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Mobile Monuments: Dialectic of Commemoration in Henry James's *The American Scene*

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I. Introduction

Returning to his native land in 1904 after an absence of twenty-one years, Henry James found New York—his birthplace, where he also spent his boyhood—now obsessed with motion and driven by "the universal will to move—to move, move, move, as an end in itself, an appetite at any price."[1] For James, the city's mobility was synonymous with its incessant replacement of old buildings with new ones. James ventriloquizes the voice of "powers above" that commands the city's architectural configuration: "[T]here's no step at which you shall rest, no form, as I'm constantly showing you, to which, consistently with my interests, you *can*. I build you up but to tear you down" (448). The city, as it were, engages in destructive creation rather than creative destruction, rendering every element of its landscape transient and provisional.

The above quotes are from *The American Scene* (1907), an account of James's one-year visit to his homeland from 1904 to 1905, a travel book eulogized by Edmund Wilson as "one of the very best books about modern America" (118). Although the book covers various regions from New England to the American South, the entire book is penetrated by the sense

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(felt in his native city) that the past and history are rapidly being "swept away" in the ruthless processes of industrialization and modernization—processes underpinned by "that perpetual passionate pecuniary purpose which plays with all forms, which derides and devours them" (447). As Bill Brown argues, James's New York, a city obsessed with a "relentless, pecuniary pursuit of novelty," testifies to "the foreclosure of any possibility that experience, memory, and history can be lodged in static physical structures" (184–85). Irving Howe's observation made decades ago still holds good: "In motivation, if not always perspective, it [the book] is often elegiac, a journey of the imagination backward in time, where all is fixed and irrevocable, beyond the blur of fashion" (vii). Howe adds: "Toward the present James marches boldly; he grasps it, embraces it, repulses it; but always he is most deeply engaged by the memory of an earlier America" (vii).

James figures his experience of loss as a demolition of commemorated objects or personal monuments that he wanted most to be immobile and fixed.[2] Significantly, he describes those personal sites of loss in conjunction with or, more precisely, in contiguity with public monuments—many of them Civil War monuments—that had been erected during his absence. James's purpose in juxtaposing personal and public monuments seems twofold. On the one hand, the juxtaposition works as an implicit criticism of public monuments. Kirk Savage, a historian and theorist of Civil War monuments, writes that public monuments "pretend to be permanent, eternal, and static" (x). They are meant to "remain a fixed point, stabilizing both the physical and the cognitive landscape" and thereby "to mold a landscape of collective memory, to conserve what is worth remembering and discard the rest" (4). Anticipating Savage's and other theorists' critiques of modern monumental projects,[3] James—who (as a returning expatriate) sees newly built monuments as part of changing landscapes—does not permit them to operate as "a fixed point." James describes them as if they were built at the cost of his personal sites of memory. These monuments then emerge as objects that represent a collective failure to remember the past. On the other hand, by juxtaposing public and private monuments, James seems to suggest that the project of identifying a certain place as a static monument that commemorates the personal past is always flawed from the outset. Even when seeking a private site of memory, James seems aware that there are no places unmediated by a kind of collectivity fabricated by public monuments. Through a close reading of the book's pivotal scenes that foreground James's experience of loss,[4] I

seek to investigate how James envisions an alternative monument that is simultaneously personal *and* public,[5] immobile *and* mobile.

I have used the terms "mobility" and "immobility" to indicate, respectively, an urban obsession with renewal, and what might be called a monumental attempt to achieve fixity within a rapidly changing landscape. *The American Scene* is so complex because this mobility/immobility dichotomy is constantly transposed into a more internal conflict—between James's mobile sensibility and his immobilized memory. In his influential study of James as an anti-antimodernist writer, Ross Posnock argues that despite his announced revulsion against urban mobility, James himself registers analogous mobility:[6] "[T]he turbulent movements of the American spectacle are refracted in the 'odd, inward rhythm' of James's own 'fluidity of appreciation.' He visualizes this fluidity as a 'warm wave' permitting him to be 'floated'" (88–89). Gert Buelens makes a similar point when he defines "the basic tension that governs *The American Scene*" as follows: "[O]n the one hand, the 'restless analyst' is eager to probe beneath the surface of the American spectacle that he wants to understand; on the other hand, the narrator's sensibility frequently seems to beat to the same tune as the surface that provokes his penetrating impulse" (2). Indeed, immobility and fixity are the last features attributed to James's convoluted later writing style, which has been understood by critics to be enacting an impressionistic influx and mobile responsiveness. Whether James intends or not, his syntactic and perceptual fluidity in *The American Scene* comes to align with the urban compulsion to "move," which he seeks to condemn. While James does not surrender to a nostalgic retreat from modernity, his thrill at rediscovering sameness remains real. On arrival in his native city, he expresses his excitement at reencountering "a past recalled from very far back" (357). James identifies the past "at every turn, in sights, sounds, smells, even in the chaos of confusion and change; a process under which, verily, recognition became more interesting and more amusing in proportion as it became more difficult" (357). James remembers the past townscape astoundingly well—it remains immobilized in his inner vision with utmost precision, with the "indelibility of the childish vision" (421). This extreme fixity of memory renders the moment of loss perplexing for James. Even as his fluid perceptivity responsively registers the changing influx of external landscapes, the past landscapes inscribed on his inner vision insistently persist. It is not so much James's fluctuating sensitivity but an implicit contradiction between sensitivity and immobilized memory that makes his text dynamically dialectic.

