

Collegium 2009 Presentation:
**“A Deepened Exploration of Practical Theology and Unitarian
Universalism’s Commitment to the Work of Anti-Oppression”**

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This is very much a work in progress. I have attached below my recent Harvard Divinity School Conference paper as well as my Academy of Religion presentation from 2008 in the Religion and Social Sciences Section. I am presenting again this year at AAR in the Death, Dying, and Beyond Consultation. My focus for Collegium is a continuation of the work I presented at HDS below as I begin to look at articulating a prospectus studying the healing and empowerment rituals in the aftermath of homicide of the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute in Boston. I am particularly focused upon helping their work to become nationally known, but I would also like to link my studies usefully to a deepened understanding of the radical contemporary concept of practical theology *as* theology for our Unitarian Universalist context, and the implications of this for our professed commitment to anti-oppression work. I welcome all suggestions, thoughts, and comments.

**HDS Conference: The Future of Unitarian Universalist
Scholarship, 10/17-18/09**

**“Defining Practical Theology as a UU, Linking the Prophetic
and the Pastoral”**

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Practical theology as a Christian field of study has undergone significant changes over time.¹ Historically, the field sought to bridge the perceived gap between the academia and the church that is argued to have occurred with the advent of Western universities and gradual proliferation of specialities. Prior to the 13th century, it is argued, Christian knowledge was conceived of as a whole, grounded in and motivated by sapiential knowledge of God – by a practical wisdom leading to salvific union with God. By the 17th century, a split between “the speculative” and the “the practical” was solidified as a four-fold pattern for studying Christian theology was laid out – biblical studies, historical studies, systematic theology, and practical theology, with practical theology initially being conceived of as a form of moral theology and thinking about general Christian praxis. By the time of the Enlightenment, however, practical theology was reduced to being a field of applied theology only, applying the received truths of the

¹ For histories of practical theology, see Maddox, R.L. (1991) “Practical Theology: A Discipline in Search of a Definition.” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 18, 159-169 and Farley, E. (1983) *Theologia: Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education*, Philadelphia: Fortress Press.

Christian tradition by building the skills of the clergy in providing pastoral care to their congregations. This is called the clerical paradigm within practical theology.

Conceptions of practical theology shifted again more radically in the contemporary era under the influence of various liberation theologies and the call by a younger generation of theologians for the church to be more relevant to the modern world. Practical theology began to encompass the fields of evangelism and mission work, ethics, and public theology, as well as its traditional concerns with worship, religious education, and pastoral care. Most importantly, the argument was put forth, specifically by Don Browning,² that fundamental practical theology *is* theology, that theology (he specifically operates within Christian theology) is practical through and through because theology always represents “communities of memory and tradition” – communities of memory, beliefs, and practices.

² Browning, D.S. (1991). *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress.

The ‘sense, wisdom, and practical reason of religious communities are embodied in their practices.’ Since all practices are theory-laden, a crisis in practices in encountering a situation or problem prompts questions of theory and then a return to practices – repeated cycles of consolidation, deconstruction, and then tentative reconstruction of theory and practices occurs.³ Christian biblical studies, historical studies, systematic theology, and the various historical disciplines of practical theology are all subspecialties of a larger, more encompassing fundamental practical theology. It is a crisis of practices in the wisdom of the religious community as it faces a new problem that prompts a movement through these various subspecialties and the rise of new practices and new theory.

Browning’s overall work is too complex to describe more deeply, suffice it to say that he has been a leading figure, along with liberation theologians generally, impacting the current evolution of the field. While Browning restricts himself to the

³ See Browning, pp. 2-8 for this description of fundamental practical theology.

Christian tradition as a practical theologian, and ironically a bit more conservatively than others given his otherwise radical stance, the international practical theology movement has become increasingly interested in phenomenological and ethnographic approaches to the study of “lived religion,” including a greater openness to the interfaith applications of practical theology beyond solely Christian concerns and concepts.⁴

This is my point of entry as a Unitarian Universalist practical theologian, with a particular interest in pastoral theology. I have striven throughout my program at Boston University to widen the definition of practical theology in such a way that it could be applied by diverse religious traditions and also be re-centered in the soteriological heart of theology. The soteriological heart of theology recognizes the contextual and relational (autobiographical) nature of all theology, but focuses particularly on the common experience of human and ecological suffering.

