attune to and whose to ignore—her voice being one of generosity toward James. While I didn’t speak *with* her in this piece, her voice still represents a misunderstood position and a difficult leap to make in terms of empathy. How does one also feel *with* her? What are the repercussions? Yet her voice is not merely representational, as it interacts with James’ voice and my own, it comes to be intimately entangled with our voices and the effect of the piece.

One specific technique used in the Rhetorical Empathy piece, along with performance, is an emergent kind of mimesis. Mimesis has typically been, according to affect scholars and cinema scholars, the transmission of affect from the face on the screen to the face of the spectator through the strategic use of the close-up: “with the camera trained on another’s face we are afforded intimate contact with that person’s emotion life” (Landsberg 224). As her face registers pain, the audience feels a response in kind. I mean mimesis as both traditional and innovative. In my piece with James, I transform mimesis from the screen’s capability into a more intimate version, which uses my own body as the medium. This kind of mimesis is more akin to digital inhabitation. I attempt to breathe with James and sigh with James, as a literal attempt to feel with James through the intensities that can pass body-to-body. I then recorded my attempts, which number over twenty, as I begin the process of rhetorical empathy. This use of mimesis attempts to “get a hold of something by means of” copying and imitation, not just of words, but of sighs, and other recorded bodily outputs for a sensuous and palpable connection (Taussig 224). Jennifer Bean further explains that this kind of mimesis has the ability to stress the “reflexive, not the reflective” because it brings the subject into “intimate contact with the object, or other, in a tactile, performative and sensuous form of perception, the result of which is an experience that transcends the traditional subject-object dichotomy” (225). Despite there being times that this process is extremely difficult and sometimes even impossible—that even as I used the method of mimesis, there were some sighs that were too deep to mimic, some language too hard to say—what remains important is that the process has begun. This part of the process is intimate and even uncomfortable, for I am asking the nigh impossible and the certainly uncomfortable, can one feel with, can one make that imaginative leap of rhetorical empathy for someone who is juridically named a murderer?

The nature of using audio editing to perform mimesis required I spend long hours with James' words, his barely audible sighs, and the cracking in his voice. I can, because of how long I spent with James, tell the moment his voice begins to break in this interview, a moment that was not perceptible to me upon even the 3<sup>rd</sup> passive listening of this interview, but is now undeniable. It breaks when he asks about his family; it breaks again when he sings a popular rap song, "I know this game is crazy, it's crazier than it's ever been..." What follows from this is an immersion in and among James' obstinacies and rhythms, his "refusals as much as his invitations" (Seigworth and Greg 1). When I fall asleep or sit quietly reading, I will hear James' rhythm and intonation in my head, my own voice infected with his in my less conscious moments of speaking. The song he sings near the end of this interview rings in my head nearly daily now. This has affected me, changed me, and implicated me.

## 6.4 IMPLICATION

Here, more overtly, I want to foreground that one of my central assertions throughout this project has been that *I am* implicated. I mention myself in the opening to this dissertation, and now more directly again here, as I move towards its end. I am wholly implicated, especially and because of my method, which posits murder on an ontologically flat diagram, where all things must be held together for their relations. In that diagram, I too, must figure in. I, too, am part of the relations. And like rhetorical empathy, I seek an implication that is both intellectual and emotional. To be implicated, Isabelle Stengers remarks, is to take the first step in un-doing bifurcation. Implication is a "folding into" of one into another. It is to say that there is no longer a split into two. This does not mean that the researcher tries to get beneath the problem, to only

look at the mechanics of the rhetoric of murder, for instance, but it means, rather, that the researcher, the producer, the artist, me, might allow the subject at hand another interpretation through the role of implication. Stengers argues that this is what the poet allows—to look for what in murder and violence (or any subject for inquiry) responds when “interrogated in another way” (Latour, “What is Given in Experience?” 6). “For we must understand that the bird is an organism that bets on life, and so too is the inquiring scientist” (Latour, “What is Given in Experience?” 7). That is to say, one is in the other, or at the least, one must cause one to be implicated with the other. Stengers’ goal is to undo bifurcation, to undo any delineating of the world into two distinct categories by beginning with implication, and allowing that process to live actively in the world.

“For genuine peace today,” writes Burke, “we must risk contamination with the enemy, or rather, we must give full expression to the voice of the enemy, not excluding it, but seeking to assign it an active place in an ultimate order” (263). There is a way in which in the last century the murderer has become the enemy to the cultural imagination, functioning as discursively distant, and more like a virus to an otherwise smoothly running system. By making murder a public spectacle, the media have failed, on the one hand, “according to Joel Black, “to convey the private and intimate nature of death, and they fail on the other hand to make violence sufficiently sensation for their increasingly desensitized and anesthetized viewers” (42). And this does not stop with the media. As for Legal and medical experts, “their special interest in murder is belied by a pretense of professional disinterest in which their authority rests” (42). And, of course, finally, there is the most egregious paradox that as the most hated crime, murder is routinely published by execution—“by killing the killer” (Black 42), where the American criminal justice system takes on the role of the murderer.

Instead of the media, the disinterest of the medical or legal expert, then, I have invited another relationship to both murder and the murderer. Here, rhetoric is not about persuasion, but about new forms of relationality. As Nathaniel Rivers says in “Latourian Provocations,” rhetoric is about redrawing the lines of relationality between humans and non-humans. Given this kind of implication, or risk of contamination, I return to the questions I opened with concerning what would happen *if*? I began with a public archival piece of James Broadnax, a convicted murder, admitting his guilt in a murder. What sprung up around his confession was a slue of hateful sentiments about how evil and demonic James is for not only committing this murder, but for the way in which he confesses to it. As I listened, I did so emergently, not for the meanings or documentary possibilities it proffered, but for the possibilities it allowed, the inquiries it extended, and the new forms of rhetoric it created. What I am proposing is that current digital methods, by virtue of the substantial trace of inscription, the vast contemporary historical, public archive, and the role of recording devised, has a special capacity to bring us into intellectual and emotional contact with circumstances, voices, and discourses that lie well beyond our own lived experience, and in the process can invite us to confront, and enter into a relationship of co-responsibility, co-responsiveness, and commitment to one another. At its base, then, taking a cue from other creative-critical scholar before me—Erin Anderson and Jamie Bianco—I like to imagine this piece as a call to consider what it might mean for writers and rhetoricians to embrace digital archives and technologies as a way to explore possibilities for writing not only with words, but with the voices and visual traces of those archives (Anderson).