II. Photographic Commemoration and Temporal Mobility

To begin, I will explore James's own account of what I have described as the contradiction between fluid perceptivity and persisting memory. In the first chapter (entitled "New England: An Autumn Impression"), James "confess[es]" how "the play of perception" during the first weeks of his return is "quickened, in the oddest way, by the wonderment . . . of my finding how many corners of the general, of the local, picture had anciently never been unveiled for me at all, and how many unveiled too briefly and too scantly, with quite insufficient bravery of gesture" (398–99). James continues:

> That might make one ask by what strange law one had lived in the other time, with gaps, to that number, in one's experience, in one's consciousness, with so many muffled spots in one's general vibration—and the answer indeed to such a question might carry with it an infinite penetration of retrospect, a penetration productive of ghostly echoes as sharp sometimes as aches or pangs. So many had been the easy things, the contiguous places, the conspicuous objects, to right or to left of the path, that had been either unaccountably or all too inevitably left undiscovered, and which were to live on, to the inner vision, through the long years, as mere blank faces, round, empty, metallic, senseless disks dangling from familiar and reiterated names. (399)

The "unveiled" corners of the local "picture" in this passage turn into "muffled spots in one's general vibration," "experience," and "consciousness." The "easy things, the contiguous places, the conspicuous objects" that had been "left undiscovered" would simply seem outside James's "consciousness." However, he assumes that they "were to live on, to the inner vision" as a sort of subconsciousness buried close to "familiar" associations. The passage encapsulates James's radically subjectivized perception of landscape, whereby newly discovered elements are immediately transposed into "spots" (of the "inner vision") that had somehow been concealed. Given James's explicit use of photographic tropes in the following passage, which I shall presently discuss, it would be safe to assume that the faculty of memory here is conceived as a camera that records everything it sees, even things to which the photographer does not pay attention. The revisited landscape appears as a "picture" he had

taken but of which he has failed to see the details.

If everything James discovers anew is immediately translated into a part of "inner vision" that had already been there but which he has failed to see, then what would occur when he discovers that the place or object he had seen has been lost or modified? Of course, confusion occurs: "[T]-he hundred emendations and retouches of the old picture, its greater depth of tone, greater show of detail, greater size and scale, [were] tending by themselves to confound and mislead, in a manner, the lights and shades of remembrance" (399). Lamenting those "emendations" as undermining "the general richness," James states:

> The richness might have its poverties still and the larger complexity its crudities; but, all the same, to look back was to seem to have been present at an extraordinary general process, that of the rapid, that of the ceaseless relegation of the *previous* (on the part of the whole visible order) to one of the wan categories of misery. What was taking place was a perpetual repudiation of the past, so far as there had been a past to repudiate, so far as the past was a positive rather than a negative quantity. There had been plenty in it, assuredly, of the negative, and that was but a shabbiness to disown or a deception to expose; yet there had been an old conscious commemorated life too, and it was this that had become the victim of supersession. (399–400)

The words "positive," "negative," and "expose" (along with "retouches" and "lights and shades") indicate James's deployment of photographic tropes.[7] The intricate formulation of "looking back" as having "been present at an extraordinary general process" (in which the "visible" grows "wan") figures James as witnessing a reverse development of a picture where an image gradually fades away. The loss of "an old conscious commemorated life" assumes a particular urgency precisely because the (lost) "visible" image constitutes James's "inner vision"; which is to say, the "process" of repudiation occurs not outside but *in* his "consciousness." James *experiences* the process of loss or the loss *as* a process by adjusting the "lights and shades of remembrance."

