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After Ground Zero: Problems of Memory and Memorialisation

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Abstract

According to French historian Pierre Nora, the twin economic and political revolutions of the eighteenth century ruptured lived traditions of memory as new social orders sought to create "new" pasts through establishing official "sites of memory." It is against this formal tide that the anti-monument movement struggles, to return the act of social retrospection back to everyday life, to place the responsibility of retaining the past not on a site specific object, such as an obelisk, but upon each individual. In light of this current epistemological shift, it is curious that the Memory Foundations plan produced by architect Daniel Libeskind for the site of New York's razed World Trade Center (WTC) ignores this avant-garde turn, and favours instead the creation of a conservative site of memory. Especially troubling is the vaguely defined process, used by Libeskind and other officials, to invest this place with an aura of sacredness. In this paper, I will discuss why constructing public memory at such sites is generally flawed, and suggest how the proposed "sacred memorial space" at Ground Zero attempts to manage and harness the range of possible recollections to be drawn from the horror of the collapse of the WTC, selectively forgetting the contradictory and complex, in favour of a spiritualised homogeneity.

In the days immediately following the tragic events of September 11, 2001,[1] a spontaneous outpouring of sympathy for the victims and their families found material expression in makeshift memorials of flowers, candles, letters, photographs, and other ephemera. These temporary memorials allowed people to grieve, pay their respects to the dead and the victims' families, and to reach out to others traumatised by the events. In Manhattan, Union Square became the city's unofficial public space for commemoration. George Washington's equestrian statue wore garlands and peace signs, Santeria candles burned beside Catholic votives, and art students unwound a paper scroll measuring hundreds of feet that would soon fill with conflicting messages from passers-by. Such unrehearsed public gatherings to express private reactions and thoughts, and to behave in ways that are personally meaningful—that is, to commemorate without being directed—suggests an intuitive inclination towards a lived practice of remembrance. At these gatherings, it seems tacitly understood that shared experience contains and conveys subjective memories far more effectively than symbolic objects, such as flowers or candles left behind as offerings. Conversely and problematically, however, permanent public monuments typically overlook the individual subject and their personal responses, emphasising instead the object's role in imparting how the past is to be remembered.

The "Memory Foundations" plan proposed by architect Daniel Libeskind for Ground Zero, at the now-destroyed World Trade Center (WTC) in New York, strives to create such a materially inscribed locus of memory. However, in an attempt to invest locality with fixed meaning, this site ignores the contemporary trend away from traditional efforts to reify the past. Rejecting monolithic, object-centered representations of history typical to traditional monuments, anti- or counter monument designers attempt to return the act of commemoration back into everyday life, to revive a practice of living memory. Contrary to the planners' publicly expressed desire to create a sacred memorial space, I argue that the traditional approach proposed for Ground Zero is neither capable of realising that sacred space, nor is it suited to conveying the contradictory and fragmented reality of human memory. Rather, the plan effects selective amnesia, not memories, of the varied meanings generated by the devastation at the WTC—a forgetting necessary to create a unified, narrow, and highly sanitised version of events.

[1] On September 11, 2001, two hijacked jets targeted the World Trade Center's Twin Towers in New York, a third the Pentagon outside of Washington, D.C., and a fourth jet crashed off-target in Pennsylvania due to the intervention of passengers on board. Thousands of lives were lost in the attack; the highest toll was taken in New York due to the collapse of the Twin Towers.

Pierre Nora: "Sites of Memory" and "Environments of Memory"

The writings of contemporary French historian Pierre Nora shed light on the problematic emergence of typical permanent memorials like that proposed for Ground Zero. Before the steady incursions of Enlightenment rationalism, Western memory was widely rooted in cultural practices of language, gesture, and religious rituals, which maintained spaces of living memory.[2] Nora describes these as *milleux des memoires,* environments of memory, which exist where the accretion of localised experience is absorbed into a form of traditional wisdom, and passed from generation to generation. This is not to be confused with nostalgia. Rather, it is a collective, geographically specific body of memories, which guides present action, yields a sense of belonging, and requires ongoing participation to keep it alive in the present.

