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**Barry Jason Mauer**

*University of Florida*

## Oracles and Divinations: A Monument to Biocultural Diversity Loss

### Introduction

This article demonstrates an emerging kind of electronic monument, pioneered by Gregory Ulmer at the University of Florida, to address our current states of emergency. This demonstration takes us through some diverse subject areas, including work by Deleuze, Barthes, and Derrida, as well as abject losses, coffee farmers in Oaxaca, backyard chickens, divination and ancient oracles, Oxfam, Gandhi, Dairy Queen, and Burger King. Despite its apparent methodological capriciousness, the monument makes three important contributions to the civic sphere:

1. It engages with history in poetic ways.
2. It offers a method for making connections we may have missed otherwise.
3. It constitutes a laboratory for shaping social and personal identities around practices of divination and mourning.

Monuments have been going postmodern for decades; they are now living sites of personal and collective wisdom, growing and changing as participants engage with them by adding data, personal stories, and reactions. For instance, the NAMES Project (aka the AIDS Memorial Quilt),<sup>1</sup> which began in the 1980s, empowers participants to learn about complex social issues and apply their newfound insights in both personal and communal arenas. Such monuments have the potential to help individuals and communities remember the past, change the present, and create the future. More recent monuments are becoming more interactive and moving online. For example, in 2010, Maya Lin, perhaps the most famous living monumentalist and the designer of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, made public a memorial called *What is Missing?*<sup>2</sup> It is part online, part onsite and it commemorates the creatures lost to ‘the sixth extinction’, the current mass extinction of thousands of species due to human activity, while encouraging the public to get involved in conservation efforts. The new electronic monument is not static, nor does it tell only one story situated firmly in the past. Instead, it is dynamic and active, allowing visitors, and, indeed, whole online communities, to shape and be shaped by a number of perspectives, narratives, and artefacts.

## Background

Gregory Ulmer’s monuments, which he describes and demonstrates in *Electronic Monuments*,<sup>3</sup> move far beyond earlier monuments in their complexity and interactivity. Ulmer’s ultimate goals are self-knowledge and global transformation. To those ends, he designs his monuments as oracles, which provide wisdom to help us address personal dilemmas. Although his monuments are nominally about various abject, or degraded, losses such as traffic accidents, pet deaths, and child abuse, they ultimately point the users or visitors to the monument, where they receive a divination in regards to their personal dilemma. For Ulmer, the wisdom we receive emerges from within the disasters themselves since disasters contain all the elements of the problems that led to them as well as lessons for avoiding them in the future. In 2010, I organized a group to apply Gregory Ulmer’s method to the problem of biocultural diversity loss. This group, called CASAS (Cultures and Species Abjectly Sacrificed), follows Ulmer by conceiving the monument as an oracle; members of the group bring personal problems to the monument and the monument helps us understand and resolve them. Ancient

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<sup>1</sup> Cleve Jones & Jeff Dawson, *Stitching a Revolution: The Making of an Activist* (San Francisco: Harper, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Maya Lin, *What is Missing?* <http://www.whatismissing.net/> 2010 [9/20/2011].

<sup>3</sup> Gregory Ulmer, *Electronic Monuments* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005).

