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DRAFT

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: Commemorating 9/11:
Anesthetics, Buffing, and Footprints

Unlike many New Yorkers who witnessed 9/11, I have no recurrent anxiety attacks or nightmares. Nonetheless I keep recalling that day in hope of making sense of my peculiar reactions. Preoccupied with preparing for a new graduate course, I took no special note of a plane roaring low over my apartment building, nor of a nearby explosion shortly thereafter. My dismissive half-thought was, "...another old fuel tank in Soho," –a thought confirmed by fire engine sirens shortly after. Indeed, there had been such an event the winter before in a building I look down on from my study window. I "read" a second explosion sometime later in the same way.

Shortly thereafter I went in search of a book and happened to glance south to see black and white smoke belching from high gashes in each of the Twin Towers. It was an arresting spectacle, but as I watched the plumes rise and drift eastward, I dozed off for a few minutes. When I came to, one of the towers was gone. My immediate reaction was to wait expectantly, almost hopefully for the other tower to fall, and when it did, I experienced a kind of relief. The skyline had suddenly after many years regained its earlier pleasing ragged regularity. If I gave any thought to the towers' occupants, it was, as I recall, an unreflective assumption that they had had time to vacate the buildings before they collapsed. It was only when I attended to television reports that I took account of human suffering and casualties.

When I later began to talk with other witnesses, I said nothing about this striking delay in my human regard and began to grope for an exculpatory explanation. I first sought comfort in Kant's notion of the sublime and the awe of our response to events of such magnitude. As with his examples of raging storms at sea and mountain cataracts, the immediate response is fear followed closely by awe, once the immense spectacle is rationally judged to be at a safe distance. So, it was with the towers burning and

collapsing less than a mile away, but with their great smoke plumes steadily drifting eastward, not northward toward me.

Kant's examples of the awesome, however, do not include harm to others, but only initial, spurious threat to the spectator. A closer parallel is that of the massive pre-invasion bombardment of the French coast in WWII, as seen by a soldier in a landing craft offshore. The spectator-- the philosopher J. Glenn Gray—described himself as “spellbound, completely absorbed” in a state of “transcendent ecstasy.” He was not only “indifferent to what the immediate future might bring” but was momentarily able to forget “the havoc and terror that was being created by those shells and bombs among the half-awake inhabitants of the villages” Suppressing moral and humane considerations, this “lust of the eye” precluded taking any action whatsoever.¹

It is as if such spectacles are a self-protective “aesthetic anesthesia.” A more precise analogy is with analgesia, a dampening but not obliteration of pain. (In my case, it was the brief dozing off that provided complete relief from painful thoughts of the human calamity behind the anesthetized scene. Analgesics, of course, are of limited value for intense pain. Suppose I had been a half-mile closer and would have seen dark shapes falling from the towers' upper floors? Would aesthetic analgesia have protected me from the shock of people jumping from upper floors to their death? Would I have seen them as mere debris? Or, even if I had identified them as people falling, could I have seen them as sky-divers in graceful free fall, thereby suppressing thoughts of their desperation and immanent death?² If so, the aesthetic construal would, like laughing gas, not just dampen pain but seem to transform it into a strange pleasure.

¹ J.Glenn Gray, “The Enduring Appeals of Battle,” The Warriors: Reflections on Men in Battle (Harper & Row 1959) pp.31-2. For him, the experience shows the immoral effect of the passive, paralyzing “lust of the eye” warned of in the Bible

² Months later I (and others) did so see a man falling in a 9/11 photograph. There is a suitably cropped photograph that is easily so seen.)

We are familiar with such transformations in art. Painters standardly represent Jesus, St. Stephen, St. Joan, and other religious martyrs as blissful in spite of their mortifying nails, arrows, thorns, and fire. Likewise, Vesalius and later medical illustrators drew flayed human figures as nobly erect, without suffering. Photographers used cropping and printing to render lynchings in the Deep South suitable for postcards. Presumably, this aestheticizing of gruesome scenes is meant to enable worshippers, students, and racists to contemplate them without revulsion. But perhaps there are people whose perceptual sensibilities can instantly transform such scenes without intervening works of art.

Shortly after the 9/11 attack, Karlheinz Stockhausen called it “the greatest work of art that is possible in the whole cosmos.”³ Was he being flamboyantly provocative, or had he actually experienced 9/11 as a singular, consummate Wagnerian performance? Did he watch TV scenes of fleeing, ash-covered survivors as if they were performers in a street-theater epilogue to the collapsing North Tower’s grand finale? If so, how should we think of him--as an amoral aesthete? a professional monomaniac? a sociopath? or all of the above?

