

glazed Gotham Godzilla. For all his brave forays into uncharted architectural territory, Lynn appears not to have a natural instinct for large-scale composition at this point in his career, and some otherwise talented designers never do.

The kindest thing that can be said about the sad plans drawn up by the New York husband-and-wife partnership of Steven Peterson and Barbara Littenberg (the in-house planners retained by the LMDC) is that they brought into the debate the principles advanced by the neo-traditional New Urbanism movement. Thus widening the discussion beyond the familiar roster of avant-garde favorites gives the mix a more inclusive range, though Peterson and Littenberg in this instance can have won few converts to their cause.

During their lackluster presentation, the couple defensively asserted that there was more to this commission than mere architecture. True enough, but in light of their exceptionally amateurish designs one can see why they chose to stress their urban planning experience instead. A symmetrical pair of gradually set-back Art Decoid skyscrapers just slightly shorter than the Twin Towers would overlook a park ringed by smaller high-rises. This

tepid blend of Beaux Arts monumentality and conservative early modernism brings to mind the hollow formalism of postwar East Berlin, without the *kitschig* élan of Stalinallee.

The most likely outcome of the competition—deemed a set of “study proposals” to get the client off the hook of having to select any one of the schemes in its entirety—is a compromise deal brokered by Larry Silverstein (who holds the lease to the site and the right to re-build there) and the LMDC. A probable scenario when a decision is announced at the end of January would see Foster teamed with SOM as local associated architects and Peterson/Littenberg as planning consultants. Although there is a separate competition pending for a memorial at Ground Zero, the enthusiastic response to that part of the Libeskind scheme could well lead to his inclusion as well.

Silverstein is said to favor the Foster proposal and is reported to have flown to London to meet with the architect before the public presentation in December. SOM and Peterson/Littenberg have been involved with the project for so long that some form of participation for them might well be deemed the decent thing to

do. But such an outcome would not be mere charity, at least not in the case of SOM, whose track record in seeing large-scale buildings through to completion in Manhattan will come in handy even for so experienced a technocrat as Foster.

Still, the foolhardy persistence of the proud towers is what remains in the back of one’s mind after all is said and done. Never has the amnesiac cast of the collective American consciousness been more disturbing than in this mad rush to create a new Tower of Babel. In its pseudo-Promethean grandiosity, all this seems like nothing so much as a secular, urbanistic version of the apocalyptic Christians’ fervor to hasten the last days.

“Let us build us a city,” the architects of Babel resolve in the Book of Genesis, “and a tower, whose top may reach unto heaven; and let us make us a name, lest we be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.” To which God answered, “Now nothing will be restrained from them, which they have imagined to do.” The results of the architectural ambition at Babel are well known. Whether one construes these ancient words as divine revelation or as mythical metaphor, they offer a cautionary tale for precisely these times. ■

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## What history can teach the architects at Ground Zero.

# Monuments and Memories

By ANDREW BUTTERFIELD

“THE VERY NOTION of a modern monument is a contradiction in terms: if it is a monument, it cannot be modern, and if it is modern, it cannot be a monument.” The death of the monument has been proclaimed many times, most famously by Lewis Mumford in *The Culture of Cities* in 1938, where he argued that monuments have lost their aesthetic and social legitimacy. Mumford believed that the monument is the polar opposite of modern architecture and the progressive city.

The notion of material survival by means of the monument no longer represents the deeper impulses of our civilization.

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Indeed, one has only to behold the monuments that have been built during the last century to observe how hollow the notion is. These Valhallas and Lincoln Memorials, these Victor Emanuel Monuments and Vimy Ridge Memorials, these “Eternal Lights” . . . are all the hollow echoes of an expiring breath, rattling ironically in the busy streets of our cities: heaps of stone which either confound the work of the living . . . or which are completely irrelevant to the living.