monuments, such as those of Delphi and Dodona, had both memorial and oracular functions,<sup>4</sup> but the oracular function of monuments has been lost in modern times. The electronic monument proposed by Ulmer brings back the oracular function. It is important to note that the CASAS monument is currently a work in progress; it exists now as a concept, some samples, and a few prototypes,<sup>5</sup> but not as yet a live website. CASAS designers are creating components of the monument to address various geographical areas of concern – the sample I have included here concerns the Oaxaca region of Mexico. CASAS’ diviners, a self-selected group willing to perform the function, read the monument as an oracle in response to a visitor’s problems, much as a Tarot reader divines the Tarot cards for a querent. To receive a divination from the monument, one is obligated to select some textual fragments and provide a few personal stories. The best way to explain how the divination works is to demonstrate it, which I do in the second half of this essay.<sup>6</sup> Our online monument will be a place where anyone can visit and pose a question about a personal dilemma, such as whether to alter a relationship, change careers, or make decisions about money: the kinds of questions one currently takes to a friend, counsellor or a fortune teller. The visitor receives wisdom from a diviner’s reading of the monument that might shed light on the dilemma or point a way out of it. The poetic reasoning at work in divinatory practices allows us to relate the problem of biocultural diversity loss to any person’s problems. Divination is the ancient art of reading the intentions of gods or ancestors. In this case, however, the monument creators do not assume a sacred task, but rather a profane one; how to read history - one’s own history, that of the greater world, and the ways in which they might make sense of one another.

To experience the monument, participants relate to it as either querent or diviner. The querent poses a personal dilemma to the monument. Once the querent poses the dilemma, a diviner interprets the monument’s response, similar to the way that the priest of Apollo in ancient times interpreted the Oracle’s response to a querent seeking wisdom. One might object that we are merely taking events out of context and presenting them as so many jumbled-up pieces to be rearranged in infinite, and therefore irrelevant, combinations. But, as Walter Benjamin posited, all history is made of quotations: ‘To write history means [ . . . ] to *quote* history. But the concept of quotation implies that any given historical object must be

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<sup>4</sup> Richard Stoneman, *The Ancient Oracles: Making the Gods Speak* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

<sup>5</sup> Marey Galbreath, Amy Giroux, Tricia Carlton, and Valerie Kasper, *Carousel of Possibilities*, <http://nyfamilyhistory.com/MEmorial/>, 2010 [9/20/2011].

<sup>6</sup> Camila Alvarez, Concetta Bommarito, William Dorner, and Barbara Kyle, *Garbania: A Memorial*, <http://garbania.wordpress.com/>, 2010 [9/20/2011].

ripped out of its context (N11, 2)'.<sup>7</sup> Relevance is a product not of events but of thoughts, and it is as much a poet's job as a historian's to imbue events with significance. By noting the chance alignment of the signifiers in both the querent's story and in the selected scene of biocultural diversity loss, we find patterns to be read both poetically and historically.

The attempt to submit chance to thought implies in the first place an interest in the *experience* (I emphasize this word) of that which happens unexpectedly. Indeed, there are those of us who are inclined to believe that unpredictability conditions the very structure of an event. . . . There are those who lean toward the assumption that an event worthy of this name cannot be foretold.<sup>8</sup>

As Derrida suggests above, indeterminacy helps us find routes around blocks in conventional thinking, which tends to assume a high degree of predictability. Because the various stories and texts we gather come from disparate sources, the process of divination is highly indeterminate, yet it often reveals valuable insights we might have otherwise missed.

Gilles Deleuze comments on the method of divination:

Here [in Cynic and Stoic philosophy], *divination* grounds ethics. In fact, divinatory interpretation consists of the relation between the pure event (not yet actualized) and the depth of bodies, the corporeal actions and passions whence it results. We can state precisely how this interpretation proceeds: it is always a question of cutting into the thickness, of carving out surfaces, of orienting them, of increasing and multiplying them in order to follow out the tracing of lines and of incisions inscribed upon them.<sup>9</sup>

CASAS applies Deleuze's methods to the monument by sampling materials such as personal memories, news stories, bits of history, and theory. We create a collage out of these fragments using techniques such as puns, associative links, and pattern making. Tarot readers use similar procedures when doing their divinations. Divination resembles poetry and art more than it does a reasoned argument with a thesis, proof, and conclusion. The divination shows the relationship among seemingly unrelated areas of knowledge and brings them to bear on the personal dilemma.

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<sup>7</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'N (Theoretics of Knowledge, Theory of Progress)', *The Philosophical Forum*, 15: 1-2 (1983-4), pp. 1-40.