Aestheticizing may, of course, make things repellant as well as attractive. Regarding war as vulgar, Oscar Wilde might well have seen the WWII barrage as a gaudy, philistine display or 9/11 as ugly, visual chaos.⁴ Also, aestheticizing may be energizing, not paralyzing, and it can well benefit others. Entomologists and other naturalists take scholarly and visual delight in the activities of swarming insects or

³ The hijackers were like people who “practice like crazy for 10 years, totally fanatically, for a concert, and then die,” dispatching 5,000 people “into eternity, in a single moment.” “In comparison with that, we’re nothing as composers.” Anthony Tommasini, “Music; The Devil Made Him Do it,” New York Times, September 30, 2001.

⁴ “As long as war is regarded as wicked, it will always have its fascination. When it is looked upon as vulgar, it will cease to be popular.” The Critic as Artist, Part II.

underground rodents who disgust the rests of us.⁵ Patients clearly benefit from physicians' pleasure in "neat," "elegant" chemical skin abrasions, intestinal resections, and post-partum perineal repairs.

Whatever the morality of these various aesthetic responses, they raise epistemic questions as well. Such aesthetic preoccupations or transformations are likely to disregard or distort what we see and think in ways that impair rational deliberation and action. So engaged, we would seem to forego evidence and considerations that the Ideal Agent would employ. In this regard we seem akin to the optimist with rose-colored glasses, or the self-deceiver who manages to avoid or distort challenges to a favorable self-image.

But how serious a failing is it to ignore or distort evidence in these ways? Is a Principle of Complete, Unvarnished Information the ideal against which all reasonable actions are to be judged? At times, optimism or self-deception may be needed to undertake or continue ambitious projects—projects that careful probability assessment or the whole truth would subvert.⁶ Just so, aestheticism may at times be needed if survivors are to live with the losses that death and destruction impose. Our commemorative practices illumine this point.

In remembering and speaking of the dead, we engage in what may be called commemorative buffing. In eulogies, obituaries, and anecdotes, we are like morticians who strive to remove blemishes and vestiges of degrading illness. Children are routinely recalled as angelic, parents and spouses as devoted, patients and soldiers as courageous; artists and intellectuals as creative and influential. Any failings are recalled with kindly

⁵ See the blind mole rate segment in Earl Morris's film, "Fast, Loose, and Out of Control."

⁶ I have discussed these matters in "Hope and Deception" (Bioethics 13:3/4 1999) and "Social Self-Deceptions" (in Perspectives on Self-Deception, eds. B. McLaughlin and A.O. Rorty 1988).

humor. (“Admittedly, she was no saint, but...”) In short, we do more than refrain from speaking ill of the dead; we make every effort to speak well of them.

This may in part reflect a lingering thought that the dead may still be aware of our doings and sayings. But there are less metaphysically suspect reasons. Speaking well of the dead can help make them more memorable and, consequently, more memorable.. Selecting and exaggerating their virtues make the dead more worthy of tributes than they may have been in life, especially in the last stages of disease or decrepitude. Just as warts distract the eye from the cast or Gestalt of a face, so too, certain failings or lapses disrupt the main features of the deceased’s life. In these regards, eulogies and other commemorative practices are part of the narrative reconstruction of a life, helping to determine how someone is remembered, how his or memory is, as we say, “kept alive.” To select and suppress various features and events also enable us to give shape to lives, to give them order and purpose not readily apparent in the partially observed and jumbled activities of daily living. What emerges through well chosen anecdotes and characteristics is an easily memorable object, a life--as in the “Portraits of Grief” of the victims of 9/11 run thereafter for months in the New York Times.⁷

The notion of a life is partly literary in that lives are written or narrated, in short, biographical.⁸ Hence in recounting lives of the dead, we employ some of the same aesthetic devices—simplifying, editing, enhancing, unifying—that story-tellers, film makers, album compilers, or other narrators use. Thereby disturbing, discordant facts are eliminated or transformed in service of the “good and the beautiful” (story).

There is, of course, the risk that beautification will increase the sense of loss that mourners suffer. That may well be the effect of the mortician’s work in “preparing the body for viewing” or of selecting for memorials photographs of the dead on happy, earlier occasions. (Witness the beaming, jolly photographs of 9/11 victims posted on

⁷ Now collected in Portraits of Grief.