In the ensuing passage, the temporal mobility of the Jamesian perception seems transposed onto the "old" life itself:

> The pathos, so to call it, of the impression was somehow that it didn't, the earlier, simpler condition, still resist or protest, or at all

> expressively flush through; it was consenting to become a past with all the fine candour with which it had tried to affirm itself, in its day, as a present—and very much, for that matter, as with a due ironic forecast of the fate in store for the hungry, triumphant actual. (400)

James's play with the verbal tense confuses the reader's temporal sense. The infinitive phrase "to become a past" is preceded by the promissory verb ("consent to") cast in the past progressive form ("was consenting"), obscuring the temporal axis of the sentence. This sense of confusion deepens with James's subsequent use of the pluperfect form ("had tried") for the insistence (of the "earlier, simpler condition") on affirming itself as the "present." The two infinitives ("consent to become" and "try to affirm") simultaneously register futurity and suspend the success of the intended action. This futural uncertainty unsettles the sense of certitude that is supposed to be conveyed by "forecast." At the moment of its "supersession," the "commemorated life" enacts temporal mobility that unsettles its own "earlier" status. This mobility would seem to correspond to the temporal restructuring of James's "inner vision," whereby James experiences the loss of the past as a process that occurs in the present. Thus, the moment of loss embodies a dynamic interaction between James's fixed memory of the past landscape and his keen sensitivity to the observed scene.

This conflict also characterizes scenes highlighting the loss of a more personal past. However, in those scenes, James evokes a kind of collectivity that is not apparent in his photographic recollection discussed above, presumably because the evocation of a personal memory brings up matters of privacy and publicity. As Ian F. A. Bell succinctly puts it, in *The American Scene*, "James overtly castigates the world of publicity at length and in detail, emphasizing its corruption of the equation between public and private through the interchangeability of market and home" (94). How can one establish a space to commemorate a personal past within a culture that increasingly dismisses privacy? James implicitly addresses this question in his description of personal loss, to which we shall turn.

III. Inscriptional Commemoration and the Readerly Collectivity

James grants a particular significance to the removal of his birthplace in New York, to the extent that, as John Carlos Rowe argues, "[t]he 'vanished . . . birthplace' [. . .] sets the tone for all the other historical absences he

encounters in *The American Scene*" (214). The episode begins with James's stroll around Washington Square, a stroll that he calls "excursions of memory" (428). Before his arrival at the birthplace, James thinks of "the unquenchable intensity of the impressions received in childhood": "They are made then once for all, be their intrinsic beauty, interest, importance, small or great; the stamp is indelible and never wholly fades" (430). The photographic connotation of the "stamp" becomes clear when he mentions a "daguerreotypist's art" that "preserved" the costume he used to wear in his childhood (430).

Arriving at Washington Place, James finds his birthplace superseded by "a high, square, impersonal structure" that "blocks . . . the view of the past," so that he feels "amputated of half my history" (431). James deploys a "tablet" metaphor to express the city's failure to commemorate:

> This was the snub, for the complacency of retrospect, that, whereas the inner sense had positively erected there for its private contemplation a commemorative mural tablet, the very wall that should have borne this inscription had been smashed as for demonstration that tablets, in New York, are unthinkable. And I have had indeed to permit myself this free fantasy of the hypothetic rescued identity of a given house—taking the vanished number in Washington Place as most pertinent—in order to invite the reader to gasp properly with me before the fact that we not only fail to remember, in the whole length of the city, one of these frontal records of birth, sojourn, or death, under a celebrated name, but that we have only to reflect an instant to see any such form of civic piety inevitably and for ever absent. (431–32)

The abiding sense of loss—figured as amputation—is followed by the subsumption (or expansion) of the narratorial pronoun "I" into "we," a remarkable move, given the deeply subjective nature of the loss experienced through the "inner sense" and "private contemplation." The move derives from James's explicit appeal to readerly sympathy. This rare appeal seems triggered by the term "inscription," a piece of writing James's "inner sense" had sought to carve on the wall of his birth-house. A "commemorative mural tablet"—erected as it may be for "private contemplation"—necessarily presupposes the reading public. He goes on to interrogate: "Where, in fact, is the point of inserting a mural tablet, at any legible height, in a building certain to be destroyed to make room for a sky-scraper? And from where, on the other hand, in a façade of

fifty floors, does one 'see' the pious plate recording the honour attached to one of the apartments look down on a responsive people?" (432). The verb "see," underscoring the illegibility of the tablet located high on the building, emphasizes that the inscription ought to be *read*, rather than seen, by "responsive people." Herein, perhaps, the differentiation between photographic and inscriptional preservations comes into play. They may externalize one's "inner vision" that is "indelible"; however, the photographic seems evocative of a more private and interiorized register than the inscriptional.

Evoking the reading public, the imagined tablet allows James a "free fantasy of the hypothetic rescued identity of a given house." James's recasting of his birthplace as "a given house" stems again from the tablet metaphor, as his generalizing impulse first manifests in his recognized "demonstration that tablets, in New York, are unthinkable"—a demonstration that recasts the personal "tablet" as plural and pertaining to the narrating present (431). Thus, the plural subject ("we") emerges, who "fail to remember." James discovers that commemoration is "unthinkable" in New York. However, through the act of inscribing (or writing) the urban incapacity of remembering, James seems to perform an alternative form of commemoration, in which the reading public, including the writer himself, *remembers* that they fail to remember.