<sup>8</sup> Derrida, Jacques, 'My Chance/*Mes Chances*: A Rendezvous with Some Epicurean Stereophanies', *Taking Chances: Derrida, Psychoanalysis, and Literature (Psychiatry and the Humanities)* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), p.6.

<sup>9</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 143.

## Method

When the monument is online, you will find in it stories and artefacts related to biocultural losses. You will also find a network of available diviners, and a primer for how to engage with the monument. Furthermore, the monument will contain testimony from previous users who choose to share their experiences. CASAS' designers will monitor the news for stories of biocultural loss to upload to the monument, keeping it current. In particular, the volunteers look for links between ordinary behaviour — drinking a cup of coffee, for example — and biocultural losses around the globe. Biocultural diversity simply refers to the variety of cultures and species around the globe and the links between them. Biologists such as C.S. Holling have argued that there is value in preserving species diversity since it preserves a greater degree of resilience within a natural system.<sup>10</sup> The areas of greatest biological diversity on the planet are also the areas of greatest cultural diversity.<sup>11</sup> These 'hot spots' of diversity are disappearing. Linguist Michael Krauss estimates that approximately 3000 languages, or at least 50% of the current living languages, will become extinct in the 21st century.<sup>12</sup> These biologically diverse hot spots are where many of these disappearing languages are spoken. Maywa Montenegro and Terry Glavin have identified the primary cause of biocultural diversity loss as 'a global epidemic of sameness'.

This epidemic carries away an entire human language every two weeks, destroys a domesticated food crop variety every six hours, and kills off an entire species every few minutes. The fallout isn't merely an assault to our aesthetic or even ethical values: As cultures and languages vanish, along with them go not just valuable genetic resources, but critical links in complex ecological webs.<sup>13</sup>

The CASAS monument creates its own complex textual webs by linking texts from four domains (see Figure 1 below): a text about a recent or on-going biocultural disaster; a text

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<sup>10</sup> C.S. Holling, "Biodiversity in the Functioning of Ecosystems: An Ecological Synthesis" *Biodiversity Loss: Economic and Ecological Issues*, Eds. Charles Perrin, C.S. Holling, et al (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 44-83.

<sup>11</sup> Luisa Maffi, "On the Interdependence of Biological and Cultural Diversity," *On Biocultural Diversity; Linking Language, Knowledge, and the Environment*. (Washington D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2001) pp. 1-50.

<sup>12</sup> Earl Shorris. "The Last Word: Can the World's Small Languages Be Saved?" *Harper's Magazine*, 301 [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_m1111/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1111/) (2000) [9/10/2001].

<sup>13</sup> Maywa Montenegro & Terry Glavin "In Defence of Difference," *Seed Magazine*. October 7, 2008. [http://seedmagazine.com/content/article/in\\_defense\\_of\\_difference/](http://seedmagazine.com/content/article/in_defense_of_difference/) [3/17/2012].

detailing a scene of instruction from the querent’s life; a text detailing a scene of instruction from national history; and a text detailing a scene from theory. A scene of instruction is a lesson in which one learns the identity categories that make up one’s culture. These lessons may occur within any of four major institutions that constitute what Ulmer calls the ‘popcycle’<sup>14</sup> shaping personal identity: family, school, entertainment, and the disciplines. We experience them as direct lessons and as indirect ones; for example, one learns masculine identity by means of a scolding, ‘boys don’t cry!’ or by observing a character learning it in a movie. As querent, I choose from the monument a scene of biocultural diversity loss that evokes strong feelings for me, in this case a scene in which native coffee growers in Oaxaca are unable to sell their beans for as much as it cost to produce them. Then I identify a scene of instruction from my life as well as a scene of instruction from American national history (e.g. something that can be found in a K-12 or undergraduate history book). I add to these texts a scene from a theory of my choosing. A psychoanalytic, post-structuralist, or cultural studies theory works best because we are dealing with symptoms — the apparently disconnected experiences of life in a consumerist society —and these theories use predominantly symptomatic approaches.