My rhetorical identification with James is delicate, which rests in part on a recognition of the profound differences between me and him, the profound divisions between us, and so, part of the rhetorical identification here also has to do with the limits of identification. The ethical call



comes as I try to make the imaginative leap to think with the another who I perhaps don't readily identify with, but which, in doing so, I can recognize more clearly both the distance and the difference.

## **6.5 ETHICAL + POLITICAL CONSEQUENCES**

In so doing, there are serious political consequences. As I said about my process in working with James: it was difficult and at times impossible to voice with him, but to stay with him in his humanity, no matter how difficult, is part of the intervention. To recognize both the distance and the difference, while maintaining a responsibility and commitment to another. Emmanuel Levinas invites and illuminates this kind of ethical response through his philosophy of how to live with the Other: "The I is responsible not only to know the other, or to share an understanding of the world which the Other also shares, but is responsible to respond to the very alterity of the Other" (qtd in Cohen 18). Digital production can help amplify and extend this philosophy through not only its potential to implicate its audience and viewers, but more strongly, through the close and intimate act of production, which offers a literal space for, not only hearing the voices of the Other, but also picturing and imagining a "response" to alterity. The practice itself can implicate the producer, the researcher, through this intimacy, or what Levinas calls the invitation to "proximity," which can be attained via the many modes of digital production. James' voice, for instance, is in my ear, and then in your ear, a voice that would usually not be heard by the public, a confession and public archival recording that might otherwise go unnoticed or dismissed as the "evil" voices of a murderer. Instead, I invite and enact a closeness and proximity that could otherwise not be achieved. The voice here, then,

“commands before all mimicry and verbal expression...it commands me not to remain indifferent to this death, to not let the other die alone”...that is, to respond to the “life of the other person, at the risk of being an accomplice in that person’s death...[or murder]...The alterity of the Other is the extreme point of the ‘thou shalt not kill’ and, in me, the fear of all the violence and usurpation that my existing, despite the innocence of its intentions, risk committing” (109-110). Despite that James’ is a murderer, I risk being an accomplice in order to take the ethical call, and in and through the practice, compassion emerges, in a tenuous expression captured and made possible through digitality. This intimacy is what works to foster the commitment and responsibility I feel towards James, the empathy, and yet we must maintain the balance of the entire murder project itself, that the emotional connection is one part of the process and it is difficult and at times impossible, which means the intellectual connection I make with James is equally important.

As Landsberg intimates in her argument, the political ramifications of empathetic practice touch on Chantal Mouffe’s new version of political action, where she defines citizenship—“not as a legal status, but a form of identification”(qtd in Landsberg 228). This is citizenship defined not as a possession of rights, but as an active commitment to another through “something to be constructed, not empirically given” (Mouffe 66). Here, I push beyond Landsberg’s argument to suggest that citizenship requires an active making—or, more preferably, the active digital practice—of a commitment to one another, all Others. Along these lines, I employ current digital methods, at the level of production, as a way to powerfully compose and actively participate in this commitment to another, even and especially if her experience is radically different than our own, as a more radical step toward thinking the digital and the ethical together. Digital production and practice more directly invites us to “confront those lives from which our impulse leads us to turn away, encourages us to take them on and let them become part of our own archive of

experience,” not as something familiar, nor something foreign either, but there for the practice of this kind of ethical commitment and citizenship (Landsberg 228). Intensifying Landsberg, I am arguing that because of increased access and increasing citizen and amateur makers and archivists, dominant digital practices and strategies may be deployed to serve a pedagogical function. It is in this way that the digital practices I have activated serve as a model for one way to begin practicing rhetorical empathy, digital intimacy, and rhetorical identification as pedagogical practices. They have the capacity to teach both the producer and the spectator how to begin the process of rhetorical empathy especially in the face of discursive and cultural distance, which encourages a process that might at least begin to develop empathy for those who are not us, in any capacity, and that might open the door for new lines of relationality and "radical movements in the future" (Landsberg 228).

As I move toward closing, I want to continue to highlight what remains most important about this project. It is the way in which the practice itself—the drafting, the experimenting, the scripting, the hours of active listening, the recording, editing, composing—the digital, in short—feeds back into scholarly inquiry. My experience in producing this piece exceeds my own human ends and offers itself as an extension of reflection and invention. Through the practice, I felt my relationship to James evolve and change, as I attempted to wince with him, anticipating the rhythms of his breath, and responding in kind to the urgencies of his speech in ways that felt incredibly present, in every sense of the term. When I began the rhetorical empathy experiments, I had only one simple idea—that empathy seemed absent on many levels—no theory as I’ve laid out to you her, no larger political and ethical consequences, and it was only in the practice of making, feeling, and watching the piece, that I felt my relationship change and my own inquiry into empathy expand through tiny divestments between making and thinking.

## 6.6 CONCLUSION

What I think this suggests is a kind of “publicness,” as Jenny Rice calls it, in our work and practice. She says, “we are rhetoricians,” not to police boundaries, but because we are trained and attuned to listening and intervening in the discourses of the publics (16). This is what Robert Arsen’s calls listening to the “everyday talk, which is where real activist work can be accomplished (2007). Underlining this publicness is the Critical Art Ensemble’s haunting claim that “The streets are dead capital” (qtd. in *Tactical Media* 1). This assertion is more a “subjective truth” (2) than an objective one, and hints at how a sensibility can be shared in online spaces, spaces that humans dwell in with more regularity than other spaces. The Critical Art Ensemble responds to their own assertion with critical and tactical media projects that are meant to change or interrupt currently flowing sensibilities, “the shift in revolutionary investments corresponds with a shift in the nature of power, which has removed itself from the streets and become nomadic” living online and in networks (2). What the Critical Art Ensemble asks us to consider is how interventions, scholarly or grassroots, must also enter the network, but not as grandiose revolutionary movements. Rather these are small “micropolitics of disruption” that might invite reflection and education (2).

So finally, after the making and thinking and the method of working with digital production towards rhetorical inquiry, I must end by considering a real intervention, for the piece itself does have the potential to reach an audience and affect them in ways seen and unforeseen. The Rhetorical Empathy piece itself will circulate in the networks of murder as a way of tactually interrupting normal agential flows. It is in this sense that I see my work not simply as a challenge to the negative ethical concerns, but also as an affirmative ethical response.

