



(Street sign by Banksy)

# Historical Markers for New Civic Narratives in New Haven

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# Revised Proposal

## Motivation

In 2011, New Haven experienced 34 homicides, and major media began reporting New Haven was the “4th Most Dangerous City in America” ([http://www.wtnh.com/dpp/news/new\\_haven\\_cty/nh-fourth-most-violent-city-in-america](http://www.wtnh.com/dpp/news/new_haven_cty/nh-fourth-most-violent-city-in-america)). The constraints of statistic-driven representation contributes to an ongoing narrative about New Haven as a dangerous, undesirable space affected by economic depression, poor police/community relations stemming from recent claims of police profiling, and other historical woes related to American urbanism. Many of the victims of homicide in New Haven are disaffected youth, who feel unfairly represented by media, and live in the “contested space” shared by Yale University and commuting suburbanites.

## Framing

In order to empower and grant a greater sense of agency to the local community, it is necessary to present their experience of the space as equally meaningful and important as the prevailing views or dominant narrative emerging from crime statistics. These are qualitative experiences stemming from personal stories which encompass more than just the violence that attracts media attention.

## Solution

To qualify/affirm those personal narratives, it becomes necessary to either broadcast them to an audience as wide as those reached by major media, or to present them with the same authority granted established outlets. As neither of these are possible without long, planned media campaigns or co-opting the media outlets that exist, adopting the tactical media strategies of culture jammers appropriates the authority of established outlets, while allowing alternative narratives to be presented. A coalescing and focused effort to shift the dominant narrative about the victims of homicide enables alternative “mnemonic enculturations” ([http://scan.net.au/scan/journal/display.php?journal\\_id=42](http://scan.net.au/scan/journal/display.php?journal_id=42)) for the city at large.

## Method

The strategy I intend to implement involves 3 stages. First, collecting alternative narrative/history of the 34 victims of homicide in New Haven in 2011, so they can be presented to the public as more than just statistics. Second, the production of replica historical markers, metal signs designed to mimic the appearance of official signage, which present the life story of a victim, ending with “[Victim’s name] died here on [date of death].” Signs will possibly include a QR code sticker or pseudo-official looking information which directs people to a site explaining the project and more relevant information. Lastly, these signs will be installed on the location where the homicide took place.

## Examples/Inspiration

There are several sources for inspiration related to this project:

- Yellow Arrow by Jesse Shapins <http://yellowarrow.net/v3/>. Through stickers and mobile technology, people were able to put a material reference to a location or object which also linked to a audio media product through their cellphones. These recordings encapsulated personal narratives or descriptions of the place/object's relevance to them and others.
- Mark Daye's homelessness street signs [http://markdaye.com/life/homeless\\_signs.php](http://markdaye.com/life/homeless_signs.php). Designed to appear official, they portrayed subversive messages about the state of homelessness in Toronto.
- Norm Magnusson's I-75 Project <http://www.funism.com/art/175project.html>. Historical markers created by the artist which contain histories motivating a political ideology in relation to the space. He is still working on similar projects with different contexts: <http://www.recordonline.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20120102/NEWS/201020308>
- RepoHistory's Lower Manhattan Sign Project <http://www.repohistory.org/work.html>.

## Partial Bibliography

New Haven Register "Interactive: New Haven Murder Map" <http://www.nhregister.com/articles/2011/06/04/news/doc4ddecdbdf55c99005332498.txt> (June 2011)

Payne, Robert Digital memories, analogues of affect", SCAN: Journal of media arts culture 1.3 (2004) [http://scan.net.au/scan/journal/display.php?journal\\_id=42](http://scan.net.au/scan/journal/display.php?journal_id=42)

Krzysztof Wodiczko. Critical Vehicles: Writings, Projects, Interviews, MIT Press, March 1999. Why Critical Vehicles (Preface) and Projections (Chapter 2, pp. 44-75).