As industrialisation and capitalism intensified in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, disruptions to political, social and religious traditions in the West created a general shift from *milleux des memoires* to *lieux des memoires,* sites of memory.[3] Nora points to the toppling of France's *ancien régime* at the end of the eighteenth century, and the revolutionary government's subsequent employment of *fêtes* and allegorical monuments as prototypical sites of memory, established to bolster a new national consciousness. Beyond the onset of national identities, radical changes wrought by modernisation such as the flood of rural populations to urban centres, the growth of wage labour, and the ever-increasing pace of mechanisation, profoundly uprooted customs of memory. Modernity brought a sense of rootlessness, of flux, of alienation from tradition, creating a general anxiety that history itself could be swept away. Ironically, the waning of traditional memory practices shifted the burden of preserving the past to those official powers that hastened their decline. Consequently, traces of the past were transformed into official memories and made permanent in various ways: through public monuments, official annual celebrations, and museums, all of which materially marked history and historical events and anchored them in a network of sites of memory.

Not only do the ideologies informing state-sponsored sites of memory determine their design, location, and intended uses, they also influence how history is to be remembered. This traditional approach to preserving memory is problematic for three key reasons. First, historical events are presented in a simplified way, whitewashing contradictions and complexities in order to preserve the political and social *status quo.* Second, state monuments often invoke and depend upon sacred symbolism to justify political outcomes and cloak partisan motivations without reflecting on the issues raised by utilising sacred themes. Third, while projecting an aura of historical accuracy and authenticity, official memorials rely on a planned amnesia of all previous histories of that site that could tarnish or interrupt what is to be commemorated at this particular point in time. Rather than openly acknowledging the limited capacity and the inherent biases of human memory and commemoration, conventional monuments direct individuals to uncritically absorb one particular version of a story without offering an opportunity for individual interaction. History, packaged as public memory, is rendered static and lifeless, unable to shift with time or to be reshaped by private recollections, interpretations, or rituals into a living practice.

The Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC)

From the outset, these problems have promised to vex the planners from the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC) who are designing the memorial site at Ground Zero. Formed on November 6, 2001 from the ranks of New York's financial elite, the LMDC was created to direct the expenditure of several billion dollars of federal aid designated for rebuilding Lower Manhattan after 9/11. As Peter Marcuse, a professor of urban studies at Columbia University ironically notes, this development-oriented committee is comprised of:

> one African American, no architects, no cultural leaders, one downtown resident, no educators, no families of 9/11 victims, three former Giuliani administration officials, one friend of George W. Bush, no planners, one union leader, no urbanists, and four Wall Street executives.[4]

Equally troubling as this committee's homogeneity is the lack of diversity among the various committees formed by the LMDC who are to draft policy for

[2] Pierre Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), p. 4.
[3] Ibid., p. 4.

[4] Peter Marcuse, 'What Kind of Planning After September 11? The Market, the Stakeholders, Consensus – or…?', in Michael Sorkin and Sharon Zukin, eds., *After the World Trade Center: Rethinking New York City,* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 135.

creating the memorial site. Monica Iken, the founder of "September's Mission," a non-profit advocacy group lobbying for involvement in the planning of the memorial at Ground Zero, is concerned by who is *not* on the committees. Iken, who was widowed on 9/11, worries that without the influence of spiritual leaders, philosophers, ethicists, psychologists, anthropologists and other scholars, committees charged with drafting the project's Mission Statement and Memorial Program could lack the necessary rigour to wrestle with the more difficult ethical questions.[5] In particular, she is concerned with debates over what constitutes sacred space, how best to facilitate societal healing, and how to balance commercial and commemorative aims.

In light of the exhaustive consultation between the LMDC and councils representing victims' families, firefighters, police, survivors, residents, architects, and others too numerous to list, oversights hardly seem possible. However, as Marcuse suggests, this fashionable "stakeholder" model adopted by the LMDC lends the appearance of democratic inclusiveness, while restricting access to a limited number of interests.[6] This could help explain why the 'Memorial Mission Statement and Memorial Program,' drafted by stakeholders from nine advisory councils clearly marks Ground Zero as a future "site of memory." Paradoxically, it seems that even a truly democratic consultation process would result in a conservative, reductive memorial in order to find a compromise that satisfies the interests of diverse groups. Also, this outcome may not be so surprising in light of the patriotic fervor and stifling of dissent in the days and weeks following September 11th. Journalists and members of the media, for example, lost their jobs over impolitic comments.[7] White House Spokesperson Ari Fleischer warned Americans to watch what they say and do, and Attorney General John Ashcroft stated that to disagree with President Bush's policies of increased civil surveillance is to aid terrorism. This reactionary atmosphere likely did not encourage the committees to imagine a pensive, self-reflective and visceral memorial such as Maya Lin's Vietnam Veteran's Memorial (1982) in Washington.