In raising the problem of intervention in digital networks, we are faced with the task, not simply of finding a problem and understanding a problem differently, where critique is one kind of scholarly exercise, but of refiguring scholarly intervention itself. As digital technologies become interlaced into our discipline and our practices, we can exercise rhetoric and ethics in new ways. We can make rhetorical empathy newly possible with and through our practices and processes with digital technologies, and yet, I do not want to end so enthusiastically, for much work remains to be done, and rhetorical empathy is only one such particularized concept, which only marks the beginning of a much longer ethical practice with our digital technologies.

## 7.0 EPILOGUE

“Worlds in miniature visually and physically possessed by the beholder and yet able to exercise their own agency.”

—Veronica Della Dora

“And most of all beware, even in thought, of assuming the sterile attitude of the spectator, for life is not a spectacle, a sea of grief is not a proscenium, a man who wails is not a dancing bear...”

—Aimé Césaire

I begin this conclusion with a quote by Aimé Césaire, which I first came across in Claudia Rankine’s lyric essay, *Don’t Let Me Be Lonely*. In it, Rankine pleads with us to not let her be lonely, to instead share in her grief, and to remember the pain that **some** Americans suffer every day. She critiques our cultural unwillingness to engage with difficult subjects and the ready substitution of diversion for that difficulty. She begins her essay by first alluding to the racially motivated murder of James Byrd, Jr. in 1998<sup>83</sup>, and her own anger that the then Governor of Texas, George W. Bush, couldn’t remember the details of the murder, which happened while he was in office. She writes, “I just find when the news comes on I switch the channel” (23). “Don’t like the world you live in,” Rankine continues, “choose one closer to the

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<sup>83</sup> James Byrd Jr. (May 2, 1949 – June 7, 1998) was an African-American who was murdered by three men, of whom at least two were white supremacists, in Jasper, Texas, on June 7, 1998. Shawn Berry, Lawrence Russell Brewer, and John King dragged Byrd for three miles behind a pick-up truck along an asphalt road. Byrd, who remained conscious throughout most of the ordeal, was killed when his body hit the edge of a culvert, severing his right arm and head.

world you live in.”(24). But this observation is a deep critique of American culture’s tendency to choose which realities to validate and which to pass-by. Alternatively, then, Rankine, along with Césaire, asks us to “beware” of assuming the tendentious role of the spectator. Beware, in part, because the spectator is a solitary position, a singular point, a point that assumes outsideness and one that “alienates [you] from the proceedings by implying its possible to remain separate from them” (Anderson). It is not possible. As hard as it is to hear about and remember murder and violence, harder still is it to suppress the details. There is no place, which exempts us from participating in these worlds or networks. I have said from the outset that I am implicated, that with our increasing connectivity, we must also take on the grief through rhetorical encounters such as this, and formulate the appropriate response, and I see this project as that encounter, which involves my own embodiment and sensitivity to the relations and exchanges of and in violence—not as a spectacle, but as a way of saying, “I participate,” too.

Yet I have struggled throughout this project with some of the repercussions of participating, of documenting and archiving a group of people and actors as part of what makes up violence. I have been stopped in my tracks at the thought of the resonant quality of this project. What am I putting in the world? Is my work and my archiving only working to perpetuate violence and murder by cementing it, archiving it, and making it reference-able? Am I creating more murder, more violence, by documenting? Am I working to create an image of the black man that only repeats mass media and culture? Is my project also negative creation? As race scholars, Michelle Alexander<sup>84</sup> and Thomas DeFrantz,<sup>85</sup> have said and practiced, there need to be positive representations of the black males, more akin to counter-culture images, stories, and archives that celebrate and edify that black male, rather than more images of the criminalized

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<sup>84</sup> See *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*

<sup>85</sup> See *Black Performance Theory*

or violent black male. This is not the route I took. And when I first started this project, even while I was working with young African American students, I tried to allow race to be only one agent, only one partial actor, in a whole slue of others, where race has gotten a majority of the attention already. I did this simply because I wanted to look for and listen to the unheard actors of violence or, at least, the less visible and yet still palpable evidence of its action, and because I tried to track many other actors involved in murder, white or black, human or non. Yet race is and continues to be an important element to consider in terms of how culture criminalizes the black male or does not love the black male, as bell hooks underlines, and how this further perpetuates violence, but this is not where my attention has been, and I want to account for that, and even admit to my own unease over it. I'm not sure I did it right.

To understand the agency and palpable effects of imagery and texts as I do at lengths here is to be troubled by my own use of those rhetorical objects I put in the world. What lasting effects and affects will they have? Have I worked to sensationalize rather than to indicate the everydayness to these distributed events? When I began this project, very few archives of murders or killings existed, and the ones that did were merely maps of the city including scant biographical information for each person. These maps work to say, yes, the murder happened and here's who died, but not much else. They don't consider the trauma, the human, or the way in which the murders often happened because of many other agents in a collective. They don't even render as aesthetically interesting. However, what did and does exist in spades is media coverage of blackness and the black criminal. These images and texts have a causal effect on publics, people, identity, actions, social relations and the material world (Fairclough 8). This is not to suggest, as Safiya Noble observes, that "people don't have agency in reshaping or



reconstructing identity” (14) through texts and images, but that the media has more power of who, how, and what gets circulated and in what rhetorical velocity.

This can be seen in one murder most acutely, one which the general public is familiar and which does not appear in my own digital murder archive, but which helps foreground the implications of my research. This murder is a spectacular<sup>86</sup> murder, a spectacle of media and community, living online and off, concentrating our gaze around a particular version of murder, race, and race relations that is in many ways divorced from lived realities. It is the murder of Trayvon Martin by George Zimmerman in Florida in 2012. In looking at the creation of Trayvon Martin and George Zimmerman, Noble notes they become stories circulated in social media and news outlets, where media outlets emphasize different aspects of the Trayvon Martin story to “grab the attention of particular audiences” (qtd in Noble 15). Summarizing her argument, media stories become different things for different news outlets depending on how they provoke audiences. MSNBC was focused on a more liberal message and that they were “proud of the fact that they are the most watched cable channel for African Americans as demonstrated by their employment of Reverend Al Sharpton” (16). Conversely, “fox news was not courting a liberal audience, but rather a politically conservative one, as evidenced by their news stories, which focused on support for George Zimmerman” (16). This, of course, contributed to very different articulations in the public sphere over what happened the night Trayvon died. As Noble points out, “these kinds of liberal commentators on stations like MSNBC and BET were heavily invested in defending Trayvon from being portrayed as a criminal. Simultaneously, right wing media was heavily invested in making Trayvon culpable for his own death exonerating Zimmerman upon race-neutrality and post-racialism” (16).