There is another striking instance of James's invocation of collective readers (of inscriptions) as an alternative form of commemoration of personal loss. James is taken by a deep sense of loss on discovering the removed birthplace, but he does not write about a place that had aroused in him the most overwhelming sense of loss—the graves of his parents and sister (who died of breast cancer in 1892). In his journal written during his stay in his homeland, James notes of "the never-to-be-lost memory of that evening hour at Mount Auburn—at the Cambridge Cemetery" (*Notebooks* 240). He is overtaken by "the blessed flood of emotion that broke out at the touch of one's sudden *vision* and carried me away" (240).

> The moon was there, early, white and young, and seemed reflected in the white face of the great empty Stadium, forming one of the boundaries of Soldier's Field, that looked over at me, stared over at me, through the clear twilight, from across the Charles. Everything was there, everything *came*; the recognition, stillness, the strangeness, the pity and the sanctity and the terror, the breath-catching passion and the divine relief of tears. William's inspired transcript, on the exquisite

> little Florentine urn of Alice's ashes, William's divine gift to us, and to *her*, of the Dantean lines—
>
> *Dopo lungo exilio e martiro*
> *Viene a questa pace—*
>
> took me so at the throat by its penetrating *rightness*, that it was as if one sank down on one's knees in a kind of anguish of gratitude before something for which one had waited with a long, deep *ache*. (*Notebooks* 240)

In the published travelogue, James removed the whole personal implication from the scene:

> Why, if one could tell it, would it be so wonderful, for instance, to have stood on the low cliff that hangs over the Charles, by the nearer side of Mount Auburn, and felt the whole place bristle with merciless memories? . . . Just opposite, at a distance, beyond the river and its meadows, the white face of the great empty Stadium stared at me, as blank as a rising moon—with Soldiers' Field squaring itself like some flat memorial slab that waits to be inscribed. I had seen it inscribed a week or two before in the fantastic lettering of a great intercollegiate game of football, and that impression had been so documentary, as to the capacity of the American public for momentary gregarious emphasis, that I regret having to omit here all the reflections it prompted. (*The American Scene* 412)

In her reading of this revision, Sharon Cameron argues that "the grief occasioned in the notebook passage by the writing of the transcript becomes incredulity first at the absence of writing and then at its triviality" (16). The "epitaph" is "being done away with, and awaited" (as exhibited by the description of the field as "some flat memorial slab that waits to be inscribed") (16). Thus, "the subject to be mourned is a subject to be ironized: 'the capacity of the American public for momentary gregarious emphasis'" (16). Further, in the conversion of the letters on the urn into football players, Cameron identifies "a parody of writing that leads to its erasure—making writing transitory by construing the players themselves as letters gone off the text/field/slab—as if this might facilitate, by analogy, the vanishing of other letters (those in the epitaph)" (16–17).

Cameron's otherwise forceful reading of the revision remains obscure as to why James, who could have entirely omitted the memorial image from the scene, *kept* it, if only in a metaphorical form, and why, consequently, he displaced the personal and familial "epitaph" into the emphatically collective and public "field." We might answer these questions tautologically. Arguably, James kept the memorial image to suggest that a public and collective space, *when empty*, may serve as a displaced form of a personal memorial. James certainly ironizes "the capacity of the American public for momentary gregarious emphasis." It seems implausible to say, however, that his parodic intent informs the depiction of the stare by "the white face of the great empty Stadium" (gleaned from the journal *ad verbum*). This is because the "stare" seems to make an essential part of "one's sudden *vision*" that effects the "blessed flood of emotion." The empty Stadium (in the journal) suggests that James's deeply personalized moment of mourning necessitates as its constitutive element a huge public space, albeit in a vacant state.

As Cameron argues, to figure the football players as the letters is to imagine an inscription that easily vanishes, but it is also to imagine an inscription that will *reappear*, one to be achieved collectively in the future insofar as the memorial slab "waits to be inscribed" (412). If, as Cameron notes, the empty stands of the stadium imply the disappearance of the readers who had read the field (as a text), they would also anticipate the readers to come. In sum, the "empty" field, which for James constitutes part of the personalized vision of loss, is recast as an in-between space that stands simultaneously for the collective inscription made in the past and the one to be made in the future. This alteration of private commemoration into a public one seems to demarcate a form of displaced mourning in which James silently engages.

IV. The Closet of Memories and the Logic of Dispossession

In the previous section, I argued that James's dismissal of gregariousness does not necessarily indicate an irreconcilable antagonism between personal commemoration and public collectivity. Rather, James seeks to imagine—by invoking inscriptional memorials and their potential readers—an alternative commemoration that retains a trace or possibility of public collectivity.