⁴ See in particular Graham, E. and Rowlands, A., eds. (2005). *Pathways to the Public Square: Practical Theology in an Age of Pluralism*. International Academy of Practical Theology, Manchester 2003. Münster: LIT Verlag as well as Heimbrock, H.G. and Schlotz, C.P., eds. (2007). *Religion: Immediate Experience and the Mediacy of Research*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht.

The soteriological heart of practical theology links the prophetic and pastoral in a deepened recognition of the interdependent web of existence – pastoral theology becomes public theology when it speaks to the impact of violence, abuse, and oppression on the web of our relationships and personal and communal flourishing, whether one conceives of the web in theistic or non-theistic terms.⁵

Thus my current working definition of practical theology has become: “In convergence with the context (relational world) of the researcher, practical theology is critical and constructive reflection on the relationship between the salvific truth claims and practices of a lived tradition(s) and a problem(s) arising out of the contemporary situation.” I use the word “salvific” in a root sense of meaning wholeness rather than brokenness and the experience of health, safety, peace, and joy.

⁵ For a review of these contemporary developments in pastoral theology see Miller-McLemore, B.J. (2005) “Pastoral Theology as Public Theology: Revolutions in the ‘Fourth Area’” and Ramsay, N.J. (2005) “Contemporary Pastoral Theology: A Wider Vision for the Practice of Love,” both in Hunter, R.J. ed. (2005) *Dictionary of Pastoral Care and Counseling*. Nashville: Abingdon Press.

If one takes the Golden Rule as an example of the “soteriological core” that exists in all religions, as Paul Knitter⁶ and others have pointed out, then this definition is broad enough to allow different religious traditions to conduct critical and constructive reflection on their specific salvific truth claims and practices in relationship to a particular contemporary problem or crisis. In many ways, I see engaged Buddhism as developed by Thich Nhat Hanh (and others) as a superb example of the movement of practical theology in response to a contemporary crisis, namely the Vietnam War, and Thich Nhat Hanh continues to critically and constructively reflect upon his Zen Buddhist tradition and practices while speaking to Western audiences regarding his interfaith work on behalf of international peace.⁷

Returning to my own research focus, in my particular context as a pastoral theologian, who is also a Unitarian Universalist living in an urban context (relational world), I am concerned with

⁶ See Knitter, P.F. (2002). *Introducing Theologies of Religion*. Maryknoll: Orbis Books in particular.

⁷ See King, R.H. (2003). *Thomas Merton and Thich Nhat Hanh: Engaged Spirituality in an Age of Globalization*. New York: Continuum.

problems posed by suffering and domination, as well as challenges posed by religious pluralism and secularism and by racial and cultural diversity in the contemporary situation. I am led by this pastoral context to place normative weight on certain issues of theological anthropology (the divine-human relationship), such as our bioaffective (embodied), relational, and finite nature as human beings, and to use a mutually critical correlational approach to the relationship between traditions and our experiences in the contemporary situation.

In a mutually critical correlational approach, I recognize that the narrative of our respective traditions shape and form our life and practices, but also that our contemporary experiences can radically challenge and transform our traditions and practices. (Within contemporary Unitarian Universalism, this process is often happening so quickly when we grapple with authentic diversity in our midst that we sometimes experience it as perpetual deconstruction with insufficient breathing space for the movements of reconstruction and reconsolidation.) For research purposes,

however, a mutually critical correlational approach leads me to find phenomenological qualitative research methods most useful for studying practical theology, particularly heuristic inquiry, ethnographic, and autoethnographic methods (generally the approaches taken by practical theologians of “lived religion”) – but I am also influenced by social constructivism, narrative analysis, and cultural hermeneutics in my research approaches.