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<sup>86</sup> In the sense that Guy Debord defines it in *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967).

So in the case of Trayvon, there are two themes that emerged: "the dominant narrative and a counter narrative" (Noble 17). In the dominant narrative that ultimately worked, in some aspects, to foster an acquittal of Zimmerman, Trayvon is cast textually and imagistically as a hoodie-wearing "thug," out of place in a gated community to which he doesn't belong. Because he was wearing a hoodie, the equivalent of "the uniform of threatening black youth," he invoked his own death, "You dress like a thug, people are going to treat you like a thug" (qtd in Noble 17). The narrative circulates, then, that he was a rebel, looking suspicious and out of place. What's more, pictures of Trayvon, as the out of control hoodie-wearing black youth circulated.

The counter narrative to this image of Trayvon is that he was a good student, that he had a relative inside the gated community, that he was walking home with ice tea and candy, and that he was pursued by Zimmerman, who is often made to be white in the media, though he is actually a Latino man. In this circulating counter-narrative, numerous pictures and protests emerged on social media of white people wearing hoods, of people trying to de-thug the hood as the uniform of the threatening black man. However, what seemed to prevail was the image of Trayvon Martin as "threatening youth" (Noble 17). Regardless of which narrative endured, what Nobles underlines is that two troubling public responses to the Trayvon Martin media spectacle emerged in the wake of circulation. According to her the first is some disregard for black life by the general public, seen acutely through Internet commentary and Internet memes copying the murder scene<sup>87</sup>. The second is what Jason Silverstein culls together, along with other empathy theorists, as "the racial empathy gap" which is, in his argument, the increased empathy toward people with more privilege, where "blackness is perceived as hard and as feeling less pain than whiteness" (Noble 23).

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<sup>87</sup> "Trayvoning," for instance, which was an internet fad of circulating pictures of white teenagers mimicking the crime scene photos of Trayvon.

What this pervasive image of the Trayvon case does is create a spectacle around the murder, which focuses public attention—on both sides of the debate, white or black, Trayvon or Zimmerman—into “a unified and often deceptive understanding” of the event (Noble 13). This spectacle polarizes, bifurcates, and further removes possibilities for empathy and social change because our public attention is so focused on the saturation and powerful affect of one version of the story (or one version of the story that posits two opposed sides). The story becomes about the bifurcated sides, race, and whiteness vs. blackness.

In response to this media event and others like it, I submit my research and method as an opening. I argue that we should instead foreground small networked histories of those being publicized. The Internet and media narratives can be collected and assembled into productive histories of people and events, not towards one side or the other, but in a complete rejection of sides, in an act of collection and following, and the internet and media demand and allow for a tracing of these constructions. Further, our attention should also shift away from those that are spectacularized, to those that are living a kind of everydayness of murder, which does not garner the media’s attention. For instance, while several unknown black men were killed in Pittsburgh and other cities, the Trayvon Martin case garnered all the press favoring a spectacle over what is daily happening elsewhere. I ask us to reject the spectacle or at least become very suspicious of where our attention is being concentrated in media. I argue that we reject two sides in favor of a collective or network, in favor of seeing how it is these murders come about from and within OUR own language, culture, and networks—our own ethos. This is what I call a new materialist rhetorical practice. It is the practice of consuming and re-assembling digital media into non-bifurcated stories and histories, while remaining within it and active in its networks. From this practice, I further invite experiments in network diagrams, collective tracing, and empathy, using

the notion of the social archive and other archives like it, as yet another *response* to what the spectacle of media makes difficult to feel or imagine.

Indeed, as I began this dissertation, I opened with a quote about listening—listening in order to invite the “appropriate response”—and I won’t say I’ve arrived at the appropriate response, but that in the method and practice of attempting to listen, of using digital archives and digital technologies toward listening, I invite responses that do not “define social life as the sum total of consciousness, nor as deliberate individual activities, because then only individual manifestations of personal prejudice, violence, and hostility” will be seen (Lipsitz 381). Instead, I invite the hearing and seeing of collective and distributed behavior, where racism and race must also emerge as part of a network. Using digital collection and digital media to listen can engage conversations that media spectacles and current grand narratives obscure.

However, despite this, I’ll still admit that there are other ways, different methods, more attunements toward listening that need to happen. That is the troubling and exhilarating part of any composition, that any thing once built—“the making of any enterprise”( *Reassembling the Social* 43)—films skyscrapers, facts, political meetings, initiation rituals, haute couture, cooking, books, interfaces (89)—can fail, can crumble, but can also be re-built, re-assembled, and re-composed bit by bit. In some ways, I suppose this is what I want to underscore in my project—that what has been made can be re-made—that the “cities of the dead,” as Joseph Roach calls them, of which I have taken an active part in documenting and building—are “primarily for the living” (xi). This assertion is deeply methodological. The cities of the dead exist here “not only as artifacts...but also as behaviors,” discourses, and affects (xi). In other words, “they endure” and present as “occasions for memory and invention” (xi). In this way, I have tried to think of archives not only as an apparatus for documenting in new ways through the imprint of social

media and network flows, but also as something that can be embodied, practiced, and performed. The archive functions on these pages as a repository of reuse and invention, where the whole notion of what it means to “care for our collections is translated into a question of use and reuse” (Parikka 43). What can be made and imagined from this archive? What can be performed? So far, I have mostly activated the repository as an encounter, started the collection, and theorized this new kind of archive by asking who else and what else is speaking in this archive. Chapter 5 makes some endeavors to begin to imagine another future for those archived materials. By speaking with and feeling with a voice of murder, I activate another potential future and new lines of relationality. And in the case of this project, the futures of the archived materials, however conceptual, do matter. I can yet imagine other ways to reuse the murder archive. But the archive and the work in these pages must proceed me and exceed its function becoming multiple through diverse rhetorical forms and purposes.