One of the more problematic "Guiding Principles" listed in the Memorial Mission Statement requires the monument to express a "powerful statement of enduring and universal symbolism."[8] The error in this goal lies in the attempt to contain and convey an enormous number of differing, even conflicting, subjective memories with a single, unified object. How else, but through a gross oversimplification, could the multiplicity of memory from the deaths of 2,833 people from sixty-two nations be expressed for all time by a "one size fits all" monument? As Michel de Certeau writes in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, "memory is a sort of anti-museum. It is not localizable."[9] Rather, it "comes from somewhere else, it is outside itself."[10] The moment memory is attached to an object or place it atrophies. Contrary to the aims expressed in the Mission Statement, memory can neither be refined, nor can it be materially anchored and eternally fixed. Despite these inherent complexities of human memory, a second Guiding Principle states that the site should "encourage reflection and contemplation [to] . . . evoke the historical significance and worldwide impact of September 11, 2001." [11] This further suggests that a simplified version of 9/11's memory will likely be forwarded at Ground Zero. Are the innocent victims of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Bush Administration's new pre-emptive strike capability, the curtailing of U. S. civil rights by the Patriot Act, or the reprisals against Arab Americans meant to be contemplated? Though clearly these events are part of the worldwide impact of 9/11, the short and obvious answer is no.

Official sites of memory routinely ignore contradictory events in order to channel reflection away from subjects that are too politically divisive to openly address. Adopting this traditional model at Ground Zero would benefit the political and economic *status quo* since both depend upon a speedy and uncritical reestablishment of Lower Manhattan as a center of world trade. After 9/11, the Pentagon, President Bush, and the American media avoided discussing the symbolic import, both economically and militarily, of the terrorist's targets. Instead, they opted to describe the aggressions as an attack on "freedom" and "American values" perpetrated by an "evil" foe.

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[5] Monica Iken; quoted from September Mission website. (www.semptembersmission.org/index.php).

[6] Marcuse, 'What Kind of Planning After September 11?,' p. 158.

[7] For example, Bill Maher's syndicated television show 'Politically Incorrect' was cancelled for making controversial remarks about 9/11.

[8] Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, 'Draft Memorial Mission Statement and Memorial Program,' 2002: p. 3 (www.renewnyc.com/Memorial/memmission.shtml).

[9] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life,* trans. Steven F. Rendall (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1984), p.108.

[10] Ibid.,p. 87.

[11] LMDC, 'Draft Memorial Mission Statement and Memorial Program,' p. 3.

Questions regarding the United State's abuse of military or economic power were few, and when raised, were silenced with suggestions that critics should "tell that to the bereaved families of the firefighters."[12] According to geographer David Harvey, this quashing of dissent in the name of personal loss and "freedom" carries "more than a whiff of McCarthyism,"[13] an odour that could well linger indefinitely at Ground Zero. By sidestepping voices critical of American foreign policies through misdirection, the political events leading up to the tragedies of 9/11 were downplayed while the material devastation and loss of life became the focus. In other words, America is presented only as a victim. I am not arguing that the victims of 9/11 were somehow responsible for what happened to them or that the terrorists were justified in their actions. However, the use of simplified binary oppositions to describe the attacks, such as good/evil, crusader/infidel, and freedom/war, promotes the idea that U. S. government policies are as innocent as the victims. These sentiments appear to be informing an equally superficial memorial project which would further bolster this facile version of 9/11 and likewise shape the memories and sense of history of millions of visitors annually.

Directing Public Memory

According to John Bodnar, a professor of American history at Indiana University, public memory is created at the junction of "official and vernacular cultural expressions."[14] Whereas vernacular expressions of memory describe social realities, official expressions rely on a dogmatic formalism meant to repackage the past as ideal and free from contradictions. These official versions of history are often built on the abstract ideals of "timelessness and sacredness."[15] Rooted in the politics of power, official expressions of public memory seek to promote social unity and continuity, and to control and calm anxieties by a selective process that champions "appropriate" events or meanings from the past. They generally endorse a "nationalistic, patriotic culture . . . that mediates an assortment of vernacular interests, but seldom . . . at the expense of ascendancy."[16] As official and vernacular aims often clash philosophically, most public memorial spaces are infused with tension: between felt, spontaneous, heterogeneous (personal) memory and desired, constructed, homogenous (public) memory. This fundamental discord between complex emotional vernacular expression and simple dogmatic public expression promises to plague those designing the memorial at Ground Zero.