⁸ See my “Biographical Lives” Revisited and Extended,” Journal of Ethics, July 2005.

fences, billboards, shrines, and other personal memorials around New York, or sent to the New York Times.) When such buffing is overdone, there is the contrary risk of reducing the sense of loss by making the dead somewhat unfamiliar. In beautifying the dead, zealous morticians or portraitists may beatify them and thereby make them unrecognizable.⁹ Such was the likely effect of celebrating all of the 9/11 victims as heroes, or even as angels (as in schoolchildren's proposals for memorials)¹⁰

Making someone commemorable may, of course, serve larger public purposes. "Angels" are easily cast as the first "innocent victims," and "heroes" as the first soldiers in a justly declared patriotic war against a "treacherous national enemy"—September 11th becomes December 7th redux. To so commemorate the dead, we need, of course, to forget that they died, with little warning of their mortal danger, in the course of doing their various civilian and professional jobs. If, however, we resist such politically motivated posthumous mass enlistment of the dead, how are we to commemorate such a diverse group -- bankers, dancers, firefighters, cooks, caterers, state employees? How can a single memorial commemorate 3000 people who happened to be in the towers that morning?

To consider such a memorial to the dead, let us separate them in thought from the towers. Suppose that the attack had been with gas that killed as many people as the exploding airplanes, but with no significant damage to the towers. What would be a suitable public memorial for the victims? Some firms and uniformed services have already created small memorials for the members they have lost, but how are thousands of victims with nothing in common but the place and time of death to be jointly commemorated?

⁹ Listening to glowing eulogies to her dead husband, a widow turns to one of her sons and whispers, "Moishe, go up and look in the box to be make sure that it is Papa who is in there" (from Arthur Zitrin's trove of illuminating jokes).

¹⁰ Almost every memorial proposal by third-grade children contained haloes, angel wings, or angels in an exhibition in the Jacob Javits Convention Center, New York City, 2002.

Politically inspired rhetoric immediately elevated all the dead to the status of “patriotic heroes” who died, like those at Pearl Harbor, by sneak attack at the outset of a war of national self-defense against fervid enemies. Not only was this morally charitable to the many victims, uninformed and otherwise, who had no idea of their peril. It was also politically “charitable” in counting people who had neither US citizenship nor employment as patriots. Even firefighters with engines sporting American flags regarded their efforts as doing their professional, not their patriotic duty. And, of course, they knew nothing of an organized enemy yet to be identified or of a “war on terrorism” yet to be defined or declared at the time of their deaths.

More plausible than this quasi-military posthumous conscription of victims is a sweeping socio-economic classification. Islamists have cast the World Trade Center dead as agents of Western cultural and economic aggression—an account perhaps of help in designing a memorial to the “martyrs” who piloted the planes, but not for memorials commemorating the “innocent victims” of their attack. A more admiring account sees the dead as economic opportunists, not imperialists—all of them like countless immigrants before them attracted to Lower Manhattan,

because it was so crowded and active and changeable—the tip of an island that kept adding shoreline to accommodate new people and new businesses. They came here from old cities with grand memorials and ancient cemeteries because the streets of New York offered so many opportunities.¹¹

Such people, the writer says, would be dishonored were the entire Trade Center site made into a memorial park, as the Mayor Giuliani first proposed. Such a memorial park would ignore the driving ambitions that accounted for their being at the Trade towers on 9/11. Hence they would be dishonored if lower Manhattan were made a “necropolis” (like ancient Sardis) rather than being restored as a thriving commercial center.

¹¹ John Tierney, “Downtown, A Necropolis is Rising,” New York Times, January 25, 2002, p. B1.

Making victims kin to economically ambitious immigrants is, I think, more plausible than making them posthumous wartime recruits. Indeed, some were just such immigrants. Yet many of the victims (dancers, chefs, conferees, EMTs, government officials third-generation bankers) would not be able to recognize themselves (nor be recognizable by their families) so regarded. We may have to accept them in their unclassifiable diversity of nationality and occupation with nothing in common but the time and place of death—not unlike passengers on the Titanic. And like those passengers, they differed even in the mode of death and the role that chance played in their various deaths. How can a memorial reflect this minimal commonality, as well as the diversity of their lives and work?

Had the towers withstood the attack, a floor in each building could be left just as it was just after the attack—with open file cabinets, operating PCs, coffee carts, carpenters' tool kits, conference tables and pads. The sense of work interrupted and lives abruptly ended would be palpable, made even keener by the striking contrast between that silent, ghostly room and the restored activity of adjacent floors and elevators.