Part of my goal, then, has been to dare us to become more constructive (in all senses of the word) and imaginative with our methodologies so we can see and hear rhetoric acting in the world in its new ways, as distributed and resonant. The social archive-as-method is an invention toward listening and eavesdropping through documenting and archiving, but not just the documentation of documents, per se, but the documentation of images, gestures, words, and affects—important considerations in this new study of rhetoric and murder. Yet the listening aspect of the social archive is of equal importance. How can we listen to things and events we already have diagrams to in our minds and bodies? How can we be open and not foreclose possibilities at the outset? I have responded to Ratcliffe’s, Stenger’s, and Cooper’s calls for more listening and more paying attention in rhetoric by using the potential of the digital archive and new materialist rhetoric to listen or to at least try to listen *differently*. Do I still foreclose

possibilities despite these attempts at listening? Yes. But I have tried to allow my voice to be present throughout this work as a way of admitting my own materiality, role, and participation, as a way of showing my own hand, and illuminating that all our research, all our relations, are massively entangled. Indeed, when I first began this project, I was fueled by a nascent sense of responsibility. I felt somehow responsible for murder, too, as if I, like Facebook, had a complicit role in the act. My role, while less palpable than Facebook's, must also be made explicit in these last pages, which brings me again to the second reason I opened with Césaire's quote—to underline our “mangle“ (Pickering xi) or “entanglement of matter”(Barad 3) between our self, our voice, body, and our encounter with world. The new materialist researcher is now newly responsible because, as she sees the world, rhetoric is “energetically at play” in a process of co-construction so when she chooses to engage that world, she enters into the co-construction; she becomes part of the complex web (Gries 288). If rhetoric is and continues to acknowledge and account for our interconnectedness, where an action does not precede the event, but emerges as an intra-action, then my seeing this web of violence and doing nothing, choosing to write something else, creates other intra-actions. Instead, I take the risk and responsibility to enter into the collective, to see what might continue out of it, as a result. And so, by implicating myself, by taking this on, I have attempted to forge another relationship and intra-action, one that I think does resonate beyond this dissertation in positive ways, even if it is merely the opening toward an appropriate response. Ann Munster is forthright about what this means when she says, “because the computer's activity takes place in tiny playing fields of integrated circuits,” the encounter with the computer should be intimate, human, and physical (7). My role, then, in all of this has been to allow the actors—the computer, the social networks, the people, the affects,

the network, the flows—to enfold and be enfolded by my relations between “bodies and technics,” but to do so openly, visibly, and intimately (Munster 7).

I have extended new materialist rhetoric and new materialist theories in order to both listen differently to murder, but also as a framework for how social events like murder can be entirely re-thought. As I mentioned in my introduction, I am interested in doing this work as a step toward practical, rhetorical interventions. Rhetoric, as Thomas Rickert explains, is no longer (or really never was) as simple as speaker, language, appeals, audience, and situation. Instead, rhetoric must begin to take into account material environment, embodiment, and other rhetorically efficacious aspects. A rhetorical event, like murder, happens then as a result of a speaker, audience, situation, and appeals, but also through and because of digital social networks, relations between identity, performance and murder, contagious violent affect, trauma shared and unshared, neighborhoods, and the host of other material actors. Here, persuasion becomes more subtle; it is less about how one is directly persuaded to kill or commit an act and more about how the action itself emerges “ambiently” or intra-actively from human and nonhuman influences. This subtler version of persuasion requires tricks and methods for study. Speaking plainly, I do see particular kinds of murder happening this way. It appears to be a one-to-one action and our criminal justice system further evinces this notion by prosecuting and imprisoning the human actor for his or her behaviors, but as rhetoricians, we are free to think something other than the law, and we are free to imagine social events as singularly blameless. And so one goal of this project has been to extend new materialist rhetoric into publics and places where rhetoric has historically dwelt, but new materialism has not. Gries recent work, *Still life with Rhetoric*, importantly extends new materialist rhetoric into an analysis of the image of Barack Obama in the 2010 campaign for election. Her addition to the conversation centers on new methods for

looking at the visual agency of images and pictures, but also the political repercussions of new materialist persuasion, given it is subtler, but just as potent means for moving. What I move to add to this already emerging scholarship is a way in—a method—where the social archive-as-method can help us hold all these actors and relations together, while we sift through who and what is acting. Gries pays special attention to visual agency, and in my work, I have not spent time looking at the visual aspect so much, as the resonant materiality and affectivity of the relations between the interconnecting parts. If we are to understand action and intentionality, then my work suggests that it is not located in any one aspect, but it is on the move and in the rhetorical relations between things, networks, affects, and humans, and so I have spent much of my time here illustrating a method for hearing and seeing what happens in those and among those relations.

## 7.1 ETHICS/ETHOS

Crucial to this invitation to be more daring in our work, as well as my own tenuous relationship to my role in this project, I want to touch on the question of ethics in this project specifically, for there is no “ethics in general, only ethics in particular” (*The Ethics* xiv). For Alan Badiou, ethics is always bound up with the question of the Other. How do we encounter the Other, from a metaphysical standpoint, without violence, hate or dominance? This is the question Hegel answers, for instance, in his master-slave dialectic, in which, there is no encountering the Other without the dialectic and its normative dominance. Badiou asks the question differently, however, when he posits that there can be an affirmative good (that is, a good not defined by its opposite: evil) and thus a movement towards the other that is affirmative and life-giving. This



can be contrasted with Hegel's move toward the Other. Badiou is after an encounter with the other that is equal, but not solely mimetic nor that of seeing the other as the self-same. To get at this, he posits a similar move to Spinoza, (an early new materialist), but with different outcomes, and join them together to think through ethics. For Spinoza, of course, all life comes out of "one substance," (like Lucretius' monism) including the view of the Other and their differences. We are all one substance; whereas Badiou argues that if there is no ONE monistic god then there is always multiplicity: "There is no God. Which also means: the One is not. The multiple 'without one —every multiple being in its turn nothing other than a multiple of multiples—is the law of being (Badiou 25). It is in this way that encountering the other becomes always about the multiple. There never was a one, a one god, that everything must be defined against, which means we have never been anything other than one substance of multiply different attributes and relations. I retain this version of ethics because it underlines two things in this project: 1) it posits an affirmative move, the move towards good as not necessarily defined against evil; and 2) his ethics of multiplicity values a system of connection, which I try to understand and think through in the logic of the network, where ontologically everything is different, but non-hierarchically situated. In the actual archive, for instance, one node may be of a murderer, which we typically think of as evil or morally corrupt, but the network tries to push and open up that narrative or boundary to something more akin to Spinoza and Badiou's ethics, where the murderer instead is part of the—*our*—multiplicity.