The view that memory is an impediment to modernity has been widely shared by architects, artists, and theorists. The obsolescence of the monument became almost an axiom of the modernist creed. The sculptor Donald Judd wrote that “there are no believable new monuments,” and the historian and critic Sam Hunter declared that “contemporary monuments can no longer plausibly celebrate national heroes, patriotic or personal virtue or

great historical events.” Many more such pronouncements could be cited as evidence of the presentist temper.

But sometimes aesthetic theory and artistic fashion must yield before the harshness of lived history. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial began to change the prevailing opinion that the monument is dead, not least because it availed itself of a modernist vocabulary to accomplish its commemoration. The Oklahoma City National Memorial has had a similar effect. And then came Ground Zero. The sixteen acres where the World Trade Center stood have brutally reminded us that monuments are not a moribund artistic habit imposed on us by social convention and cultural inertia. Monuments are, rather, the products of primary human needs; and they serve these needs in a way that nothing else can serve them. People build monuments not because they do not know what else to do, but because there are wounds so deep that only monuments

will serve to honor them.

Unfortunately, the haze of modernist theory still clouds the minds of many architects and planners. They themselves exemplify the dogmatic mentality that they decry in others. They know relatively little about the history, the function, and the variety of monuments, and yet they still presume, like Mumford, that architecture and urbanism is all that remembrance requires. This attitude is manifest in many of the designs and the statements of the architects of the master plans for the World Trade Center site. No doubt they all want to build something that will honor the dead; but a combination of arrogance and ignorance leads most of them to assume that buildings, the more spectacular the better, can do all the spiritual and cultural work. In "Plans in Progress," the video that accompanies the exhibit of the models at the Winter Garden, Ken Smith of THINK Design makes his priorities clear: "If you have only produced normative buildings and, you know, sort of banal public space but had a really great memorial, you would have missed the whole thing. I think in the end you have to have good urbanism and great architecture and a good memorial, and that would be a really good re-building." Not a great memorial, but great architecture and a good memorial: that is the way to avoid banality.

**O**BVIOUSLY NONE OF the contestants deny the memorial impulse at Ground Zero, but many of them wish to replace the traditional form of the monument, which is primarily petrean and sculptural, with a new one that will be architectural and urbanistic. This goal is most succinctly articulated by Peter Eisenman: "What is needed is a new idea about memorial. In other words—and we have provided seven memorial sites because we are not building an obelisk or anything—we are building a public place." As if a public place is in some sense itself a memorial. Steven Peterson of Peterson/Littenberg expresses the same ideal: "The city plan can set out a square that is beautifully placed and that can be/have a memorial quality, too, but you don't have to have a memorial in it." What is it about memorials that makes these people nervous? Why do they believe that commemoration is the enemy of art? Why can't they think of life and death at the same time? Whatever else Ground Zero will be, it will always be the site of a national catastrophe, a vast graveyard.

To be sure, the architects were asked to make a master plan for the entire site, not a memorial. (The memorial will be

selected on the basis of a competition to be announced later this spring.) Still, these attitudes and these assumptions are important because the master plan will establish the placement and the context of the memorial, and also determine a good deal of its character. Do we really want the monument to be placed in a narrow strip at the northern end of the site and to be overshadowed by a forest of buildings, as it would be in the plan by Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, or to be subsumed and metastasized into the grandiose and, at ground level, chaotic scheme of Daniel Libeskind? (Libeskind's gift for morbidity has oddly failed him here.) Do we really want to take an elevator to a memorial in the sky, as in United Architecture's design, or to have seven memorials instead of one, as Eisenman has proposed? With the exception of Norman Foster's plan, none of the designs manifests an understanding of the way monuments work.

It would make sense, then, to learn more about the history and the character of monuments before our aesthetic and architectural clichés run away with the site. This is especially necessary since monuments have generally played a smaller role in modern American life than in other cultures. Although monuments have been a feature of human culture throughout the world since the Neolithic Age, most people now know very little about what monuments do and why they exist. Fortunately, in the past twenty years or so, there has been a surge of interest in the monument as a cultural phenomenon, and scholars from different disciplines have written wisely and learnedly on the subject.