This scenario, however, may appear too optimistic when we recall that the depiction of the effaced birthplace (discussed above) is immediately

followed by James's denouncement of the commercial nature of an urban collectivity. James dismisses "a huge, continuous fifty-floored conspiracy" as undermining "the ancient graces," which had "flourished just in proportion as the parts of life and the signs of character have *not* been lumped together" (432). He concludes: "So interesting, as object-lessons, may the developments of the American gregarious ideal become; so traceable, at every turn, to the restless analyst at least, are the heavy footprints, in the finer texture of life, of a great commercial democracy seeking to abound supremely in its own sense and having none to gainsay it" (432).

James seems to find "democratic" collectivity essentially at odds with personal commemoration. The Boston chapter, however, signals his struggle to negotiate a collective and democratic space (in its operating, not "empty" state) that somehow makes personal mourning possible. To examine such a struggle, we first need to trace how James dramatizes his discovery in Boston of the vanished house where he used to live. Instead of depicting the surviving landscape at first, James from the outset inscribes "the harshness of change" added to Ashburton Place, "a particular spot [he] had wished to revisit" (542). "In this immediate neighbourhood of the enlarged State House, where a great raw clearance has been made, memory met that pang of loss, knew itself sufficiently bereft to see the vanished objects, a scant but adequate cluster of 'nooks'" (542). He fortunately finds a surviving "pair of ancient houses," in one of which he had spent "two-years of far-away youth" during "the closing-time of the War," a spot "full both of public and of intimate vibrations" (543).

A month later, however, he returns to the spot "to see if another whiff of the fragrance were not to be caught" and instead finds "a gaping void, the brutal effacement, at a stroke, of every related object, of the whole precious past" (543).

> I had been present, by the oddest hazard, at the very last moments of the victim in whom I was most interested; the act of obliteration had been breathlessly swift, and if I had often seen how fast history could be made I had doubtless never so felt that it could be unmade still faster. It was as if the bottom had fallen out of one's own biography, and one plunged backward into space without meeting anything. (543–44)

The last sentence echoes the expression quoted earlier, "an infinite

penetration of retrospect, a penetration productive of ghostly echoes as sharp sometimes as aches or pangs" (399). The "ghostly echoes" also find their equivalent: In his first visit to the house, James seeks to "recover . . . some echo of ghostly footsteps—the sound as of taps on the window-pane heard in the dim dawn" (543). When James feels "as if the bottom had fallen out of one's biography," he seems precisely at the edge of (or in the process of) an "infinite penetration." In other words, somewhat paradoxically, the house had served for James as a closet to put away memories—one that saved him from remembering too much.[8] "The place itself was meanwhile, at all events, a conscious memento, with old secrets to keep and old stories to witness for, a saturation of life as closed together and preserved in it as the scent lingering in a folded pocket-handkerchief" (543). The formless "scent" is congealed (or "closed") in an object that is to be sequestered into a "pocket." Together with "old secrets to keep," this image of concealment seems to figure James's commemoration as a variation of hoarding and hence, perhaps, the house as "the whole *precious* past" (my emphasis). To extend this reading, the clearance of the house amounts to a kind of dispossession—perhaps in a double sense insofar as the demolition implies an exorcized "echo of ghostly footsteps"—which sets memories into motion.

James draws an implicit correlation between the removal of the house and the erection of public monuments:

> I recall a Sunday afternoon in particular when I hung about on the now vaster platform of the State House for a near view of the military monuments erected there, the statues of Generals Hooker and Devens, and for the charm at once and the pang of feeling the whole backward vista, with all its features, fall from that eminence into grey perspective. The top of Beacon Hill quite rakes, with a but slightly shifting range, the old more definite Boston; for there seemed no item, nor any number, of that remarkable sum that it would not anciently have helped one to distinguish or divine. (544)

James mentions the "near view" of the (recently erected) monuments only to underscore "the whole backward vista," whose "fall"—along with the attendant "pang"—would seem to reenact James's backward "plunge." Public monuments represent an unwelcome change to James's familiar vista, crystallizing the town's misguided way to commemorate the past.

Absorbed in a "backward" landscape, James finds "the old uplifted front

of the State House . . . more delightful and harmonious even than [he] had remembered it" (544). However, "[t]he irresistible spell, . . . was something sharper yet—the coercion, positively, of feeling one's case, the case of one's deeper discomfiture, completely made out" (544–45). He sees "a continuous passage of men and women . . . who struck [him] as labouring wage-earners," from whose lips "no sound of English, in a single instance, escaped"; "the people before me were gross aliens to a man, and they were in serene and triumphant possession" (545). Their "possession" urges James to reclaim his ownership of the city: "Nothing, as I say, could have been more effective for figuring the hitherward bars of a grating through which I might make out, far-off in space, 'my' small homogeneous Boston of the more interesting time" (545). The "aliens" seem to represent an American mobility that defamiliarizes his homeland: "[T]hey gave the measure of the distance by which the general movement was *away*—away, always and everywhere, from the old presumptions and conceivabilities" (545). James reports his "vision" of "a huge applied sponge, a sponge saturated with the foreign mixture and passed over almost everything I remembered and might still have recovered"—a sponge that effects an "obliteration" (545–46). The terms "saturation" and "obliteration" reiterate the vocabulary used for the lost house, exemplifying how James conceives his dispossession of the "ancient house" as forced by immigrants.[9]