<i>A scene from a recent or on-going disaster</i>	<i>A scene of instruction from the investigator’s life</i>
<i>A scene of instruction from national history</i>	<i>A scene from theory</i>

Figure 1: The four domains that provide materials for the divinatory reading.

After the querent has posed a dilemma and gathered the materials from the four areas, a diviner interprets them by noticing details that share common elements. The diviner responds to details that provoke particularly strong feelings; Roland Barthes refers to such a detail as a *punctum*.<sup>15</sup> Elements belonging to the various quadrants align by means of coincidence. In other words, following the principles of condensation and displacement Freud enumerates in his description of the dream work,<sup>16</sup> the diviner finds the points of connection poetically. The point is not to emulate Freud in practice but to use the principles he enumerates, much as

<sup>14</sup> Gregory Ulmer. *Electronic Monuments* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), pp. 19-21.

<sup>15</sup> Roland Barthes. *Camera Lucida; Reflections on Photography*, trans. by Richard Howard. (London: Hill and Wang, 1982).

<sup>16</sup> Sigmund Freud. *On Dreams*, trans. by James Strachey. (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 1952).

André Breton did in his *Surrealist Manifesto*, to different ends. Resemblances in terms of size, scale, colour, texture, and proportion provide the pathways through the four scenes.

**Demonstration Dilemma:** What's the best way for me to allocate my financial resources? To be more specific: Of the limited resources available to me, how should I allocate them in order to lead an ethical life? I would like to improve my home, live comfortably, donate money to charity and social causes, record an album of original music (my hobby and a vanity project), keep my daughter Josephine in private school, pay off debts, save for retirement, save for Josie's college years, and share decision-making with my wife. I also want to live more simply, decreasing my biocultural footprint. At the same time, I want to increase my moral footprint, making the world a better place (or at least not a worse one). Gandhi seems a likely superego figure for me, a man who consumed little but made a large impact in moral terms. He is a father figure, certainly, but is he a model of fatherhood? He often deprived his family of the basics without considering their needs or wishes. How do I balance the tensions between private and public life, between self and other? Am I capable of parenting myself? Even with all my privileges — education, financial security, good health, and a relatively safe environment — I sometimes feel unsure whether I am grown up enough to handle my choices and responsibilities.

**Scene of the Disaster:** A cup of coffee at a shop is about two or three dollars, but the costs to the environment and to diverse cultures caused by coffee plantations can make it much higher. While a small portion of the coffee market is moving towards greater sustainability, the vast majority depends upon the exploitation of labour and the destruction of ecosystems and cultures. 'Coffee is the second most valuable legally exported commodity of the South, after oil.'<sup>17</sup> Yet on average, a coffee grower receives \$0.14 per kilogram, while the retailer gets up to \$26.40 per kilogram.<sup>18</sup> Before coffee was a commodity, it was a traditional drink in Abyssinia. Dutch traders turned it into a commodity, starting plantations for it throughout their equatorial colonies and brutally enslaving natives to work the plantations. The drink became a luxury in Europe; then it became a necessity.<sup>19</sup> Wolfgang Schivelbusch sums up its

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<sup>17</sup> Gavin Fridell, *Fair Trade Coffee: The Prospects and Pitfalls of Market Driven Social Justice* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), p. 102.

<sup>18</sup> *Ibid*, p. 103.