**W**HAT IS A MONUMENT? The word comes from the Latin noun *monumentum*, which is derived from the Latin verb *moneo*. The primary meaning of *moneo* is "to bring to the notice of, to remind, or to tell of." *Monumentum* consequently is a thing with this function, specifically something that stimulates the remembrance of a person or an event. *Monumentum* could be used for anything with this purpose—a text, a building, a work of art; but its primary denotation was a tomb or a funerary memorial. In English, the word "monument" retains this basic meaning; it has special reference to a tomb, a cenotaph, or a memorial.

Monuments provide an enduring physical demonstration of the fact of the existence of a person or an event. It marks a spot and it says who. And it says so forever. It is an object that serves as the locus of the

memories of a person or a group, and it makes those memories tangible—literally so. Hence the most basic component of a monument is its marker: the physical object erected to mark a locus in perpetuity. Owing to the emphasis on permanence, survival, and continuity, the marker naturally is made of the most durable materials—stone and metal.

Markers come in a seemingly bewildering variety. Consider, for example, monuments to the dead: among the most basic types there are headstones, plaques, slabs, stelae with or without effigies, wall tombs with or without effigies, free-standing tombs, and statues. Then there are the monuments to the living—a much smaller group of objects, as only an exceptionally finite group of living individuals are ever honored in this fashion. Such monuments are almost always statues raised on pedestals. They are erected in praise of what sociologists and zoologists (and now politicians and journalists) call alpha males: rulers and victors, whether in athletic contests or in war.

The simplest form of the monument are giant stones or pillars, known as megaliths or menhirs, a Welsh word meaning "long stone." Generally, these are aniconic; that is, they do not depict or represent an image in any way. Indeed, often they are completely unworked and unadorned. Sometimes they do not even bear an inscription. Megaliths are thought to be the oldest form of monument known to mankind. The earliest examples date from the Neolithic period. And seven thousand years later it is still an effective type, as the Washington Monument and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial show.

This primordial form of the monument is also perhaps the most revealing about its fundamental appeal. Human beings feel an almost instinctual urge to congregate for remembrance and worship at a stone marker. If we look at the goal of a pilgrimage or the center of a rite, it is often either a rock or made of rock. Instances of stone worship are found in every culture, all over the world, throughout the course of human history. It is with us today. In Jerusalem, one may observe the members of the three religions worshipping at rocks: the Christians at the Holy Sepulchre, the Jews at the Wailing Wall, the Muslims at the Dome of the Rock. Each site is the locus of the most profound meaning, the focus of the most intense emotion, the repository and the stimulus of the most central tenets in the collective memory of the faithful. Yet in all three cases the rock or rocks at the focus of devotion are aniconic. They represent the deepest meanings, and they are sur-

rounded within their precincts by signs of their importance, but the rocks themselves bear no sign, symbol, or image. The rocks appear to be just rocks, except for the faithful who come from all over the world to worship there.

**M**ANY OF THE greatest anthropologists and historians of religion have written about stone worship. In *Patterns in Comparative Religion*, Mircea Eliade began his account of sacred stones by noting their conspicuousness and their permanence. "For the primitive," he remarked,

nothing was more direct and autonomous in the completeness of its strength, nothing more noble or more awe-inspiring, than a majestic rock. Above all, a stone *is*. It always remains itself, exists of itself. Rock shows mankind something that transcends the precariousness of his humanity: an absolute mode of being. Its strength, its motionlessness, its size and its strange outline are none of them human. In its grandeur, its hardness, its shape and its color, man is faced with a reality and a force that belong to some other world than the profane world of which he is himself a part.

Eliade identified a number of special powers and functions that are at times attributed to sacred stones. Three of these powers seem especially relevant to the discussion of the monument.