One of the key passages of the LMDC's Memorial Mission Statement evokes the desire that "lives be remembered . . . deeds recognised, and the spirit reawakened be eternal beacons, which reaffirm respect for life, [and] strengthen our resolve to preserve freedom."[17] Clearly this excerpt fits Bodnar's definition of an official expression of public memory. Its dogmatic formalism converts the senseless deaths into eternal beacons of spirit, employing timelessness and sacredness in the same breath. The tragedy also seems to justify the U.S.'s tougher political stance as an offshoot of a strengthened determination to safeguard freedom. This echoes Bodnar's earlier point that official expressions mediate an assortment of vernacular interests—in this case, the need of solace for the victims is conjoined with the state's need to garner acceptance for increased police and military action, both at home and abroad.

Perhaps the most perplexing problem associated with this site of public memory is the assumed ubiquity of Ground Zero's sacredness. Is it possible to create one sacred space that could satisfy and include the wide range of religious activities expressed in infinite forms? As concepts of sacredness rest on particular sets of belief, is it possible to build homogenised memorials that speak lucidly and personally to each participant? Or should we, as David Dunlop of the *N.Y. Times* drolly suggests, erect "a Quad-Faith Plaza, if not a Faithplex, with room set aside for those alienated or troubled by the presence of religious sanctuaries?"[18] However tongue-in-cheek, Dunlop's point is well taken. If this sacred space is to serve people of different faiths, its structure and iconography cannot seek to be universal or enduring, but must be as layered and malleable as possible to allow for individual interpretation and experience of the site. Rather than confidently assuming that such a

[12] David Harvey, 'Cracks in the Edifice of the Empire State,' in Michael Sorkin and Sharon Zukin, eds., *After the World Trade Center: Rethinking New York City* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 58.
[13] Ibid., p. 60.
[14] John Bodnar, 'Public Memory in an American City: Commemoration in Cleveland,' in John R. Gilles, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 75.
[15] Ibid., p. 75.
[16] Ibid., p. 75.
[17] LMDC, 'Draft Memorial Mission Statement and Memorial Program,' p. 2.
[18] David Dunlop, 'Looking for God in the Details at Ground Zero,' *N.Y. Times*, January 9, 2003, p. 85.

monolithic sacred space can be made, openly acknowledging the uncertainties of its nature may generate the insightful dialogue needed to realise a memorial that fulfills the needs of believers and non-believers. Otherwise, Ground Zero's memorial will take the shape of many other traditional "sites of memory" described earlier by Pierre Nora: a *mélange* of fossilised traces of living culture (memory) displaced from its original context, often for a new politicised purpose.[19]

The Proposed Memorial Space: "Site of Memory"

Undoubtedly, the task of creating a memorial for Ground Zero is a daunting one given the range of political agendas and commercial proposals focusing on the 4.7 acre site. To complicate matters further, the remaining 11.3 acres of the WTC site slated for commercial redevelopment are also widely regarded as sacred and replete with memory. This suggests that much of the simplistic litany of social unity, patriotism, and sacredness heard from business interests is likely meant to ease the perceived tension between the commemoration of 9/11 and concurrent plans for commercial enterprise. The presence of a strong sense of unease explains the call from some to avoid commercial development entirely. New York's former mayor Rudy Giuliani, for instance, declared in his farewell speech that the site of the former WTC site should *not* be restored as a mercantile centre. Though usually in favour of speculative urban development Giuliani insisted that, by raising a "soaring, monumental, beautiful memorial that . . . [would] draw . . . millions of people here who just want to see it,"[20] the devastated area could be revitalised without paving over Ground Zero's memory. To accomplish this Giuliani claimed, "we have to . . . create something here…that allows people to build on it [9/11] and grow from it. And it's not going to happen if we think about it in a narrow way."[21] In other words, the standard, short-term profit-driven ethos should not be pursued.

Contrary to Giuliani's wishes, New York's new Mayor, Michael Bloomberg, aims to remake the site as a centre of global commerce while ensuring to "pointedly recall for all time what happened on September 11, 2001."[22] Similarly, LMDC members who have from the outset insisted on conjoining the memorial and commercial functions, want to redevelop Ground Zero as quickly as possible to restore at least ten of the fifteen million square feet of rental space lost with the destruction of the WTC complex.