So to come out of all of this theory and words *about* practical theology, I’d like to engage you shortly in an experiential exercise with practical theology as “lived religion.” I’ve decided today not to present my research as I have done at the American Academy of Religion but as I present it in the worship context, which I have done for a Unitarian Universalist congregation as well as in two different Christian church contexts. I agree that the academy and the church can seem to be quite distant from one another, and as a practical theologian I would want my research to be related to and serve lived religion in some way. So in a way, this is an exercise in bringing the “church” back into the academy for just a moment.

In addition to studying, in an ethnographic immersion, the public theological implications of street memorials and funeral rituals in the aftermath of Boston homicides within the context of a specific grassroots community-based agency, the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute of Dorchester, I have increasingly experimented with how to creatively share this research with church communities that are quite distant from the lived soteriological realities that foster these particular ritual practices. What we term “strategic practical theological aim,” in this case, is to promote an embodied and moving worship experience that hopefully deepens a desire for one community to become part of the relational world of another community and develop joint practices to foster human flourishing and reduce human suffering. I can say there was some impact within two of the congregations and I am hopeful that the third, presented more recently, will also become more involved in supporting the work of the Peace Institute.

As I’ve stated before, theology is autobiography and my approach to practical theology and research interests are no

different. In the first semester of my doctoral program in September 2006, my African American goddaughter's 17 year old nephew, Kenny Hall, was murdered on the streets of Boston. Within one month, my weekend youth ministry lost another young person, 29 year old LeVar Jackson, and the after school youth program at the UU Urban Ministry in Roxbury lost two related people – four overall within a two month period. Boston homicides were reaching a new 10 year peak during that period.

As a contemporary situation and crisis, youth violence and violence in general is an area of substantial concern in the American context. Studies by the Center for Disease Control and Prevention have found that, among 26 industrialized nations, 73 percent of all child homicides occurred in the United States. The United States homicide rate far exceeds that of any other country, and juveniles ages 5 to 14 are six times more likely to be murdered in the United States than in the other 25 wealthiest nations.⁸ How

⁸ Statistics quoted in Prothrow-Stith, D. & Spivak, H.R. (2004). *Murder is No Accident: Understanding and Preventing Youth Violence in America*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 39 and 72. These are from a 1997 CDC report.

does this problem challenge our practices as Unitarian Universalists today? Does it impact on our orbit of awareness, or we more often participating in what Mary McClintock Fulkerson has termed “the sin of obliviousness?”⁹

While I had been aware of the phenomenon of street memorials since the 2002 murder of 10 year old Trina Persad (and folklore and popular cultural theorist Jack Santino has written on the growing international phenomenon of spontaneous shrines in the aftermath of Princess Diana’s death as well as 9/11), these particular deaths in my personal relational world prompted a new level of crisis in my normal urban ministry practices. I began to take pictures of Kenny and LeVar’s street shrines, and I deepened my connection to the Peace Institute in the process of walking through the funerals with the families. My anthropology and trauma and theology professors in my coursework encouraged me to begin to study the formation of these rituals with the youth and families as well as the Peace Institute.

⁹ Fulkerson, M.M. (2007). *Places of Redemption: Theology for a Worldly Church*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

In doing so, I began to experience myself as a vehicle for their lived religious experiences to have a voice in the academy. But how then could they also have a voice in the church? What does it take to help our often disengaged and overwhelmed congregants to begin to care and act in solidarity and compassion or love with their inner-city urban neighbors? Can the voices of these urban neighbors be heard through the embodied artistic expressions of their memories, grief, and longings? Is this pastoral theology as public theology in embodied form – sacred memorializations that become “dangerous memories” in the public space, in Johann Baptist Metz’ theological terms, protesting and professing “solidarity with the dead and the vanquished”¹⁰ – a type of eschatological hope for the salvation of what might otherwise be forever lost? How does a predominantly white, highly educated and economically privileged denomination come to care to participate in the formation of this public theological expression? And let me add, I have the same question often for inner-city

¹⁰ Metz, J.B. (1992/2007). *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 169.

ministers who can also be disconnected from these theological expressions of eschatological and soteriological hope in the public square.