It was a special function of sacred stones to serve as a witness. Witness stones were common in antiquity: recall the lithos in front of the Royal Stoa in the Agora in Athens. Witness stones also appear in the Bible. In the Book of Genesis, it is reported that Jacob and Laban set up a heap of stones, a pillar, or both at Gilead to be a permanent testimony to their concord: "Now therefore come thou, let us make a covenant, I and thou, and let it be for a witness between me and thee. And Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a pillar. And Jacob said unto his brethren, Gather stones, and they took stones and made a heap.... And Laban said, This heap of stones is a witness between me and thee this day." Similarly, at the end of the Book of Joshua, it is recorded that Joshua erected a witness stone at Shechem after the Israelites re-dedicated themselves to the worship of their God: "So Joshua made a covenant with the people that day, and Joshua took a great stone, and set it up there and Joshua said unto all the people, Behold, this stone shall be a witness unto us, for it hath heard

all the words of the lord which he spoke unto us, it shall be therefore a witness unto you, lest you deny your god."

It was also the purpose of sacred stones to represent the ancestors or the tribal deities of a group. In Genesis, when Jacob wakes from his dream of angels descending on a ladder from heaven, he "rose up early the morning, and took the stone that he had put for his pillow, and set it up for a pillar, and poured oil upon the top of it ... and Jacob said, This stone which I have set for a pillar shall be God's house." In his analysis of this episode, James Frazer points to the existence of other sacred stones all over the world. To cite just one example among many, he reports that "there is hardly a village in Northern India which has not its sacred stone. Very often the stone is not appropriated to any one deity in particular, but represents the aggregate of the local divinities who have the affairs of the community under their charge."

Stones can represent deceased ancestors as well. Discussing the religious practices of aboriginal tribes in Australia, Emile Durkheim observed in *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* that "it will be remembered that the fabulous ancestors from whom each clan is supposed to be descended, formerly lived on

earth and left traces of their passage there. These traces consist especially in stones and rocks which they deposited at certain places, or which were formed at the spots where they entered into the ground. These rocks and stones are considered the bodies or parts of the bodies of the ancestors, whose memory they keep alive; they represent them."

Thus sacred stones serve as the center for the group and as the group's point of contact with the other two realms of being, the immortal and the dead. Such points of contact are sometimes referred to as the *axis mundi*, the fulcrum of the universe. Frazer, Eliade, and Robertson Smith agree that the bethel of Jacob must be seen as such a cosmically pivotal location, since it was not just the House of God but specifically the place where, by means of the ladder of angels, communication took place between heaven and earth. The omphalos or navel stone at Delphi, the Ka'aba at Mecca, the umbilicus in the Roman Forum, and the rock on the Temple Mount in Jerusalem are all stones that were widely believed at one time to be the center of the world. Eliade observes, moreover, that it is common to perceive a tomb as such a site. He notes that Erwin Rohde and Jane Harrison, the distinguished historians of Greek religion, both

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suggested that the omphalos at Delphi originally represented a tomb, and that the Roman poet Varro specified that it was the tomb of the serpent of Delphi. Eliade elaborates: "A tomb, seen as a point of contact between the world of the dead, of the living and of the gods can also be a center, an omphalos of the earth."

**T**HE SECOND CONSTITUTIVE element of a monument is the memoranda, or the biographical information preserved by the marker. In ancient Greek, one of the words for monument and the word for memory are the same: *mnema*. But monuments are a special vessel for memory. They do not record everything about a person or an event—far from it. They seem to exclude the kind of personal memories that most of us recall of the departed, and instead to register only an extremely narrow spectrum of information about the object of our affection. So what kind of memory do monuments traditionally preserve? What is it that they report and transmit?

Perhaps the most basic fact that a monument typically records is the name of the person, the family, the community, or the event that it commemorates. This primary emphasis on the name was true in antiquity and it is true today. This hardly needs demonstration. Nearly every town in America and Europe has a monument that lists the names of those who died defending their country. Monuments are witness stones, and the names on them are like names on a public record or a historical document: a kind of declaration of the fact of existence.