<sup>19</sup> Wolfgang Schivelbusch, *Tastes of Paradise; A Social History of Spices, Stimulants, and Intoxicants* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992), p. 38.

appeal: Coffee fit the ideological imperatives of Protestantism, with its demands for sobriety, and it fit the ideological imperatives of rationalism, with its demands for industry and accountability.<sup>20</sup> In 2001, Oxfam International stated, ‘While the coffee economy generates bumper profits for Nestlé and Starbucks, it is also intensifying poverty and fuelling social dislocation in the world’s poorest countries’.<sup>21</sup> Coffee regions in Mexico’s Oaxaca district are among the poorest regions.<sup>22</sup> They also have the highest concentrations of indigenous peoples and the greatest biodiversity in Mexico.<sup>23</sup> “Though Oaxaca consists of only 5% of the area of México, it contains 50% of México’s vascular plant species, 35% of its amphibian species, 26% of its reptile species, 63% of its bird species, and 55% of its terrestrial mammal species”.<sup>24</sup> In Central America, ‘indigenous populations were frequently forced into slavery . . . and communal Indian lands . . . were confiscated to make way for large-scale, agro-export production’.<sup>25</sup> According to Gavin Fridell, author of *Fair Trade Coffee: The Prospects and Pitfalls of Market Driven Social Justice*, ‘many pre-Colombian indigenous groups were self-sufficient and had to be forced to work for the local elite’.<sup>26</sup>

David Ransom, journalist and editorial member of the *New Internationalist*, characterizes the life of coffee farmers along the Tambopata river valley in Peru like this:

If your coffee harvest brings you in less than it costs you, if you have laboured for a year without reward, then you will have nothing to pay for treatment for you or your children when sickness strikes, as it invariably does in places such as this — yellow fever is rampant. As a result, there are no doctors or medicines. The prevailing certainty becomes that if you get sick you die — it's as simple as that. Whether or not you will be able to keep your children in school is doubtful. So there are not enough schools. The cumulative effect of all this continuing year after year, and of having to submit your life entirely to the whims of world coffee prices, is what powerless really means.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Gavin Fridell. *Fair Trade Coffee*, p. 101.

<sup>22</sup> Daniel Jaffee, *Brewing Justice; Fair Trade Coffee, Sustainability, and Survival*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), p. 60.

<sup>23</sup> Patricia Illoldi-Rangel, Trevon Fuller, Miguel Linaje, Christopher Pappas, Víctor Sánchez-Cordero & Sahotra Sarkar. “Solving the Maximum Representation Problem to Prioritize Areas for the Conservation of Terrestrial Mammals at Risk in Oaxaca”, *Diversity and Distributions*, 14 (2008), p. 494.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Gavin Fridell. *Fair Trade Coffee*, p. 110.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid, p. 111.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid, p. 125.

Inmecafé was a Mexican governmental agency set up to aid coffee farmers. It offered them some benefits, but was abolished in 1989 by the Salinas government under pressure from the IMF:<sup>28</sup>

The twin blows of the agency's disappearance and plummeting world prices for the 1989-90 harvest wreaked social and economic havoc on wide swaths of the Mexican countryside. One Oaxacan coffee farmer summed up the dilemma small producers faced in this new landscape: "When Inmecafé left us orphaned, we had to look ahead in order to be able to continue, even though we knew nothing, because this father did not teach us anything, he only controlled and protected us a little by giving loans, buying our coffee, and giving a few odd jobs".<sup>29</sup>

Inmecafé was a product of the Green Revolution, which was premised on the expansion of monoculture crops and chemical fertilizers and pesticides.<sup>30</sup> The dismantling of the organization due to neoliberal reforms led to greater vulnerability for small farmers, but also greater autonomy. One organization that formed in the wake of Inmecafé is UCIRI, a cooperative of coffee producers in the Oaxaca area,<sup>31</sup> which turned to fair trade coffee. "The organic programme has allowed UCIRI to produce coffee in an environmentally sustainable manner and attain a price premium on markets in the North".<sup>32</sup> The co-op is primarily made up of indigenous groups, who have organized themselves into a democratic organization dedicated to 'preserv[ing] local traditions and knowledge'.<sup>33</sup> The UCIRI represent their organization in the form of a tree.<sup>34</sup>

