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Paper #2

A Memorial Park or An Exposed Burial Ground?

After the selection of Daniel Libeskind's design for Ground Zero, the use of ground space became one of the most controversial issues concerning the reconstruction of Lower Manhattan. As I feel strongly about the use of outdoor public spaces and parks, I have developed firmly grounded views about Libeskind's questionable memorial park located in the thirty foot pit under the site of the World Trade Center. I believe it is most important to heal this area with parks and beautiful open spaces, encouraging families to come to this site and renew life there. I believe the World Trade Center site needs to be redeveloped into a peaceful outdoor area that is a place for reflection and healing. However, the pit that Libeskind is proposing will not provide a peaceful, warm place for families and visitors, and it will not assist us in our search for healing and closure.

In "The Very Image of Loss at Ground Zero", a March 2, 2003 New York Times article, Kirk Johnson discusses different views of this pit. Along with detailing the positive and negative views of the design, Johnson describes Libeskind's pit as a revolutionary form of memorialization. This "memorial park" will provide a completely new memorial experience as visitors walk down into the memorial, as the site of death is preserved and viewed. Another quality of this design that diverges from the traditional memorial concept is that this memorial, with the pit, does not stress the importance of healing and reflecting upon times that have passed. This design may be a revolutionary memorial form that stresses the void and loss of the space. This pit may "evoke even

older corners of human past... where ceremonies and rituals in burial chambers of the dead were common.” It may also be consistent with the European views that “reject the notion that beauty or grandeur could ever memorialize war.”

However, I believe it is more important to realize what this pit will actually do: it will keep viewers (as well as New York City) bound to this tragedy for as long as the slurry walls are exposed. By leaving the space open, we will be leaving the wounds of September 11th raw and exposed. There will be no healing or recovering as New York City residents walk by the pit each day and realize they are seeing the graves of thousands of victims that were claimed that day. This site and this understanding will keep us shackled to the devastation of this tragedy, restraining us from moving forward. Libeskind’s pit will be a public space that is similar to exposed burial grounds, and that will not create the peaceful public space that is so desperately needed in Lower Manhattan to help us recover from this event.

Johnson discusses the important point that Libeskind’s pit will not offer closure. He quotes University of Pittsburgh art history professor Kirk Savage’s view that “The typical commemorative monument is supposed to create closure. There’s a kind of definitive past interpretation.” However, this pit will only remind us that a structure is still standing, still resisting the September 11th attacks. As Johnson mentions, the slurry walls are still performing their original purpose of holding back the Hudson River. This fact, this view, keeps us from marking the definitive final point of this tragedy. As Johnson notes, “Where the wall was, it still is, and in such a place memory is still a live event.”

In addition to these thoughts, we must consider what this pit will come to represent in the decades ahead. We must consider how appropriate this pit will be in this space in the years to come. Eighteen months after the tragedy, the turbulence initiated by the September 11th attacks can still be felt. Its aftermath is still surrounding us as recovery and mourning are still taking place. The September 11th attacks have also launched us into a political situation concerning the Middle East that is more heated at this moment than it has ever been. This fact also keeps us from grounding ourselves and recuperating after this event. How can we possibly memorialize and reflect on an event that is not yet entirely resolved? Our sentiments and needs concerning a World Trade Center memorial are still heavily involved with emotions and impulses. We must be understand the importance of building a memorial that will not only cater to our present sentiments but that will also be appropriate after these initial sentiments have subsided and new generations are visiting the memorial.

I believe that Libeskind's pit is an example of an impulsive, emotionally charged form of memorialization that will not be appropriate in the decades to come. Though it may provide some form of immediate satisfaction for those closely affected by the September 11th attacks, for the most part I believe it will keep our generation bound to this tragedy. Then, as the decades pass, the meaning of this pit will be lost on future generations. Future generations will not have memories of the event brought to the surface, and they will not understand the wounds and loss that this pit represents. The immediate significance of this pit will be lost as the generations ahead fail to identify what it represents, and it will become a sixteen acre exposed pit that will not appropriately memorialize the tragedy for future generations.