The issue of monumental imagery is more complicated. Some monuments have no images. Some have images, but wholly idealized ones: they may represent a specific person, but they do not attempt to depict his actual features. And some monuments have images that record the features of the person in a more or less accurate and particularized fashion. Of course, there are many degrees of verisimilitude, and differences of aesthetic skill, between accuracy and idealization.

Sometimes these differences in conception and execution are owed to the relationship that can exist between portraiture and honor. In Renaissance Florence, sumptuary legislation forbade all but a few highly honored persons from being laid out at their funerals with their bodies and their faces exposed for the mourners to see. Though not regulated by law, the same reservation evidently applied to the decorum of tomb design, with the result that only a handful of highly placed persons are honored in tombs with portrait

effigies. This honor was not simply a matter of wealth and power: no member of the Medici family is commemorated in this manner, although for much of the period they effectively ruled the city. It was, rather, a matter of station and office. In an age in which the church controlled burial and commemoration, tombs with portrait effigies were typically the privilege of princes of the church, of founding donors of religious institutions, and of persons honored in civic funerals for their service to the city. One can cite many other instances of restrictions on the right to have a portrait monument: in medieval Rome, only popes and archbishops got them, and in medieval and Renaissance Venice, portrait monuments were reserved, with few exceptions, for doges and soldiers who deserved special recognition for their service to the city.

**P**ERHAPS ALL PORTRAITURE exhibits a tendency toward conventionality and standardization, but this seems to be particularly true of portraits on monuments. On medieval and Renaissance tombs, more emphasis is placed on the ceremonial garb of office than on the depiction of individual character. In ancient Greece, monumental portraiture was almost wholly conventional. Tomb statuary and stelae depict the dead as idealized types whose features embody aristocratic stereotypes of moral good and physical beauty. Convention was the rule as well in statues of athletes, an important genre of Greek sculpture. Thus Pliny writes that "it was not usual to model likenesses of men unless for some reason or other they deserved lasting honor, first for a victory in the sacred contests, especially at Olympia, where it was the custom to dedicate statues of all who were victorious; and if they won there three times, their statues were modeled in their own likeness." As Pliny so clearly states, the right to a portrait was an honor, and the right to have an accurate and individualized portrait was an even greater honor, vouchsafed only to those thought most deserving of enduring recognition.

The biographical details preserved and expressed by inscriptions likewise tend to be limited and conventionalized. In addition to the name, such description is usually confined to a list of offices and honors, often in an acknowledgment that the deceased has served the public good in a noteworthy fashion. Even people of remarkable complexity and achievement are often reduced to the briefest of honorific terms. Thus the tomb of Cosimo de Medici simply records that he was called the father of his country, and the monu-

ment to Bartolomeo Colleoni states, "In recognition of his military authority, perfectly served." In ancient Greece, the inscriptions on monuments often said little more than that the departed was *agathos kai sophron aner*, "a good and wise man." Such brevity is still typical today.

As these examples demonstrate, the language of inscriptions also tends to be highly formulaic and standardized. Like the language of ritual, it shows a great respect for established norms inherited from tradition, and little interest in innovation or variation. By means of this standardization, it often limits the commemoration of an individual to a single aspect: how the dead personified a social ideal that is regarded as a central and permanent value. Writing of archaic Greek monuments, Joseph Day has observed that

the man was dead and gone, but the marker and the epitaph provided a substitute for him; that is, they reduced the complexity of a man to a simple, permanent, monumental form that represented to the community of the living what he had now become, i.e., one of their ideal dead. This state of idealized death could not be portrayed as a biographical moment like actual death in battle. It was a state of moral and physical perfection, artificially created by verbal and visual motifs any contemporary would recognize from previous acquaintance with literary encomium and commemorative art.