V. The Public Library as a Space for Democratic Commemoration

In effect, James's vexing experience in Boston (described in the preceding section) reenacts, in a reversed order, a sequence of events that revolves around his discovery of the vanished birth-house in New York. James's "excursions of memory" in New York start as "an artful evasion of the actual" or an "escape" into the past from "the ubiquitous alien"—swarming immigrants (in Ellis Island) whom he writes about in the preceding section (428). In that section he likens his experience of witnessing immigrants to a ghostly possession of an old house: "So is stamped, for detection, the questionably privileged person who has had an apparition, seen a ghost in his supposedly safe old house" (426–27). Here, James implicitly puns on the word "possession." In Ellis Island, James deplores the "native" people's reduction to "*un*settled possession" or "dispossession" resulting from the immigrants' "note of settled possession" (427).

James's nostalgic stroll in New York also involves a (dis)engagement with a public monument. On the familiar streets, his "sense of other

days" keeps "meeting, half the time, to its discomfiture, the lamentable little Arch of Triumph which bestrides these beginnings of Washington Square—lamentable because of its poor and lonely and unsupported and unaffiliated state" (430). The monument continues to occupy a corner of his consciousness: "With this melancholy monument it [the sense of other days] could make no terms at all, but turned its back to the strange sight as often as possible, helping itself thereby, moreover, to do a little of the pretending required, no doubt, by the fond theory that nothing hereabouts was changed" (430). The arch, which commemorates the centenary of George Washington's inauguration, was erected in the 1890s, during James's absence. The erection of the public monument is aligned with the loss of his birthplace, both of which represent the urban mobility that undoes the basis of his nostalgic recollection. In New York, immediately following his discovery of the removed birthplace, he identifies an alternative monument. James visits the Ascension (church), "a charming and considerably dim 'old' church," which he deems "very nearly as commemorative a monument as a great reputation need wish" (433). His evaluation derives less from its architectural or historical resonance than from a work of art inside the church, "that noble work of John La Farge," a "great religious picture" before which "the sensation, for the moment, upset so all the facts" (433):

> The hot light, outside, might have been that of an Italian *piazzetta*; the cool shade, within, with the important work of art shining through it, seemed part of some other-world pilgrimage—all the more that the important work of art itself, a thing of the highest distinction, spoke, as soon as one had taken it in, with that authority which makes the difference, ever afterwards, between the remembered and the forgotten quest. A rich note of interference came, I admit, through the splendid window-glass, the finest of which, unsurpassably fine, to my sense, is the work of the same artist; so that the church, as it stands, is very nearly as commemorative a monument as a great reputation need wish. (433)

Given James's enduring friendship with the artist, he seems to be summoning a personal recollection here. La Farge's picture dismantles James's sense of place, even as its inherent "authority" dictates what to remember and forget. The church for James serves as a monument, not because of its historical or topographical specificity, but because the

artwork placed *inside* the building disturbs geographical fixity and shapes the viewer's mnemonic practice. If the church compensates for the city's failure to erect a "tablet," it does so through James's strategic dislocation of what a "commemorative monument" signifies.

The transformative power of artworks speaks to the core of the Jamesian redefinition of commemorative space. Nevertheless, the church operates undeniably as a refuge from the reality represented by the ubiquity of immigrants, the sense of dispossession (given by the lost house), and erections of new public monuments. The reversed order of events in Boston would seem to insinuate the writer's efforts to reach an alternative conclusion. Arguably, in his depiction of the Boston Public Library, James seeks to construct a commemorative space where he reengages the triad of problematics rather than escaping from them.

James's initially dismissive view of the library gradually changes as he proceeds to write about that institution. American libraries, where he has an "impression . . . that every one is 'in' everything," present "fresh evidence of that democratic way of dealing which it has been the American office to translate from an academic phrase into a bristling fact" (560). James reevaluates "[t]he Boston institution" as "a great and complete institution" (560). However, it strikes "the restored absentee as practically without *penetralia*," without an innermost space that provides "a place of study and meditation" (560). He speculates that "social democracies are unfriendly to the preservation of *penetralia*" (560). Inside the library, James witnesses "the multitudinous bustle, the coming and going, as in a railway-station, of persons with carpet-bags and other luggage" (561). The lack of *penetralia* implies a presence of "the open doors and immediate accesses" on the one hand, and on the other an absence of "the deeper depths," "some part that should be sufficiently *within* some other part, sufficiently withdrawn and consecrated" (561). "A library without *penetralia* may affect him [James] but as a temple without altars," a contradiction in terms (560).