But given the destruction of the towers, is there anything similar to do? We could of course reconstruct such disrupted offices in new towers to be built at Ground Zero, but this won't do. Like other replicas and reenactments, these reconstructions would at best show what it was like but not how it actually was for office occupants at the time of death. Nor would these displays, original or replicated, capture the collective loss. A single office cannot represent the interruption of 3,000 diverse work lives.

One way to represent the collective loss is by an aggregation of names of victims, done most dramatically in Maya Lin's Vietnam memorial. The Trade tower deaths are less than a tenth of the US Vietnam deaths, but still numerous enough to seem countless. Many designs proposed to inscribe all these names on walls, ramps, oculi, or, as in the case of the winning memorial design, in bronze plates atop low walls surrounding water pools on the tower footprints. Some families objected to the plan to list the names at

random with the uniformed rescue workers flagged. As for the order of names, one official replied: “Sept. 11 was not orderly or neat. It was not alphabetical. It did not go floor by floor. It was a random event. And that is the power of the event.” And yet the uninformed rescuers are to be flagged with shields-- an invidious distinction or hierarchy according to one widow whose bond trading husband helping friends and fellow workers.¹²

Some people would press individuation farther, including family photographs and biographies on line in a museum at the site. But this is to be resisted if it is the collective loss we are commemorating. We may be do no better than the massing of names in a suitable place. To have the names around the footprints of their place of death seems most suitable.

Commemorating the Towers

But are the victims, whether heroes or not, the only subjects for commemoration, collectively or individually? Although I watched with relief as the second tower collapsed, restoring harmonious skyline, nonetheless I almost immediately missed the towers. And, surprisingly, so did others, including some of their harshest critics.

A few professional photographers aside, most people found them of questionable aesthetic virtue. An authoritative architectural guide called them “stolid monoliths” (later, “stolid banal monoliths”).¹³ Their height and location were thought a

¹² “Everyone who was killed that day was attacked equally... Was Glenn Thompson not, in his own selfless way, as heroic as any of the brave firefighters and police offices (sic) who attempted similar rescues?” New York Times, 2003

¹³ American Institute of Architecture Guide to New York City, edited by Norval White and Elliot Willensky (New York: Macmillan 1967, p.27; New York: Three Rivers Press, Crown Publishing Group, 2000, p.53In 4th edition. The authors add that the plaza [“larger than Piazza San Marco in Venice”] is “drain[ed] of any meaningful activity” by the “profusion of eateries” in the underground concourse. They do concede, however, that “The coming of the World Financial Center’s shaped-top towers in Battery Park City softened the impact of the Trade Center’s pair—at least for viewers in New Jersey.”

domineering violation of the lower Manhattan skyline, as well as of jokes about the risk of tipping Manhattan island into the Hudson River.

But once the towers were attacked and destroyed, people began to remark on their beauty at certain times of day.¹⁴ Images and replicas of the towers standing (alone) abounded in windows, on tee shirts and placards, and eventually their silhouettes came to be standard substitutes for the numeral ‘11’ in ‘9/11.’ Some of these images were inscribed with “We shall never forget” and “Remember 9/11”—as if it were the towers themselves that we mourned and wanted to keep in memory. As noted above, some memorials seem to express that very sentiment. So, too, the early insistence that the towers be rebuilt just as they were.

Would that have been a suitable commemoration of the towers? To focus solely on the towers, let’s imagine another variant on the 9/11 attack. Suppose, for example, that the hijackers had stolen empty, unattended UPS planes late Saturday night and attacked early Sunday morning. There would have been few deaths—or spectators; most people would have awakened to find the towers missing, marked only by a column of drifting smoke—a shock, but without tales and images of people trapped, crushed or jumping. Nor would the aftermath include pictures, pleas for information, and spontaneous shrines for the dead or missing.