I think that this tendency is often true of monuments and points to a widespread feature of them: they commemorate the dead and other figures from the past as personifications of the values of the group. They do not emphasize personal detail and idiosyncratic data; they promote the exemplary. According to the rules of both classical and Renaissance rhetoric, funeral oratory was intended to be a kind of instructive praise that inspired the audience to emulate the virtues of the deceased. Monuments often serve the same function. This points to an interesting fact about monuments. Often they are meant to preserve not only the identity of the departed, but also the identity of a social group—the family, clan, city, nation, or religion—to which the deceased belonged.

**T**HE THIRD CONSTITUTIVE element of the monument is the precinct. Monuments are not placed just anywhere in a city or a landscape. They tend to be erected in two kinds of sites. The first is along major thoroughfares, so that the greatest number of people can see them and remember the

persons whom they commemorate. Thus the roads leading in and out of Athens, Rome, and other major cities were major sites for monuments in antiquity. The Greek soldiers in the *Odyssey* declare that the ideal spot for a tomb is a promontory overlooking the Hellespont, so that "it might be seen from far over the sea both by men that now are and that shall be born hereafter."

The other typical site for a monument is a space of some kind that has been clearly demarcated and set off from the world at large. To emphasize their distinction, such spaces are often geometric in plan, and often marked along their borders with a fence or a barrier of some kind. Examples of spaces of this kind that regularly serve as the sites of monuments are graveyards, churches, or temples (including their grounds), chapels, battlefields, and central public or civic spaces such as town squares. Such locations serve to provide common ground for groups. Specifically, they are places where individuals can go to experience membership, to re-establish their identity as parts of a special and distinct social body.

Monuments are erected for groups, such as the family, community, city-state, nation, or religion, and they are erected specifically in the particular sites where the members of these groups go to affirm their commonality or common identity. Thus, the tomb of the patriarch of a family is set in the church or the chapel of his clan, and a statue of a national hero is placed in the central square of his country's capital. But that is not the end of the story, or of the monument's ambition. Since Durkheim, it has been widely acknowledged that a clan or a nation defines itself not only horizontally—that is, in relation to itself—but also vertically: that is, in relation to God and the sacred.

This notion may now make us uncomfortable, living as we do in a secular society; but it is important to stress that historically the spaces of the kind that I am describing have been sanctified. They are places of high symbolic significance, exceedingly rich in meaning, and often the sites of group rites or rituals. Owing to the sacral and symbolic character of the precinct, the members of the group approach a monument with a high expectation that the monument will provide an epiphany of meaning, and specifically that it will be an expression of the identity, the history, and the philosophy of the group. Today this is still obvious in the case of sites such as graveyards, temples, and chapels; and, until the modern era, it was equally obvious in the case of central city squares. We can see that it is true as well

of battlefields. We speak of a battlefield as Lincoln spoke of it, as ground that has been hallowed by blood spilled for the sake of a common cause or a common identity. Like Lincoln, when we visit Gettysburg and its monuments, we recall our special history and identity, and honor the sacrifice of the men who died to establish and to preserve it.

In the modern world, it has also been common to place monuments in civic parks. These may seem like an exception to the rule, since although parks are public land, they rarely have the communal or sacral associations of the sort I have been discussing. The parks of New York City are filled with statues of writers, statesmen, and heroes of the past. But none of these monuments, so far as I know, now serve as the focal point for any group. Nor were they ever meant to do so. Perhaps that is one reason why they have failed as monuments, in the sense that the individuals whom they seek to commemorate are often forgotten.

**B**Y THEIR FAILURE, such weak or low-functioning monuments point to the fourth constitutive element of the monument: the act of commemoration. There is a tendency among historians and critics to treat the monument purely as a thing. They often discuss it in strictly formal and typological terms, or merely as a category of sculpture. But like many other things in the world, the monument can only be understood in terms of its use. It is a tool and an instrument in a series of extraordinarily complex personal and social processes. The monument cannot be understood without looking at its dynamic, immaterial dimension—at the acts of remembrance for which it is used.