One of the rare instances of James eulogizing public monuments occurs within such a radically open and exteriorized "democratic" space:

> The main staircase, in Boston, has, with its amplitude of wing and its splendour of tawny marble, a high and luxurious beauty—bribing the restored absentee to emotion, moreover, by expanding, monumentally, at one of its rests, into admirable commemoration of the Civil War service of the two great Massachusetts Volunteer regiments of *élite*. Such visions, such felicities, such couchant lions and recorded names

> and stirred memories as these, encountered in the early autumn twilight, *colour* an impression—even though to say so be the limit of breach of the silence in which, for persons of the generation of the author of these pages, appreciation of them can best take refuge: the refuge to which I felt myself anon reduced, for instance, opposite the State House, in presence of Saint-Gaudens's noble and exquisite monument to Robert Gould Shaw and the Fifty-fourth Massachusetts. There are works of memorial art that may suddenly place themselves, by their operation in a given case, outside articulate criticism—which was what happened, I found, in respect to the main feature, the rich staircase of the Library. (560–61)

As James's reference to "stirred memories" suggests, the monuments mentioned in the passage have personal implications for himself. As Richard Howard notes, "The two lions . . . honor the 2nd and 20th Massachusetts Infantry. Thirteen of the sixteen officers of the 2nd Massachusetts killed in action were Harvard graduates; among the officers of the 20th Massachusetts was Oliver Wendel Holmes, Jr.," one of James's lifelong friends.[10] The 54th Massachusetts Infantry—"celebrated for its assault on Fort Wagner, South Carolina," during which its commander, Robert Gould Shaw, was killed—had as one of its officers James's younger brother Wilky, who was badly wounded in the engagement.[11] William James (Henry's brother) served as one of the orators at the unveiling ceremony of the sculpture in 1897. If public monuments generally purport to enact a form of collective memory, James's "stirred memories," and his concomitant escape into "silence" as to their content, seem marked by a refusal to share his thoughts collectively with readers.[12] The monuments inside the library seem to enact a conflicted inversion of public and private, or exterior and interior, relationality. James indulges in a meditative "silence" precisely in a markedly exteriorized space that lacks an inner space necessary for "meditation."[13] The lions serve as "public" monuments insofar as there is no *penetralia* in this building; however, James finds their value in strikingly personal terms rather than in aesthetic or public terms. He does not clarify (or *publish*) his memories but, in a rare gesture, shares his *generational* silence with the reader. Those monuments "place themselves . . . outside articulate criticism"—outside a kind of discourse publicly sharable. That "place," which is "outside" in this instance, would be neither private nor public, but it would be a contradictory space that allows the manifestation (or exteriorization) of interiorized "silence"

without canceling its interiority. Despite his stress on the unavailability of a withdrawn space that guarantees consecration, James, by remembering and writing about the place, seems to engineer a form of consecration available only in "a temple without altars."[14]

James's obliterated house represented the modern destruction of "nooks," an impossibility of preserving a closeting space in which to keep "old secrets" and "old stories." He had associated his shock of loss with a sense of dispossession induced by "aliens." Although James might not witness "aliens" in the library, "the open doors and immediate accesses" render the place coterminous with the nation replete with immigrants. James writes that the Boston library "exemplif[ies] the distinction between a benefit given and a benefit taken, a borrowed, a lent, and an owned, an appropriated convenience" (560). He characterizes the democratic institution in possessive terms, but ownership here is collective. James seems to reinscribe an alternative form, or space, of commemoration that is neither entirely individual nor collective, private nor public, interiorized nor exteriorized, possessive nor dispossessive, but can achieve both poles simultaneously. He consistently castigates an American lack of privacy throughout the book. In this particular instance, however, he seems to locate a form of commemoration available only in a nation that has realized a curious ideal of democratic "gregariousness."

VI. Conclusion

In this essay, I have sought to trace some of the ways in which *The American Scene* dislodges monumental projects—both the writer's own and public—of establishing a permanent and static memento expected to be exempt from modern mobility. I have focused on the mutual interplay between personal and public commemorations rather than on public monuments dispersed throughout the text. This is because, as I discussed in the introduction, James's writing becomes most dynamic, or mobile, when he seeks to negotiate the personal sense of loss and its public implication. My titular usage of the term "dialectic" might hint that what I have discussed as photographic, inscriptional, and democratic forms of commemoration get, in this order, sublated or sublimated, but that is not my intention. They all constitute the nub of the Jamesian struggle to articulate a way to implement personal commemoration when public mediation renders the project impossible and public commemoration when a modern obsession with mobility suspends the concept of commemoration. The Jamesian

dialectic I have sought to delineate has not "become a past" insofar as the capitalistic urge for mobility and the attendant loss of personal sites of memory constitute the actuality of the present American scene.