Between these two seemingly irreconcilable poles of opinion, those opposed to and those for commercial redevelopment of Ground Zero, the lead architect Daniel Libeskind has toiled for a compromise. The name of his project, "Memory Foundations," so called for "the depth of memory linked to 9/11, and . . . for the foundations of the future New York,"[23] indicates his intention to fuse the antithetical positions of commemoration and development. His inclusion of a sizable central green space, five separate memorial parks, a cultural center, a museum, and a 150-foot waterfall in the plan has won over some critics of commercial redevelopment. But, it is in his reuse of a massive concrete retaining wall, the only surviving material from the WTC, that he claims to have brought together "these seemingly contradictory viewpoints into an unexpected unity."[24] The retaining ("slurry") wall holding back the waters of the Hudson River forms the western boundary of the "bathtub," a large sunken area that will contain the memorial parks, the competition winner's monument, the preserved "footprints" of the Twin Towers, and non-commercial structures. Framing this commemorative core, the remaining seven buildings allotted for office space, along with the enormous underground retail mall they will sit upon, will comprise the mercantile portion of the Memory Foundations scheme. While it is true that Libeskind's clever plan spatially integrates business and commemorative interests, it is not clear how he can claim this is a reconciliation of both competing desires. Between these opposing desires Libeskind has crafted an artful compromise, perhaps even a *détente* of sorts. But to claim his design "unifies" disparate points of view betrays how prepared Libeskind is to employ essentialist language to sell his proposal.

Libeskind's hyperbolic language mimics what is typically used at public sites of memory to assuage and mediate differing opinions. In particular, he leans heavily, as do the authors of the Mission Statement, on sacred imagery. Not only has he referred to the slurry wall as a spiritual and sacred area, he has gone so far as to suggest that the "rebuilding of the World Trade

[19] Nora, *Realms of Memory: Rethinking the French Past*, p. 4.

[20] Rudy Giuliani, quoted in Michael Sorkin's 'The Center Cannot Hold,' in Michael Sorkin and Sharon Zukin, eds., *After the World Trade Center: Rethinking New York City* (New York: Routledge, 2002) p. 197.

[21] Ibid., p. 197.

[22] Michael Bloomberg; quoted from Radio Free Europe website. (www.rferl.org).

[23] Daniel Libeskind; quoted from press release, p. 1. (www.daniel-Libeskind.com/press).

[24] Ibid., p. 1.

Center has to be a spiritual process, not only an architectural one . . . [that requires] not only finding the visible angles, but the angles in the soul."[25] As seen in the press, the enormous popularity of Libeskind's spiritualised vision suggests the public's need to frequent sacred sites in order to help heal trauma. Despite this popularity, when *N.Y. Times* architecture critic Herbert Muschamp accused Libeskind of indulging in emotionally manipulative language and planning, and condemned the project for its "quasi-religious, pre-Enlightenment emotionalism [that is] intolerant of criticism,"[26] Muschamp quickly found out just how intolerant people could be. He received an unprecedented amount of demands for his resignation—a censorious furor set in motion largely through an email campaign by Libeskind's office manager.[27] Before being shouted down, Muschamp's polemic raised an interesting point, namely: is it not highly problematic for lay people such as architects, politicians, and concerned "stakeholders" to promise sanctified sites of memory to the anguished? Worse still, is it not smug, even unethical, to suggest that converting sorrowful memories into future prosperity is merely a matter of finding the "right angles?" There is still a general need to heal, to be able to remember the events of 9/11 in a personally meaningful way. But can a design for a largely commercial complex do this, regardless of how "right" its angles are? Is it not shared dialogue and shared memories that will help clear the path to acceptance, to peace? To fully appreciate the poignancy of this tension, it must be remembered that thousands of unidentified partial remains are to be interred in a central memorial crypt—a graveyard—in the midst of commercial buildings.[28]

Especially troubling is the certainty with which Libeskind and the LMDC attempt to unite the public's traumatic memories and desires for a spiritual space with the sanguine hope of financial recovery. In a *Cross Currents* editorial entitled 'That You Forget Not What Your Eyes Have Seen,' Catherine Marsden discusses this tenor of religious confidence in the U.S. after 9/11 as a "liturgy of glory," or as a form of "public boasting." Public boasting, Marsden relates, "treats religious and national icons as secure and unshakeable."[29] In times of crisis, this boast is mechanically repeated, "which does not reestablish the icon . . . but merely denies the truth of the present conditions."[30] However, the key liturgies, upon which most if not all sacred beliefs rest, admit the frailty of their icons. Traditionally, it is:

> the intemperate God, the crucified God, the unrepresentable God that govern the imagination not by their unassailable power but by their instability. Our relationship with God is always about to fall apart; much of the work in the monotheist traditions is the effort to salvage it through prayer and ethical life. In religions outside the monotheist traditions, the very dependency of the gods or the ancestors on human offerings and human remembrance emphasizes the frailty of the bonds that make the world cohere. Compelling ritual gives us not a prop for our complacency but a task that can fail.[31]