**Scene of Instruction:** First scene as a consumer; I walk alone to the Dairy Queen across the street from Lake Josephine in Roseville, Minnesota, in 1971, with some coins in my pocket. I am six years old. 'How much can I get with this?' I ask. An popsicle. I'm somewhat disappointed because the real prizes are the hot fudge sundaes and the banana splits. It's easier not to make a choice, however. In the future, when I have enough coins to buy more, I anxiously consider my options. I notice that adults walk in the store and buy whatever they like. They take less time choosing. I am not yet aware that a few people can buy absolutely anything they want — cars, boats, corporations — without much consideration. They have so

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<sup>28</sup> Daniel Jaffee, *Brewing Justice*, p. 51.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 51-2.

<sup>30</sup> Gavin Fridell, *Fair Trade Coffee*, p. 178.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, p. 185.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid*, p. 203.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, p. 211.

<sup>34</sup> The logo can be found here: [http://www.uciri.org/otras\\_paginas/arbOL\\_uciri.htm](http://www.uciri.org/otras_paginas/arbOL_uciri.htm) [20/9/2011].

much money that they can write off a mistaken purchase. At home, my mom has boxes of ice lollies in the freezer I can get at any time, but getting my own popsicle with my own money is more satisfying. I save all the used popsicle sticks and make elaborate houses out of them with my brother.

My parents drink coffee. When I become a teenager, I drink coffee too. The effects of the caffeine are short lived; later, I feel anxious and lethargic (see Figure 2). In my mid-twenties, I quit coffee and all caffeine. My mood and energy stabilize. When I get to grad school, I fall off the wagon and drink lots of coffee. Now in my forties, I have quit entirely.



Figure 2: Author's photo taken at the Harry P. Leu Botanical Gardens in Orlando, Florida.

### **Scene of Instruction from National History: Public Relations**

It was Edward Bernays who built both the theoretical and practical foundation of modern public relations, beginning with his promotion of women's smoking. Bernays was a nephew of Sigmund Freud who [applied] psychology on a mass scale while serving on the World War I

Committee on Public Information. He never disguised the purpose of PR, saying those ‘who understand the mental processes and social patterns of the masses ... pull the wires which control the public mind’.

On behalf of Lucky Strike, Bernays sought the advice of the psychoanalyst A.A. Brill. Brill's message to Bernays and the American Tobacco company was ‘freedom’: sell cigarettes to women as a symbol of liberation. Following this advice, Bernays staged a legendary publicity event that is still taught as an example in PR schools. He hired beautiful fashion models to march in New York's prominent Easter parade, each waving a lit cigarette and wearing a banner proclaiming it a ‘torch of liberty’. Bernays made sure that publicity photos of his smoking models appeared world-wide.<sup>35</sup>

**Theory Scene:** Gilles Deleuze revives the philosophy of the Cynics and Stoics, which had been marginalized in the Socratic-Platonic tradition:

Diogenes Laertius relates that the Stoics compared philosophy to an egg: “The shell is Logic, next comes the white, Ethics, and the yolk in the centre is Physics.” We sense that Diogenes rationalizes. We must recover the aphorism-anecdote, that is, the koan. We must imagine a situation in which a disciple is raising a question of signification: O master, what is ethics? The Stoic sage takes then a hard-boiled egg from his reversible cloak and designates the egg with his staff (or, having taken out the egg, he strikes the disciple with his staff, giving him to understand that he himself must provide the answer. The disciple, in turn, takes the staff and breaks the egg in such a manner that a little of the white remains attached to the yolk and a little to the shell . . .). The place of ethics is clearly displayed between the two poles of the superficial, logical shell and the deep physical yolk.<sup>36</sup>

As the disciple, I try to follow Diogenes’ method (see Figure 3).

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<sup>35</sup> John C. Stauber, “Smoke and Mirrors; How Tobacco and PR Grew Up Together,” *PR Watch*, 1: 3, (1994), <http://www.prwatch.org/prwissues/1994Q3/smoke.html> [20/9/2011].