Further, as I began this dissertation, I asked the reader to postpone blame because it often gets lumped into its typical associations with morality and good vs. evil. This is because the murder project takes seriously the idea that murder can be understood distributively, in a network, making the role of ethics especially important, but "reinvoking the need to detach ethics

from moralism” (Bennett 464). As Isabelle Stengers points out in *Thinking with Whitehead*, ethics, though related etymologically to morality (from the Latin), can be thought of more productively, as being related to its Greek etymological root, “ethos.” Distinguishing ethics from morality and taking the concept as it relates to ethos or character, “and is therefore connected to the great theme of habit,” I open yet another pathway towards understanding an ethical relationship to my project (Stengers 433). This is ethics in the manner of the practices or habits that concern a social identity or a character. In this way, my project is not to understand (too limited) nor capture (too colonial), but admit and account for the practices of those involved in the network, which necessarily involves me too, but which still requires an admittance of their practices. That is—and I think both Badiou and Spinoza go after this—an ethics that resists bifurcation is an ethical modification worth pursuing and developing. So, I cannot be bifurcated from those murdered and murdering, just as they cannot be bifurcated from each other. The most ethical understanding of the murder, according to Stengers and building off Badiou, is an affirmative appreciation of their “contrasts” and practices—their ethics. I say “they” and “their” here because, for Whitehead, the ethical relationship to the other is addressed to a “them,” a they, “in their element, in so far as their habits constitute a world for them, into which they admit no free trespassing” (517). Whitehead’s interest in ethics lies in giving value to their world and their dreams. For Whitehead-Stengers, there will always be an Other and so the real move is to “articulate the fabulous contrasts” (517). In this way, they define an ethics as related to ethos, and thus practices that concern social identity and an ethics as affirmative admittance of the other’s stories and practices—their whole ways of living and dying.

There is further an important relationship in this project between ethics and aesthetics. This work problematically and only fragmentarily attends to the practices of those involved in

the murders, and I talk about the practices surrounding both murder and death, the practices of murderous discourse and the practices of performatively claiming the murdered as a “close friend” or “bro,” as a way of habitual and cultural response to those being murdered. One way of seeing these practices could be performatively, but they also lead to action. So that line between what is performative and what is active is very interesting in the face of life and death (as I point out in Chapter 3). However, seeing the practices as aesthetic opens yet another way to re-think murder while still problematizing that relationship between aesthetics and action. Delray Dockery, from chapter three, for instance, seems infatuated with the picture of him drinking that bad vodka, and the picture of him holding the picture he drew of the Daniel Peek’s Facebook page, where on every level we see an aestheticization of the murder, of the habit of the murder, of even the way we remember who was murdered. On every level, we don’t get at life itself, or I don’t, as the researcher, yet nor does Delray, nor Isaac, Daniel’s brother; instead we prefer (it seems) the aestheticization of the murder on all sides, which is life itself more and more—“digital life is the aestheticization of life itself or the tendency of material objects to become aesthetic objects” (Galloway 58). All this leads me to wonder about the role of aestheticization—that is, the “content—interface” relationship in the role of murder (Manovich 66).

I don’t see this aestheticization as necessarily a “bad” thing in the question of ethics, but I think it changes the ethical question from not only being distinguished from morality, but now being shuttled through aesthetics. That is to say, the ethical, as I’ve been relating it here, which is the encounter of the Other as affirmative, can perhaps only be fully realized in a network aesthetic or network theory. There are, then, two levels as I see them relating to aesthetics (and ethics, as in ethos). The first level is the aestheticization of the murders themselves by the media, the youth, and communities in involved—their practices. These practices, however habitual,

form their own ethical particularities and performances in social networking. There is yet another level of aesthetico-ethical relations, and that is what I seek to underline here, that despite the already latent aestheticization of murder, we, as in the privileged public, ignore these kinds of murders. We, again, the privileged public, are more fascinated by the murders that pick up news coverage, like Trayvon Martin. Yet in the system of murder, no one murder is better than the other. So, in order to re-think our relationship to murder, I have sought aesthetically to present the murder networks, to follow their networked relations, and in so doing, attempted to make them more real, or at least more affirmative and particular. I have attempted in some ways to give them singularities through their own words and aestheticized performances. But in creating the network and singularities, I think the problem of murder opens up to include many more actors than those immediately involved. Murder becomes a network, full of nodes like communities, education, neighborhoods, practices, the gun, where the gun came from, why the gun is imbued with power, me, you, etc. And all of these come together in a kind of radical ethical and aesthetic situation, which re-thinks blame and responsibility in a world of distributing and “crosscutting forces” (Bennett 464). Of course, the inclusion and rendering of a network of murder does not necessarily nor automatically equal liberation or democracy.

However, concerning the ethical stakes of this project, I want to turn away from the networked part of murder and toward what it means to compose affirmatively any one thing, any one piece in an archive. And I want to connect back to Badiou’s and Stengers’ notions of ethics and the Other. The murder project is first and foremost an archive of those murdered and murdering; this can be called an archive of the not so distant past, an archive of seemingly ephemeral materials, but which still needs to be carefully re/membered and collected. In this way, as I’ve stated elsewhere, the archive is becoming a tool or production of a researcher, a