Instead, Libeskind brims with the confidence that fuels Lower Manhattan's speculative markets. In broad strokes, he links the perceived sacredness of the site to the stability of the economic and political orders that built the WTC—again, via the slurry wall. Already described as a key memorial object and a sacred area, he further claims that the surviving wall stands "as eloquent as the Constitution itself asserting the durability of Democracy and the value of individual life."[32] The LMDC similarly splices these disparate values in their 'Blueprint for the Future of Lower Manhattan,' with wording strangely familiar. The future memorial space should be an eternal tribute to the victims that "reaffirm[s] the democratic ideals that came under attack" yet also "reflect[s] the free exchange of ideas, goods, and services among diverse peoples that the WTC embodied."[33] In the name of sanctified memory, both parties boldly promote a secular "liturgy of glory," lauding America's political and economic life without considering the negative consequences world trade has inflicted globally. As such, there remains a poignant gap at Ground Zero

[25] Ibid., p. 1.
[26] Herbert Muschamp; quoted from *Spiked* website, p. 1, (www.spiked_online.com/Articles00000006DCB7.htm)
[27] Vicky Richardson, 'That Libeskind Touch,' March 7, 2003, quoted from *Spiked* website (www.spiked_online.com/Articles00000006DCB7.htm) p. 1.
[28] LMDC, 'Draft Memorial Mission Statement and Memorial Program', p. 3
[29] Catherine Marsden, 'That You not Forget What Your Eyes Have Seen', *Cross Currents*, Summer 2002, Vol. 52, no. 2, p. 4.
[30] Ibid., p. 4.
[31] Ibid., p. 4.
[32] Daniel Libeskind; quote from press release, p. 1, (www.daniel-Libeskind.com/press).
[33] LMDC, 'Principles and Preliminary Blueprint for the Future of Lower Manhattan,' April 9, 2002, p. 3.

between the public's need to engage in a living practice of memory that yields solace and healing, and the divided loyalties of official interests charged with rebuilding the site.

Erasing the Layers of History

The most ironic and reductive aspect of the proposed memorial lies in the LMDC's claim to offer an interpretation of sacred space at Ground Zero, while "convey[ing] historic authenticity."[34] To achieve both on that spot, however, requires invoking a powerful oblivion. The difficulty arises in overlooking the palimpsests, the historical layers of sacred memory connected to the WTC site. To silence the voices of competing histories, official sites of memory require an erasure that clears and neutralises the ground so that new stories and histories can be invented and circulated. How else could Lower Manhattan's newest sacred space be considered historically "authentic" when the myth of Manhattan's sale by unnamed Indians for twenty-four dollars is common knowledge, and accounts such as the following of a 1643 Dutch raid on a Munsee Lenape camp which actually gave shape to Lower Manhattan, are largely erased from vernacular memory?

> Infants were torn from the mother's breasts, and hacked to pieces in the presence of their parents, and the pieces thrown into the fire and in the water, and other sucklings, being bound to small cradle boards were cut, struck, and pierced, and miserably massacred in a manner to move a heart of stone. Some came to our people . . . with their hands, some of their legs cut off, and some holding their entrails in their arms.[35]

Clearly, not all traumas can be accounted for on a particular site, but that is the point. There is no "real" or "authentic" memory. Memory *is* biased and deficient. As Toronto anthropologist Michael Lambeck points out, "to remember is never to solely report on the past so much as to establish one's relation to it . . . [as] memory . . . is never morally or pragmatically neutral."[36] Yet it is the LMDC's posture of neutrality and objectivity and its refusal to recognise other histories such as those of the Munsee Lenape that allows for the construction of this "historically authentic" memorial site. Without the deficiencies and biases of official memory, without forgetting, how could a traditional memorial on this site work in the ways that the LMDC desire?

In a similar vein, the efforts to preserve the "footprints" of the Twin Towers further erase aspects of the city's memory and its history. In *Divided We Stand: A Biography of New York's World Trade Center*, Eric Darton discusses how the development of the site required the displacement of the vibrant commercial neighborhood known as Radio Row. Though home to hundreds of small-scale, family-run businesses that employed some 30,000 people, Radio Row fell to the bulldozers despite a lengthy battle in the streets (the largest demonstration staged swelled to over 120,000 protesters) and in the courts.[37] Since 1920, Oscar's Radio, perhaps the most noteworthy business on Radio Row, sat in the middle of Tower One's current footprint. Though never substantiated, allegations of strong-arm tactics used to force out the last holdouts, including assaults and arson, were leveled against the Port Authority and private interests.[38] In this light, how paradoxical this "authentic" official memory appears, to save and make sacred in the name of "freedom" and "American values" the footprint of buildings that uprooted the lives of so many entrepreneurial citizens.