<sup>36</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Logic of Sense*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), 142.



Figure 3: Photo of author and Emilene the chicken by Josephine Mauer.

Conclusion: The diviner (Henry Miller, UCF graduate) responds:

**Henry:**

You raise chickens, which are a growing source of sustainability, and allow you liberation from corporate control of chicken farming. Hinduism was Gandhi's original faith. A story from the Rigveda describes the universe as an egg, and the Stoics viewed philosophy as an egg. Edward Bernays' stunt happened on Easter, a holiday celebrated by hiding eggs. The stunt made women appear liberated. You want to share decision making with your wife, thus highlighting equality.

Royalty is a common theme. You learned the influence of money at Dairy Queen, a company that also owns a chain named Orange Julius. Napoleon's wife was named Josephine. Julius and Napoleon both come from families with ties to present day Italy.

Coffee is indigenous to Abyssinia. The Abyssinian Crisis was a conflict between Ethiopia and Italy. Starbucks uses Italian names for their coffees. Starbucks' practices continue to undermine Ethiopia. In 2006, Industrial Workers of the World and Starbucks Workers Union faced physical violence in the Oaxaca region district.

As a child, you were concerned with the responsibility and liberation that came with money. Starbucks' inability to acknowledge their damage to the environment highlights their

lack of responsibility. “Bucks” is slang for currency. The realization that money conflicts with responsibility becomes apparent to Gandhi, who rejects materialism.

The dilemma is concerned with allocation. The connections relate to royalty, money, family leadership and gender equality. I believe the answer comes from looking beyond the individual. While Gandhi is an inspirational figure, he alone could not have accomplished all he did. He had to have help from the people of India. Achieving your domestic goals is a task that requires you and your wife. You can’t have the chicken without the egg.

In an age of information overload, we need a way to cut through the clutter and gain insight. Divination, like Freud’s dream work, is a condenser, allowing us to see patterns across areas of knowledge that seem impossibly large and distant. The diviner, Henry Miller, has taken seemingly unrelated areas of knowledge and found paths through them, making them relevant to my dilemma. The reading strikes me like a flash of insight, similar to the profane illumination Walter Benjamin experienced from the collage method of doing history he used in his *Arcades Project*.<sup>37</sup> For example, I was surprised by the diviner’s indication of the theme of royalty. In my childhood, my brother and I used to pretend we were kings and we ordered each other around. These fantasies were reinforced by family trips to Burger King, where we always wore the cardboard crowns. Advertisers sell us an illusion of power but no corresponding lesson of responsibility. This pattern, continued to adulthood, contributes to the sense of alienation I feel when I consume products without accounting for the costs that others incur in their production. My wish to escape feelings of anxiety makes me vulnerable to such illusions of power. A coffee addiction, like any other addiction, feeds the illusion of control while taking it away.

The diviner’s advice to seek a communal answer to my dilemma is empowering and echoes the solution found by the coffee growers in Oaxaca. I return here to the claims I made at the beginning of this essay about the contributions of the monument to the civic sphere. The diviner’s reading indeed helps me engage with history in poetic ways; I have an aesthetic experience and not just an intellectual one in response to this material. Also, I find connections I may have otherwise missed, noting especially the theme of royalty linking the various texts and the light it sheds on my fantasies of power without responsibility.

Regarding the third claim, I can state that the monument is indeed a laboratory for me to test how I shape identity around mourning, but at this point, the effectiveness of this laboratory has yet to be fully determined. Since identity is shaped in relation to a community, we need to test it on a larger scale. One way to test it is by creating a thriving community of

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<sup>37</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. by Howard Eiland (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002).

biocultural diversity mourners in action, a goal towards which we are working. I can state that the monument offers me wisdom: awareness of my situation, my choices, and some guidance in how to live a good life.

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