How might that difference have affected memorial thoughts? Patriotic sentiment might still have supported rebuilding the towers to show our enemies and the world that

Their conclusion: “The public agency that built them (Port Authority of New York & New Jersey) ran amok with both money and aesthetics.” AIA Guide to New York City,

¹⁴ Paul Goldberger recently wrote: “The towers did wonderful things in the light. They didn’t glare, like glass, but they didn’t absorb all the light either, the way stone or brick buildings often do. They reflected it back, softly, with a gentleness that belied their size. [T]hey could sometimes appear almost to glow... [T]he towers, as much as any buildings that have ever been, existed in the light, and changed as the light changed. It is the view of these buildings in the light that raised them to something exalted. ““The World Trade Center: Rising in Sheer Exaltation,” The World Trade Center Remembered. New York: Abbeville Press 2001 pp.24, 26.

we were resilient and unintimidated¹⁵ This popular proposal would, of course, avoid the beautification problem, but fail to commemorate. . The replicas would be all too familiar, indeed, overfamiliar. Rather than reminding us of what had been loss, their replicas would repair that loss without remainder. These substitutes would fill in all too well, just as do the best Elvis impersonators. The original towers had not aged enough to be notably different from their successors. If they were rebuilt, there would be no need to mourn the lost towers, or to recall them: their successors would, as it were, restore them. Nor would we feel any historical loss: there were no events (apart from the earlier failed attack on the towers) that gave the towers a historical patina which their replacements would lack.

What then are the ways that the towers might be commemorated? From the outset many architects and others favored making the “footprints” of the original towers’ into gardens or reflecting pools. Indeed, in time officials made their preservation free of buildings or commercial use a requirement of all competing architectural designs. This condition reflected the view that the footprints were sacred ground, given that most victims died in the compacting rubble of the towers, many of them pulverized beyond any identification or recovery. The footprints, of course, also refer to the towers from their earliest conception in blueprints and their order of construction.

But footprints do not recall the most memorable feature of the towers, their stark height (“apostrophes in the sky line”). Arguably, they commemorate the dead more than the buildings, marking “final resting places” (until rubble removal) of most victims, crushed or pulverized by the compacting floors. One early design rotated the silhouette of one of the towers through 90 degrees to form a canal of the same dimensions extending into the Hudson River. By this translation of the vertical to the horizontal plane, we could in imagination think of the towers as if, rather than compacting, falling

¹⁵ The proposal has been dropped, largely for commercial and psychological reasons. (“No one would want to work above the 50th floor”). Nonetheless some people persisted New York Times, p. November 3, 2002.

westward and neatly dissolving into the ground—a comforting fantasy not unlike more direct commemorative buffings.

Other early proposals sought to commemorate the lost towers by way of some their surviving fragments. Like shells of British churches, Greek temples, or Roman buildings, such structural fragments could effectively recall the original buildings, sometimes paradoxically surpassing the beauty of the original they call to mind, not unlike leafless winter trees. Ruins can be purely formal, freed from function, decoration, and architectural requirements. (Think here of the bleached pediments of the Parthenon by contrast with Arthur Evans’s painted restoration of the Palace of Knossos in Crete.) They no longer have to serve as accessible portals or buttresses supporting beams or walls. They may even be freed from aesthetically compromising walls or windows with they were unhappily conjoined in the original construction.

Such aesthetic liberation of fragments was, arguably, true of the curtain wall fragments of ground level palisades left standing askew by the collapsed North Tower. This graceful, quasi-Venetian stonework was no longer dwarfed and compressed by the soaring Modernist monoliths above them.¹⁶ Nonetheless, in their solitary, broken state they readily called to mind the missing tower before and after its disappearance. In these respects, the remnants are like eulogies which allow us to mourn without reminders of the unpleasant features of what we have lost. Derivatively, they also recall the lost uses of the ruined buildings, and those people who once used those buildings but can no longer do so, whether living or dead.

As some architects have proposed, these fragments might be incorporated in a newly designed building for the site, or they might be made free standing in a memorial park. Both present considerable design problems. Freestanding fragments would require

¹⁶ “”The tallest buildings in the world and among the largest, their architecture was delicate, almost dainty. Yamasaki had put neo-Gothic arches at the bases of the towers and at the top, which he thought would give the building a humane air but served only to make them seem fussy “ “The World Trade Center: Rising in Sheer Exaltation,” p.20.

more park space than builders will cede. In too small a space, the palisade fragments would overpower the space, an unhappy reflection of the towers' effects on surrounding buildings and the ground-level palisades themselves. Moreover, the fragments if too close to benches or paths could seem somewhat threatening--a feeling incompatible with the solemn, calm contemplation that the memorial park is meant to encourage. Perhaps for reasons of aesthetic proportion and serenity, ruins in parks should be generally be set in the middle or far distance—a safe distance that reflects their distance from the present time.