These are open-ended strategic practical theological questions I welcome further discussion upon. But let me leave you this afternoon with an opportunity to experience these expressions and to close then in song. This power point musical presentation is approximately 6 minutes long, and in the worship context is accompanied by a sermon and several of our spirit-based hymns. I have dedicated it to the memories of Kenny and LeVar particularly, but among the pictures are the shrines for 13 year old Steven Odem, killed when walking home from a basketball game, and 3 month pregnant 18 year old, Paula Castillo, killed at a party celebrating her birthday. May we hold these memories tenderly as our ongoing call to put our faith into action. Please feel free to take care of yourself as needed during the presentation. We will close with a hymn afterwards.

Power Point Presentation accompanied by Pachelbel's Canon
in D.

Spirit of Life, Come Unto Me,

Sing in My Heart, All the Stirrings of Compassion,

Blow in the Wind, Rise in the Sea,

Move in the Hand, Giving Life the Shape of Justice.

Roots Hold Me Close, Wings Set Me Free.

Spirit of Life, Come to Me, Come to Me.

INNER-CITY AFRICAN-AMERICAN YOUTH RITUALS IN THE AFTERMATH OF VIOLENT LOSS

AAR Presentation, Religion and the Social Sciences
11/2/08, 9AM, Michelle Walsh, ThD Student Boston University

Since the 2002 murder of 10 year old Trina Persad in Boston, an innocent victim of gang related violence, there has been a steady rise in specialized rituals related to the murders of youth and young adults. These rituals have included the creation of elaborate street memorials at or near the site of the murder, the wearing of buttons and t-shirts with the victim's photo, and the formalization of orders of funeral services that now include poetry about, letters to, and pictures of the victim submitted by the victim's family and friends, as well as information on trauma healing resources. My interest in and commitment to understanding youth rituals in response to this violence comes from my experiences working as a Unitarian Universalist youth minister in inner-city Boston for over 17 years, and also now as a doctoral student in practical and pastoral theology.

This paper reports on the results of two small pilot studies – ethnographic (with autoethnographic elements) and phenomenological – of six African American young adults, ages 19 to 24, who were primarily unchurched and from two different inner-city Boston families. Through individual interviews, the meanings drawn from and their experiences with participation in these rituals were examined. I will also show you slides for discussion.

Aspects of these rituals, such as the increasing use of formalized orders of funeral services, are unique to the Boston community because of the special role of the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute, founded in the early 1990's by Tina Chery after the murder of her 14 year old son. However, these rituals have also been popularized and creatively added to by the youth themselves.

Youth violence, and violence generally, is an area of substantial concern in the American context. Studies by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention have found that, among 26 industrialized nations, 73 percent of all child homicides

occurred in the United States. The United States' homicide rate far exceeds that of any other country. (For example, the U.S. homicide rate is 10 times as high as Western Europe and 70 times as high as Japan; and juveniles ages 5 to 14 are six times more likely to be murdered in the United States than are juveniles in the other 25 wealthiest nations).¹¹

As best as I have been able to determine to date, experiences with inner-city youth rituals that develop in response to the murder of a loved one is not an area that has been studied for expressive or psychological meaning, including explicit or implicit public theological or religious content. In the course of one pilot study I did of the street memorials a year ago, literature that seemed applicable was drawn from the fields of anthropology, trauma studies, and communication/folklore/cultural studies. I particularly want to mention Jack Santino's studies of spontaneous shrines.

¹¹ Statistics quoted in Prothrow-Stith, D. & Spivak, H.R. (2004). *Murder is No Accident: Understanding and Preventing Youth Violence in America*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, pp. 39 and 72. These are from a 1997 CDC report.

Santino (2006) argues that spontaneous shrines represent a “genre of mourning rituals (p. 2),” which can be analyzed for both their commemorative and performative aspects. In this sense, spontaneous shrines are both private commemorations and public performances – privately, they represent a highly intimate form of remembering a loved one lost to untimely death; publicly, they bear witness to a social issue and an implicit or explicit political position.¹² Santino argues that both commemorative and performative aspects are always present in a public spontaneous shrine, though these aspects are on a continuum by degree and explicit emphasis.