Firmly reestablishing American values like freedom at Ground Zero's sacred memorial space necessitates a planned lapse of recall, without which this recent site of memory would simply lose its rhetorical force. When Libeskind waxes patriotic, stating that "freedom really [is] etched into this [slurry] wall,"[39] it is difficult to believe he is speaking about the freedoms historically enshrined in the Constitution. As David Harvey notes, "If freedom is exclusively defined in terms of market freedoms . . . [then] the space of the WTC could be depicted as a 'space of

[34] LMDC, 'Draft Memorial Mission Statement and Memorial Program,' p. 3.

[35] John Kuo Wei Chen, 'Whose Downtown?!?', in Michael Sorkin and Sharon Zukin, eds., *After the World Trade Center: Rethinking New York City* (New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 42.

[36] Michael Lambeck, 'The Past Imperfect: Remembering as Moral Practice', in Paul Antze & Michael Lambeck, eds., *Tense Past: Cultural Essays in Trauma and Memory* (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 240.

[37] Eric Darton, *Divided We Stand: A Biography of New York's World Trade Center* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), p. 132.

[38] Ibid., p. 92.

[39] Daniel Libeskind; quoted from Polonia Global Fund Website (www.pgf.cc/Polonia/articles.3htm).

freedom.'"[40] Freedom, however, is an ironic and problematic term. Market freedoms can disguise numerous negative freedoms, such as "the freedom to exploit labour, to deplete and degrade environments . . . to exact high rents, to lay people off overnight . . . to exercise private property rights ruthlessly in the pursuit of individual advantage."[41] As with other memories of past events that have been distorted or erased, the history of the WTC's influence on the city's planning and its neighbourhoods is stripped of its contradictions and repackaged as beneficial, and as embodying sacred freedoms—in this case free enterprise—held so dear by many Americans.

The Anti-Monument Model:
Towards "Environments of Memory"

While this paper's discussion has focused on the inherent problems of traditional and conservative sites of memory, there is an alternative. There is an *avant-garde* approach that promises to shift commemoration away from object-centered sites of memory towards a lived practice—towards the environments of memory discussed earlier by Pierre Nora. Referred to as the anti-monument movement, it is promoted by a loose group consisting of scholars, conceptual artists, and architects from around the world.[42] They seek to move memory production from the grasp of state power and in doing so, reveal how it is always subjective and constructed. To avoid creating still more sites of memory, anti-monuments either openly acknowledge the break with the past's meaning – the presence of absence – or through public interaction at the memorial, seek to build the past's meaning not through material at the site, but through the memories of those who visit and participate.

John R. Gilles, a professor of history at Rutgers University, insists that the appearance of the anti-monument represents more than an intellectual trend; it reveals a deep rejection of the talismanic quality of traditional memorial sites. It constitutes a "radical turn not only aesthetically, but epistemologically."[43] Aesthetically, instead of creating an object-focused site of memory, anti-monuments seek to dematerialise remembering. In the case of certain Holocaust memorials, for example, the form and iconography of counter monuments often highlights the fragmentation and destruction of memories, rather than trying to relate the memories of those who cannot speak for themselves through material artifacts or representations. For instance, at first glance Rachel Whiteread's 'Nameless Library' (2000) at the *Judenplatz* in Vienna, Austria, appears to be a cube-like structure with doors, but upon closer examination the doors are merely modeled in a solid concrete wall, denying any entrance to its interior. Similarly, mock cement bookshelves hung on the building's exterior are filled with false books turned with their spines to the wall to avoid reading their titles. Whiteread strives to give the viewer a sense of the utter loss of memory wrought by the Holocaust in Vienna—to "describe the indescribable."[44] By recognising our inability to grasp the void of memory rent by the Holocaust, by acknowledging the presence of absence, Whiteread's Nameless Library formally avoids closure, challenging the viewer to wrestle not with the material of the site, but with what is not there.

Epistemologically, anti-monuments seek to close the gap between past and present by returning memory to the practice of everyday life; in this way they are closer in form to an "environment of memory." This requires moving away from the image of a certain, "authentic" past advanced by most official sites of memory, to the uncertainty of each person undertaking a share in preserving and shaping memory. When memory is stripped of "all appearances of objectivity, . . . [it] forc[es] everyone to confront hers or his subjectivity, while at the same time acknowledging a civic responsibility not to let the past repeat itself."[45] Generally, anti-monuments feature vernacular expressions over dogmatic rhetorical expressions, for the aim is to reflect upon the function of memory as experienced, rather than as desired and directed.