Notes

[1] Henry James, *The American Scene* (reprinted in *Collected Travel Writings: Great Britain and America*, Library of America, 1993), 425. Subsequent references will be to this edition and will be included parenthetically in the text.

[2] Alan Trachtenberg notes of the book that "the dominant emotion is of loss—loss of place, of relation, of detachment of mind" (294). David McWhirter also legitimately argues that James's "late, explicitly retrospective writings [including *The American Scene*] . . . are full of confrontations with loss and the places of loss, with a personal and collective past that is irremediably 'gone'" (2).

[3] For a seminal critique of modern monumental projects, see Young, particularly introduction and chapter 1 ("The Countermonument: Memory against Itself in Germany").

[4] My essay is about the interplay between personal and public sites of memory rather than about public monuments as such. James's depictions of public monuments in Philadelphia, Washington, and the American South are thus outside the scope of my essay, not least because they do not entail the question of personal memory. Beverly Haviland offers a detailed study of Independence Hall and the statue of Sherman. However, her interest lies in "how places and objects, as opposed to verbal texts, convey meanings"; therefore, she does not delve into a correlation between public monuments and more personal sites of memory (268). My concern resonates more with Tamara L. Follini's essay, where she explores personal dimensions of James's response to the Civil War statues of Augustus Saint-Gaudens.

[5] Considerable attention has been devoted to the question of privacy and publicity in *The American Scene*. Richard Salmon, for instance, notes that "an extinction of the possibility of difference between private and public spheres" is at issue in the book (181). In a similar vein, in her assessment of James's treatment of public buildings, Martha Banta cogently argues that "*The American Scene* continually provides differing, contradictorily engaged responses to matters of publicity and privacy, inclusivity and exclusivity—a dialectic expressive of the divergent needs and motives of James the private individual and of James the story-teller" (4). My essay, in one sense, is an attempt to reconsider the "dialectic" of privacy and publicity in conjunction with the book's pivotal issue of commemoration of the lost past.

[6] James as a mobile observer is also clear in his various self-designations as the "restless analyst," "repatriated absentee," or "visionary tourist." Tony Tanner maintains that by these varied appellations, James "wants to dissolve away any sense of a distinct, historically defined and culturally delimited individual" (5–6).

[7] Paul Giles also points out "the photographic imagery that permeates the book," but his equation of the imagery with a "mood of abstraction" (as seen in words such as "impressions" or "spectralities") diverges from my focus on a more precise reproduction of observed images (115). My view is close to that of Mark Goble. He indicates the "odd digitalization of memory" in James's autobiography and argues that James's "account of memory-at-work seems everywhere implicated in photographic and cinematic ways of seeing" (359).

[8] My use of the term "closet" derives from Georges Poulet's striking observation on the Jamesian memory. Poulet notes that, because of "superabundance" of memory, "[i]nstead of allowing memory constantly to enlarge and deepen the field of consciousness, James acts to

restrain it, to give it limits. These limits are those of the present. Life is a surface affair. Let us leave memory to the clothes closet" (351). Poulet quotes from James's autobiography: "The ragbag of memory hung on its nail in my closet, though I learnt with time to control the habit of bringing it forth" (qtd. in Poulet 351).

[9] For the past few decades, James's nativistic depictions of immigrants have been the center of critical studies of *The American Scene*. I argue that despite his explicit disdain for the "ubiquitous alien," James nonetheless requires their presence for his alternative commemorative project. For a representative study of the book's racial treatments, see Blair 158–210.

[10] See Richard Howard's textual notes (*The American Scene* 829).

[11] See Peter Collister's textual notes to the Cambridge edition, 267n50.

[12] Follini goes one step further and argues that James in this passage engages "further recesses of private memory and an ongoing reflection, as a noncombatant during the Civil War, on the relation between the kinds of knowledge accessible through imaginative sympathy and those that can be derived only from immediate experience" (32).

[13] James E. Dobson reads the memorial as an instance of *penetralia* (53–54), a reading that seems deeply misguided given James's stress on the absence of *penetralia* in the library.

[14] James's admiration of Grant's tomb follows a somewhat similar trajectory. The tomb stands "unguarded and unenclosed, the feature of the prospect and the property of the people, as open as an hotel or a railway-station to any coming and going, and as dedicated to the public use as builded things in America . . . only can be" (476). He identifies in its openness "a great democratic demonstration caught in the fact" (476). For a nuanced analysis of the depiction of Grant's tomb, see Buelens 83–86.

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