Spontaneous memorials include the phenomenon of roadside memorials, but Santino argues that media attention to the spontaneous memorials developed in the aftermath of Princess

¹²See Santino, J. (Ed.) (2006). *Spontaneous Shrines and the Public Memorialization of Death*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan. Santino’s text is the first collection of essays seeking to theorize about this phenomenon by examining it from a number of perspectives, internationally as well as historically. Santino argues that the media has played a significant role in calling attention to these spontaneous shrines, and thus their emergence as an international phenomenon (e.g. coverage of the death of Princess Diana, 9/11 memorials, and even earlier, objects left at the site of the Vietnam War Memorial). Remarkably, however, the collection of essays in Santino’s text does little theorization on purity and pollution concerns and shrines, or generally on spiritual themes, nor is there an essay specifically addressing the types of inner-city spontaneous street memorials examined in my prior study, though there is an essay on inner-city memorial wall murals (Lohman, in Santino, J. 2006).

Diana's death and 9/11 have driven this to become more of an international phenomenon. Santino, whose studies are based in Northern Ireland, prefers the term "spontaneous shrine," rather than "makeshift memorial" and his focus is more overtly political while also acknowledging the role of the sacred. To quote Santino:

...these are more than memorials. They are places of communion between the dead and the living...They are sites of pilgrimage...They commemorate and memorialize, but they do far more than that. They invite participation even from strangers. They are "open" to the public...I suggest that the shrines personalize public and political issues, and in personalizing them, are political themselves...Spontaneous shrines are silent witnesses....[They] act [in opposition to depersonalization]...the shrines insist – by their disruption of the mundane environment, their calling attention to themselves – they insist on us acknowledging the real people, the real lives lost, the devastation to the commonwealth that these politics hold. By translating social issues and political actions into personal terms, the shrines are themselves political statements...They are, I believe, the voice of the people. (12-13)

Following Santino's argument that "spontaneous shrines are silent witnesses...[to] public and social issues" on a political level, I would argue that these street memorials also play a "public theological or religious role," regardless of any explicit religious

content they may or may not carry. Both youth and adults behave in protective and preserving ways toward these street memorials, giving them a sacred character of ‘untouchability,’ of being set apart. They make pilgrimages to these sites and give testimony to the particularity of both the body and soul lost through their highly personalized public offerings in a communal spiritual creation. They function, in Johann Baptist Metz’s theological terms, as “dangerous memories” in the public space, protesting and professing in “solidarity with the dead and the vanquished” – a type of “eschatological hope”¹³ for the salvation of what might otherwise be lost forever.

Let’s begin to get a feel for this now:

1. This is Kenny’s street memorial, a 17 year old killed in 2006, and his memorial wrapped around a street lamp pole near the site of the murder is typical. (Show slides two and three) Notice the careful wrapping around the memorial to protect it from the weather. In both families

¹³ Metz, J.B. (1992/2007). *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*. New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 169.

studied, the young adult females took leadership in creating the initial street memorial. Here are pictures of the memorial two years later (show slides four and five). The initial memorial had been removed by an unknown party within a month or two of its creation, which is very unusual – memorials are rarely disturbed. The family recreated a memorial a year later on the anniversary and continue to add to it on particular occasions.

2. This is LeVar's memorial, killed at age 29, also in 2006 (slides six and seven). His is a more atypical memorial in that it was created along a fence and sidewalk where he was killed. Notice also the spray painted graffiti on the sidewalk expressing the family's love. That is also atypical of Boston street memorials and possibly reflects the tight-knit family-like neighborhood in which the murder occurred – there was a higher comfort level in professing solidarity with a permanent marking. A picture of LeVar is also displayed. (Show slide eight) – This is a

picture of the remnants of a memorial two years later at LeVar's site. In LeVar's situation, the family decided to take down the memorial within a month and to keep parts of it at home, but the site is still marked on anniversaries. Many memorials, however, are known to stay up for years if the family seeks to preserve and maintain it and there is no public objection.

Psychological theories can also provide a useful lens for religious studies here. The largest body of literature that readily applies to this research and integrates with findings to date is that of trauma and neuroaffective attachment studies, as well as possibly relational psychology and object relations theory.