citizen, or an activist. Being in the researcher category, I see my work with the murder archive doing the work of history. As Victor Vitanza has pointed out in the *History of Rhetoric*, we have to look for the third man/woman/etc; that the historian's job is to search for the "systematically excluded" (181). While I'm not doing a history of rhetoric, I am still using the principles to look for those who are (and those things that are) systematically excluded and which we might traditionally not think of as rhetorical. This following after of those who are systematically excluded--which is the murdering public, the forgotten public, who are, of course, not forgotten by their own communities, but forgotten by the communities immediately adjacent, the communities that write, and the communities of rhetoric--is the attempt to encounter the other in a safe space—the space of the archive—in order to include the othered in our histories and our communities. This is what Avital Ronnell calls the "ethical task" which is to "search for, to attend to, these exclusions, these unaccountable refugees of cognitive regimens" (324). Ronnell offers finally a way in which I, the creative-critical researcher, am implicated ethically yet again in the murder project. In this way, my ethical project is not just to re-think murder, but to be open to a conversation with or a collaboration between myself, the Othered and those interacting (the audience). In this way, the most ethical response is "boundless generosity" in regards to the other (Ronnell xxvii). The murderer, especially the black murderer, is in some ways, as Othered as one can be in a non flat ontological system, so in conjuring these relationships, which are always hauntings of their aesthetic and performative social networking texts, I create the space of possibility for an ethical relationship with the Other. Badiou knew that there was another way to ethically understand the "evilness" of the Holocaust and Hitler, but he could never quite get at what that was in his work, but as I imagine murder (and by proxy the Holocaust) now, as a haunting and a space for boundless and safe generosity, I see it as a possibility for new modes of ethics, and

encountering the Other. I think this might change the two notions of ethics—one substance (Spinoza) and a multiplicity (Badiou)—to a question of how to listen, and, perhaps, how different digital technologies help us listen differently. By collecting the social networking practices of those murdered and murdering, and placing them in a digital, public archive, I am admittedly haunted and admittedly implicated, but I am attuned and listening to an Other in a way that puts me (even now, even as I struggle to understand the ethics) at the threshold of my understanding, but which is perhaps possible through digital modes of collecting, capturing and representing.

## **7.2 PRACTICE/THEORY**

Importantly, and relatedly, another goal of this project has been to practice and demonstrate the movement between theory and practice. Charting my own trajectory, I began with the practice of making an archive, collecting digital traces, and defining what I meant in the process. From there I moved to writing as an encounter, to writing that tries to understand the practice of collecting. Each of the chapters is an attempt to write what emerged through practice. Chapter 5 is the most obvious iteration of the relationship between practice and theory, where the chapter itself came about only after extensive play with the digital data and records of the recorded voices of murder. Theory, as we know it, Amerika asserts, is dead. What is left in its place is “performing theory,” “creative research,” or what several critical theorists have

construed as “practice theory.”<sup>88</sup> Theory, as an entity, still exists, but it emerges from and through practice in an active sense. Practice, then, is the mutual shaping of method, affect, and theory.

Because I have tried to inhabit the movement between practice and theory, my work, too, has rocked back and forth between artwork and research, poetics and philosophy, pedagogy and affect. What transcends each of these categories for me, though, is the felt relation of experience. Shipka<sup>89</sup> took the old adage, “die making something” and adapted it to say, “die making someone feel something.” A sentiment I think ties my work together. What can we know from felt reality and new affective sensations? What new identity and categories emerge from felt experience? Thinking largely and ambitiously, I see much potential for us to *die making someone feel something*, and therefore, in my view, offer a pedagogical experience, one that is tied to sensation and affect. While the project itself has only loosely touched on pedagogy, in the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter, and that was a pedagogy or training ground for empathic commitments, I do want to suggest that this work is about some facet of pedagogy. I mean pedagogy here as larger than a measurable classroom activity or method. I mean pedagogy as not only what can be taught in our classrooms, but also what can be taught to the world at different levels of output: empathy, critical digital media, archiving as listening. But “by transforming how people think of themselves as public subjects, we can perhaps begin to encourage more people to see themselves as subjects” through practiced acts of empathy and practiced acts of archiving (Rice 7).

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<sup>88</sup> See recent work on practice theory by Schatzki, Cetina, & Savigny 2002; Stengers, 2005; Sloterdijk 2012, 2014.

<sup>89</sup> During her talk at the 2015 *CCCC: Risk and Rewards*.

### 7.3 LOOKING FORWARD

As I end this exhilarating, controversial, and complex iteration of this project, I realize I have yet to answer the question of what is an *appropriate response*. I have only prompted methods toward listening in preparation for an appropriate response. As I turn toward future work that continues to take up the role of nonhuman relations in social events, not as theoretical exercises, but as real material practice and intervention, then I want to touch on taking rhetorical risks in our research. In this project, I expose many ethical questions that may not be immediately answerable, but that are necessary in taking an ethical risk: “The problem is not to polemicize (sic) but to accept risk” (Stengers 40). Or as Jane Sutton asks in “Rhetoric’s Nose: What Can Rhetorical Historiography Make of it?” quoting Roxanne Mountford, “at a time when the [community] is increasingly in need of rhetorical exploration, we must *risk* looking for rhetoric, “ looking “for rhetoric where it has not been found” (Octalog II 34). Both Murphy and Mountford address a need to discover, to find, to create—to invent. Specifically, they refer to this need in terms of a dare and a risk. So finally, I think there are still many questions about the ethics of this project, but I see them as part of the risk of doing work that takes the “Whiteheadian adventure,” which is *wild* as it invents concepts and is always open and searching.

Finally, murder, violence of all kinds, upheaval, the recent police-killings, government actions, terrorist attacks, revolutions, Charlie Hebdo, etc., can be traced backwards from the event to account for the non-human and human relations through the process of archive-as-method, and this is, I argue, necessary as our daily living becomes more and more enmeshed and entangled with digital actors and networks of action. Our lives are networked and interconnected; therefore, any action that results must also take into account the network interconnections. This



is, I have maintained, a way of listening, a rhetorical method towards hearing the palaver of many voices, so as not simply to react to any thread of action, but to take action as heterogeneous, where the solution right now may just be a kind of hanging back, collecting, and gathering of details. I invite, then, more methods toward listening, more methods towards collecting heterogeneous actors, more methods towards holding many voices together at once. From here, I invite more rhetoric scholars to take part in publics, to participate in publics, and to activate rhetoric as capable of intervening in these heterogeneous, distributed, networked publics. We must begin to invent the appropriate response. Our work can straddle both the scholarly and the makerly, both practice and theory, and we are capable of not just proposing interventions, but enacting them, composing them, and distributing them in online space. What kind of counter-terrorist networks can we imagine? What kind of rhetorical interventions can speak back to entangled notions of matter and action? What kind of rhetorical compositions can we circulate to interrupt networks of action? These are the kinds of questions I think we should be asking of our work and scholarship.