The German conceptual artist Jochen Gerz's 'Anti-Fascist Monument' (1986) in Hamburg exemplifies this aim. The monument, a single twelve-meter column sheathed in lead, was lowered yearly into the ground after each reachable section was inscribed with visitor's comments about the crimes of the Nazis, until being totally submerged beneath the ground in 1994. Gerz believes that because people interacted with the

[40] Harvey, 'Cracks in the Edifice of the Empire State,' p. 60.
[41] Ibid., p. 60.
[42] It is important to distinguish that there are different types of anti-monuments. Some do not try to construct anything at all. Rather they are concerned only with confronting our inability to remember, or the reality of forgetting. Others do seek to make new memory forms through interaction
[43] John R. Gilles, 'Introduction,' in John R. Gilles, ed., *Commemorations: The Politics of National Identity* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 18.
[44] Rachel Whiteread, in Adrian Forty, 'Introduction', in Adrian Forty and Suzanne Kuchler, eds., *The Art of Forgetting* (New York: Berg, 1999), p. 13.
[45] Gilles, 'Introduction', p. 17.

memorial, through marking it or attending the yearly lowering ceremonies, more profound and lasting memories were created than is possible with a static object. More than any inert obelisk, Gerz feels his monument transmits subjective, lived memory to the minds of its visitors, the only place he deems memory actually exists. In this way, he tried to make the public's memories—over 60,000 people left inscriptions on the stele—one of the site's key building materials. Further, the absence of the now-submerged column is meant to obligate people to be watchful and vigilant, as the shared recollection of the memorial's disappearance is more powerful than the object itself. As Gerz reminds us, "no permanent object can stand for justice."[46]

Though Libeskind's 'Garden of Exiles' memorial at the Jewish Museum in Berlin (1999) is widely considered to be on the leading edge of counter monument design, the Memory Foundations project appears to be steering towards the typical, conservative "site of memory." What makes this especially surprising is the LMDC's decision, on the other hand, to rebuild using *avant-garde*, deconstructivist architectural forms such as those employed by architects Frank Gehry, Zaha Hadid, or Peter Eisenman. Though this preference for tradition likely has mitigated and sped up the rebuilding process, it will do little to allow the average person to participate in a shared conversation of grieving and healing needed at Ground Zero. For commemoration to shift towards a lived practice, it needs to be inclusive and removed from the control of official power and the confines of an object. Living memory has both a *personal* and a *communal* form, and each shapes and sustains the other. If people are unable to contribute freely to the collective pool of memory, or to validate and express the valuable impressions that dwell subjectively, this reciprocal relationship begins to break down, and the practice of commemoration becomes suspect.

Conclusion

The open competition to design the memorial concludes in October 2003 with the announcement of the winning proposal. The overriding considerations directing the jury are the guidelines outlined in the LMDC's 'Draft Memorial Mission Statement and Memorial Program.' Though the jury members are among the top architects, artists, and scholars in the nation, the assumptions found in the Mission Statement and Memorial Program regarding the monument's power to represent memory and the possibility of a homogenised sacred space will likely hinder their attempt to achieve these aims, however well intentioned. As outlined in this essay, it is problematic, perhaps even impossible, to invest objects and sites with memories. It is even more difficult when the memorial is state-sponsored since it is in that governing body's interest to determine a suitable closure to trauma and to direct how events are best remembered. To exist at all, official sites of memory require simplifying complex events, making untenable claims to historical authenticity, and invoking an unexamined spirituality. While it is unlikely that the work of the anti-monument movement will close the gap between the past and present, or fully revive bygone environments of memory, struggling to subvert existing controls on public memory will shift its usage towards more egalitarian ends.

At Ground Zero, the financial stakes are too high and the process too politicised for architects and planners to construct a memorial that will acknowledge how U.S. foreign policies have decreased world peace. Instead, the commemorative project's sanguine and boastful tone lends stability to the hurried effort to rebuild a key instrument of global capitalism. There is no room in that proposed sacred space for deep reflection on the troubled, contradictory *tableaux* of American life, or the public's subjective deficiency to process and grasp the meaning of traumatic memory. If the model of the anti-monument had been adopted by the LMDC and these shortcomings openly confessed, perhaps the opportunity to develop a sacred and inclusive space of recall, or at least a step toward a more honest, vivid and animated experience of the past, could have been realised.

[46] Jochen Gerz, 'Introduction', in Adrian Forty and Suzanne Kuchler, eds., *The Art of Forgetting* (New York: Berg, 1999), p. 7.