Memory, time, and bodily connection are key elements in neuroaffective studies of the impact of trauma on the sense of self, understanding of reality, and connection to others. I am indebted to the work of Dr. Shelly Rambo in drawing my attention to the integration points of trauma and theology, including in Judith

Herman's (1992) classic text, *Trauma and Recovery*. Herman

writes, quote:

Traumatic events destroy the victim's fundamental assumptions about the safety of the world, the positive value of the self, and the meaningful order of creation... Basic trust is the foundation of belief in the continuity of life, the order of nature, and the transcendent order of the divine... (52)

Key dimensions to the experience of trauma include: first being overwhelmed by a threatening experience and then also experiencing a sense of powerlessness. Healing components are recognized to be: reestablishing a sense of safety and control, as well as connection to others; establishing commonality (a shared understanding of reality); and creating possibilities to reintegrate the trauma into one's narrative sense of self and identity so that new meaning-making can occur, a basic religious or theological function.

Healing from trauma such as the murder of a loved one is a lifelong process of re-establishing and maintaining a new social support system that in effect becomes a new life – a radical break with one's former world of meaning into a new world of ongoing

meaning-making in the aftermath. Some of these rituals studied appear to be functioning as small but highly important healing steps in the wake of tremendous trauma. By participating in creating a street memorial with family, friends, and strangers – a sense of connection to others, a commonality and shared reality about the sanctity of the particular life lost is experienced.

Related to trauma studies, I also want to draw attention to the Stone Center's development of relational psychology theory (now known as Relational-Cultural Therapy). These theories and research argue that there is a healing and energizing function in connection with others, a connection that permits mutual empowerment and can counteract the disempowerment and isolation of trauma. These theories could be extended to include connections brought through religious or spiritual rituals as well.¹⁴

By wearing buttons and t-shirts with the victim's photo – and by

¹⁴ Particularly see works by Jordan, J.V., Kaplan, A.G., Miller, J.B., Stiver, Irene P., & Surrey, J.L. (1991). *Women's Growth in Connection: Writings From The Stone Center*. New York: Guilford Press; Jordan, J.V., Walker, M., & Hartling, L.M. (eds.) (2004). *The Complexity of Connection: Writings From The Stone Center's Jean Baker Miller Training Institute*. New York: The Guilford Press; and Walker, M. & Rosen, W. B. (eds.) (2004). *How Connections Heal: Stories From Relational Cultural Therapy*. New York: The Guilford Press.

participating in creating a funeral order of service together, some small measure of control is gained in the participant's traumatized relational world, and the young adults studied expressed feelings of empowerment, connection, and uplift by participating in these rituals together.

Let's look at a few more slides:

3. This is a long shot of a young man, Cedrick's memorial (slides nine thru eleven), also from 2006, though his family was not interviewed. It is again wrapped around a street lamp pole. Cedrick was killed outside of his uncle's store, so in this case, a very large display went up in the store's window. I want to briefly draw your attention to the teddy bear in the window in the left, the one with the scarf with red stains wrapped around its neck (slide eleven). One of the interviewees, Tiesha, knew Cedrick and said that one of his injuries had been to the neck and that we might assume the red stains signify blood.

Witnessing and memorializing the victim's blood in some

way was important to both families in the study. This spontaneously disclosed topic also brought the most discomfort to the interviewees, in that they wondered out loud about their behaviors as “crazy” – behaviors that included seeking to keep blood found at the murder site in some manner, as well as wanting to keep the victim’s clothes with bullet holes and blood. Family members actively sought to maintain a visible/tactile representation of and connection to the body of the victim. [Show slides twelve thru sixteen] For example, here is Tiesha’s box of mementos from LeVar’s funeral, including the ambulance blanket with his bloodstains; and here are the posters from his street memorial; and here, autoethnographically, is a picture I personally felt compelled to take of Kenny’s bloodstain and his place of death – long before I even thought to study the street memorials as a phenomenon. Given that both families spoke of this drive to maintain a connection to the victim’s body, and in an

autoethnographic sharing, I also experienced this same drive, I believe there is some value to considering the normalcy of this particular phenomenon in the aftermath of violent loss and it's relationship to issues of trauma and attachment and loss.