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## APPENDIX

### APPENDIX 1



Figure 34: A portrait drawn by Rahmod Williams, age 14, when asked to imagine his future



APPENDIX 2



Figure 35: Leah Walker, Dane’s alleged wife, Facebook page just after the murder

### APPENDIX 3

A Hill District man was arrested Wednesday in the death of 21-year-old Dane Smith, who was found fatally shot in the 2500 block of Centre Avenue on Saturday afternoon.

Marcus Smith, 21, who is not related to the victim, was awaiting arraignment Wednesday night for criminal homicide and numerous gun charges. He was being held at the Allegheny County Jail.

Figure 36: Pittsburgh Post-Gazette account of Marcus Smith on February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011

APPENDIX 4



Figure 37: Tricia Gehring's Facebook page, the alleged instigator to the murder

## APPENDIX 5

Several witnesses came forward to identify Marcus Smith as the gunman, including one who told detectives that he became angry over information about Dane Smith's involvement with a woman, according to a criminal complaint. "Dane needs to be gone. He is causing too many problems," Marcus Smith told the witness in a phone call before the shooting, according to police.

**Figure 38: From the Pittsburgh Post Gazette on February 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011**

## APPENDIX 6



Figure 39: Portrait of Lauren Williams, the deceased

## APPENDIX 7



Figure 40: Tribute Twitter profile appearing in the wake of the murder

## APPENDIX 8

Police are investigating a shooting in Duquesne that left a teenager dead and three others, including his 14-year-old brother, wounded in a Duquesne apartment complex Saturday night.

The Allegheny County medical examiner's office identified the slain boy as 16-year-old Daniel Peek.

County homicide Sgt. Scott Scherer said Daniel was shot after his brother answered a knock at the door, opened it and three gunmen rushed into the apartment at 2501 Duquesne Place in the Hilltop Parkview Manor complex and started shooting around 5:30 p.m. Daniel's brother, aunt and grandmother also were shot.

Figure 41: Newspaper article about the Daniel Peek shooting

## APPENDIX 9



**Figure 42: Picture of Daniel Peek featured on Charlene Peek's Facebook page**



APPENDIX 10



Figure 43: Tribute photo made 2 years after Daniel's murder

## APPENDIX 11

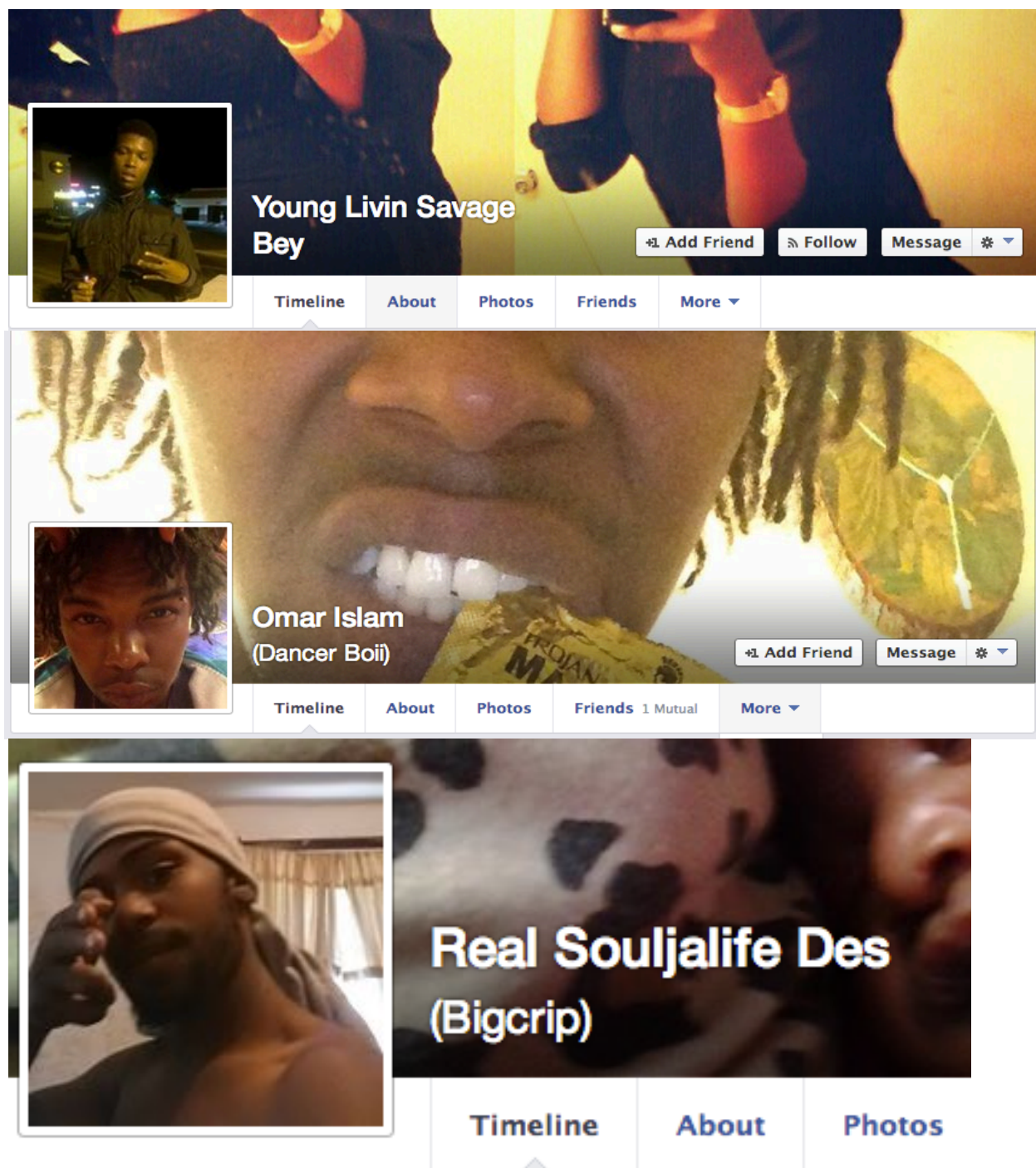


Figure 44: Facebook profile's of Jordan Bey, Omar Islam, and Desmond Young

## APPENDIX 12



Figure 45: The gun discussed/imagined vs. the gun used