Would any of the smaller objects recovered from the debris require less space? A crushed fire truck might recall the rubble, but not the standing towers. Fritz Koenig's damaged, but largely intact metallic centerpiece of the WTC plaza has been installed as a temporary memorial in Battery Park, but it brings to mind debris falling from the towers, not the towers themselves.

Many of the other proposals submitted by invitation to an early gallery exhibition made no reference to the towers at all, but filled the site with various towering biomorphic, electronic, geometric forms, stairways or bridges.¹⁷ The common emphasis was on looking forward with novel “21st century structures” which avoid “nostalgic ruminations.” What is wanted, in the words of one architect (Brad Cloepfil), is “a place of life, and urban space—not a spectacle, not a sculptural object or a symbolic memorial, but a resonant void in the city that will be filled with activities of life.” Several proposals included large screens or color effects that change with the season or current world events.

Some of the eight finalists did have futuristic elements and all provided for extensive commercial and cultural activities, day and night. But only one—the semi-finalist Think team--made clear reference to the twin towers. They had two lattice-structures with suspended cultural and convention centers rising 300 feet higher than the towers, but with no office or commercial space. (It was assumed that no one would want

¹⁷ The Max Protetch Gallery, Manhattan, January-February 2002.

to work daily above 50 or 60 floors.) But the winning design by Daniel Liebeskind makes no such reference: its single “Freedom Tower” soars to a significant 1776-foot height at the corner of a congeries of commercial buildings, museums, footprint memorial pools, and “Heroes’ Plaza.” It does, however, make indirect reference to the towers, or at least to their destruction. The disposition of the buildings is supposed to allow sunlight to illuminate the Heroes Plaza for the precise time between the fall of the first tower and the second.

A far more dramatic use of light to commemorate the towers was first proposed separately by two architects who eventually joined forces and succeeded in executing it, to near unanimous acclaim. Original called “Phantom Towers,” the memorial had two intense beams of bluish light soaring upward from two arrays of Klieg lights near the excavations of Ground Zero. By the time they were installed, the name was changed to “A Tribute in Light” in response to survivors’ complaints that “Phantom Towers” made no reference to the victims. Although not explicitly referring to victims, the name “A Tribute in Light” does allow for a double reference, a dual tribute to buildings and people. Moreover, the light beams themselves allow a metaphysical interpretation akin to the school children’s use of angels. In many religions light symbolizes holy or spiritual states or agents. Hence the lights could readily be thought to represent the release of souls from destroyed bodies and their ascent to Paradise.

Admittedly, strict clerics would be reluctant to endorse this understanding. Even if the dead are “innocent victims” in some political sense, few if any of them were in the state of innocence required of entrants into Heaven. (The pilots, of course, are a separate case.) To think otherwise would be another instance of the post-mortem beatification we noted earlier.¹⁸

Arguably, the light beams—now to be made an anniversary commemoration--indirectly beatify the towers themselves. As they soar heavenward disappearing into the

¹⁸ Possibly, some version of this light tribute will occur on anniversaries of 9/11, but in a less dramatic form

sky of clouds, the beams allow us to think of the towers without “fussy” palisade fringes at top and bottom, dull surfaces and abrupt flat tops. And indeed, even the towers’ most salient feature, their height in surrounding cityscape, is exaggerated, but without overbearing their much lower neighbors.

Besides towers and victims, is there yet a third subject and genre, namely, the 9/11 attack itself? The videotapes and photographs of the planes hitting the towers were shown repeatedly for days and months. This was clearly not in the service of memory: (Who needed reminding?) Indeed, we might wonder why this painful sight was continuously rerun. We do commemorate painful events. Witness the memorial in Honolulu built in the sunken remains of a battleship sunk on December 7, 1941—a “day that will live in infamy.” The government made an instant comparison of 9/11 to that day, no doubt to support its declaration of war on an enemy said to be as sly and alien as were the attacking Japanese. So, we have commemoration in the service of current action, not as an act of respect or mourning.

This leads to the much broader topic of collective memory, obligations of remembering, and national identity-topics attracting increasing philosophic attention.¹⁹ It may be enough for now to have taken note of the phenomena of aesthetic analgesia, commemorative buffing, and the complexities of commemorating both buildings and people when both are lost simultaneously.

¹⁹ For a start, see Avashai Margalit, The Ethics of Memory (Harvard University Press 2002). There was a panel on “The Obligations of Memory” at the Pacific APA in 2003, with papers by Jeffrey Blustein, Ross Poole, Janna Thomsson, and Sue Campbell. Blustein’s critique of Margalit is included in his forthcoming book on this topic.