For example, neuroaffective attachment studies specifically support the traumatic impact of the loss of a key attachment figure, such as an immediate family member. Lewis, Amini, & Lannon (2000)¹⁵ provide a useful summary of attachment literature, arguing that human beings need lifelong “limbic regulation to give coherence to neurodevelopment” (p. 88). They argue that:

...even after a peak parenting experience, children never transition to a full self-tuning physiology. Adults remain social animals: they continue to require a source of stabilization outside themselves...Stability means finding people who regulate you well and staying near them...This necessary intermingling of physiologies makes relatedness and communal living the center of human life. (86)

¹⁵ Lewis, T., Amini, FI, & Lannon, R. (2000). *A General Theory of Love*. New York: Vintage Books.

Dr. Phyllis Silverman and her research on grief processes also seeks to normalize the experience of a continuing bond with the dead – that it is a healthy healing process reflective of our actual social nature. She contrasts this with the historical American psychological norm of fostering detachment as healthy independence and adaptation.¹⁶ Thus the significance of ongoing communal rituals, including religious or spiritual rituals, for healing from traumatic loss may have a base in neuroaffective attachment and grief studies – and again, these support the pastoral usefulness of normalizing the desire by the victim’s family members to touch the body, blood, or clothing of the dead as well as their other forms of maintaining connection, such as the persistent wearing of buttons and t-shirts.

4. Going back to the more typical street memorial for Cedrick [slides sixteen thru twenty-one], in this one you can observe many stuffed animals, candles, food offerings, liquor bottles, personal belongings, such as a hat or hair

¹⁶ See Klass, D, Silverman, P., & Nickman, S.L. (Eds) (1996). *Continuing Bonds: New Understandings of Grief*. New York: Routledge.

brush, and flowers – food offerings can also signify the favorite food of the lost loved one. Once the initial memorial is created, it remains open to the community to participate and offerings can be quite personal and commemorative, or public and explicit, as in the case of written materials. In both of the families studied, the young adult females spoke of their struggles with managing offerings made by others to the memorial. For example, Kenny’s aunt, Keisha, was concerned that offerings of red flowers would offend Kenny’s spirit because he hated the color red and it would cause his spirit unrest or his spirit to become destructive of the memorial. LeVar’s female cousin Tiesha disliked the contributions of liquor bottles, typically by male friends, but did not remove them, opting instead to set them to one side, minimizing their placement in the public memorial.

I’ll briefly mention here that I have also found an anthropological social scientific lens useful in thinking about these

struggles. I have turned to Mary Douglas' work on purity and pollution¹⁷ combined with Victor Turner's consideration of the liminal space¹⁸ created in ritual formation when communal roles are leveled in the ritual process – in this case, when gang members and/or strangers and family members are all participating in the creative process together, compromise can become a rule of thumb in deciding what is 'polluting' a memorial and what is not when the liminal space creates an overriding communal bond. Keisha opts to put the red ribbons lower on Kenny's memorial and Tiesha sets the liquor bottles to one side, but nothing is removed in their decisions, everyone's contribution has a role.

5. This next memorial is again slightly atypical in that it is strung along a fence (slides seventeen to twenty-two). I want to point out a letter posted on this one that integrates biblical quotes from I John and Acts, and also if you look closely at these two teddy bears on the left, a small

¹⁷ Douglas, M. (1966/2002). *Purity and Danger*. New York: Routledge Classics.

¹⁸ Turner, V. (1969/1995). *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure*. New York: Aldine de Gruyter.

wooden stick in the shape of a wishbone that has been carefully tucked under the bear's chin and over a heart on which is written the word love. There seems to be a bit more of an explicit eschatological theme of hope in this street memorial in particular.

6. This last street memorial is for Steve, age 13, killed one year ago. The right side of the picture represents the original memorial, which has stayed in place, protected again from the elements, for an entire year, while the left side was a creation on the one year anniversary when the family led a very public media-covered commemoration at the site, along with a call for public action and accountability to reduce the violence. In this case, the public performative political potential and capacity of the street memorial was lifted up by a highly active, connected, and empowered family (Steve's parents had founded a local church). In most other cases, however, youth express feelings of disempowerment and despair in

relationship to the broader society and their capacity for political impact, and the memorials become tools for commemoration and shared grief, albeit still in a public performative form. Notice in these slides an example of the button with Steve's picture next to a figure of Jesus as a shepherd with the cross – again hinting at a more explicit eschatological hope perhaps. One of the most striking findings across the board regarding these buttons, as well as the t-shirts worn with the victim's photo, is that these very much gave the family member a sense that the victim's spirit was present and "alive" and with them in a real and visceral way, that the wearing of the photo allowed some form of "channeling" of the victim's spirit to occur. This sense was magnified the more people present were wearing the buttons or t-shirts.

Those of us familiar with object relations theory in psychology might readily see connections here.¹⁹ However, it is also true that if we are neuroaffectively related in our attachment as Lewis, et.al. (2000) argue,²⁰ then some sense of “being present and alive,” may remain after the death of a loved one, and this is part of the experience of mutuality and energy in relationships observed by relational psychology and is also part of the experience of the significance of transitional objects during a mourning period that may last a lifetime.²¹ This experience may also be conceptualized anthropologically or theologically, rather than psychologically, in terms of the experience of ‘spirits’ or of the ‘Holy Spirit,’²² for example. The neuroaffective bodily base to this human experience may create a new lens on a commonality across cultures to the experience of phenomena such as ghosts and

¹⁹ Particularly see works by St. Clair, M. (1994). *Human Relationships and the Experience of God: Object Relations and Religion*. Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock Publishers; St. Clair, M. with Wigren, J. (Eds.) (2004). *Object Relations and Self Psychology: An Introduction*, Fourth Edition. Belmont, CA: Thomson-Brooks/Cole; and Jones, J.W. (1991). *Contemporary Psychoanalysis and Religion: Transference and Transcendence*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

²⁰ See also Goleman, D. (2006) and his summary of the newest social psychology research on neuroaffective attachment.

²¹ See also Fine (1997) on connection in the aftermath of the suicide of a loved one.

²² For a discussion of trauma and the doctrinal and ritual conception of Holy Saturday and the Holy Spirit in the Christian tradition see S. Rambo (forthcoming).

spirits and ancestor worship, etc., in different religions.²³ While the young adults in this study were all unchurched, they all had some belief in “God” and an afterlife and often spoke in the language of “spirit” when experiencing their loved one as still present. They each shared an African American and Christian linguistic and cultural context, but they also each shared a human embodied neuroaffective capacity for their experiences.

7. I want to quickly run through these remaining slides. While many street memorials are actively preserved for several years, some are taken down and all of the interviewees expressed a desire for more permanent public forms of memorials, such as this small community dedication of 3 plants in memory of three lives lost in LeVar’s neighborhood, and this more public memorial created by a school that was on display for two years in a major area of inner-city Boston. This traveling button memorial sponsored by the

²³ I have touched on this in the street memorial research previously through some of the anthropological and evolutionary psychology literature mentioned in the working bibliography (not included), see particularly Deren’s (1953) work on Voudan Haitian religion and also Atran (2002) and Barrett (2004).

Louis D. Brown Peace Institute is another example of a type of permanent memorial.

8. Finally, these are some samples of the funeral orders of service ritually prepared now with the family by the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute. I'll show Kenny's in full – his obituary and the order of service outline are generally typical of African American funerals, but additional pages are titled with seven core values by the Peace Institute: love, unity, faith, hope, courage, justice, and peace or forgiveness. There are scriptural selections and photos and letters from family and friends. There is advice on ways to be with or help the family – such as “say little on an early visit” and “connect them with other survivors” – as well as specific types of statements to avoid making to the family, such as “It was God's will” or “I understand how you feel.” The order of service ends with the Peace Prayer. Here are a few sample pages from LeVar's and another one showing the Peace Institutes' continued innovation by adding color and having the family create adjectives out of the loved one's name. Reading resources have also been

added now. Finally, the Louis D. Brown Peace Institute has also developed a hospital guide for the families. Let me close with this quote by Adrienne Rich.