Throughout history, high-functioning monuments have been conceived in relation to regular and even programmatic rites of memory. Before the modern era, these acts often had the character of religious ritual. The Medici tombs at San Lorenzo in Florence were placed at sites where the dead whom they honored would be officially and ceremonially commemorated throughout the year, and these rites involved not only the members of the family but also officials of the state and other institutions, as well as the canons of the church, whose chief professional obligation was to say masses in memory of the Medici dead. While perhaps exceptional in scale, the Medici practice of memorialization was otherwise typical in late medieval and Renaissance Europe.

The connection between the monument and the rites of memory can be so strong that many monuments even feature reliefs

that depict a ritual, a ceremony, or a procession. An obvious example is the Ara Pacis in Rome. It was commissioned in 13 B.C.E. by the Roman Senate to celebrate Augustus's victories in Gaul and Spain. The two long sides of the Ara Pacis are filled with reliefs that show a procession led by Augustus and including the imperial family and other top civic and religious officials. Scholars differ about exactly which procession is depicted, but they generally agree that it is a procession related to the foundation of the Ara Pacis. Indeed, many Roman monuments illustrate the ritual or the ceremonial that took place at the foundation of the monument itself. Triumphal arches often bear reliefs showing a triumphal entry through an arch; and funerary monuments, whether for emperors or freed slaves, show the honorific rites that the dead received at his funeral.

This practice was not confined to antiquity. The tombs of bishops and popes in the Middle Ages often depict or allude to elements in the official ceremonial of their burial. This tradition continued into the Renaissance. The depiction of the dead lying in state on a bier and beneath a funerary catafalque is fairly common on Renaissance tombs. All such representations are honorific. They show that the represented person received the full measure of acclaim to which his station and his achievement entitled him. And they are an absolute sign that the person is or was exemplary, worthy of imitation. Moreover, such representations are prescriptive: they establish a model or an ideal of the rites of remembrance that should take place at the site in the future.

The most basic rite of remembrance is for the visitor to leave something at the site as a mark of love, remembrance, and respect. It is a universal practice. Around the world and throughout time, people have poured libations or placed rocks or flowers on the gravestones of their ancestors, and pilgrims have left votives at the tombs of saints. At the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, visitors leave so many things—flowers, photographs, letters, medals, even a Harley-Davidson motorcycle—that there is an entire warehouse to preserve them all. At Ground Zero, there arose a tradition of bringing banners and T-shirts with handwritten messages to the fence at St. Paul's Chapel.

I do not mean to be merely nostalgic. Plainly our existences are not like ancient or medieval or Renaissance or nineteenth-century existences. We lead lives that are less formalized and less sacralized, and our acts of remembrance typically do not take the form of religious rituals. Yet the stubborn fact remains that, even in our

secular and disenchanting and accelerated times, the most successful monuments are still those that become sites of regular commemoration. For many Americans, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial is the most powerful monument in the country. There is no liturgical calendar of rites there, nor is there a prescribed routine or custom that the acts of remembrance must follow; but the commemoration is regular, and every day people go there to remember those who fought and died in the war. It brings us together on common ground, and it gives us a place where we can literally get in touch with the past.

A monument is both a personal experi-

ence and a collective experience. "Collective sentiments can become conscious of themselves," Durkheim instructed, "only by fixing themselves upon external objects." A monument is one of the means by which an aggregate of individuals transforms itself into a community that feels bound together by a common moral experience and a common historical framework. It is proof that the past is real, and that the past is still present. A monument is where the mythical and historical memory of a person or an event comes to earth and, by adopting material form, lives on. A dolmen in lower Manhattan? We could do worse. We probably will. ■

immediately following the failed coup, a tense calm took hold in Venezuela. Both a contrite Chávez and a stunned opposition called for reconciliation and declared themselves willing to engage in a national dialogue. But their good intentions were short-lived. After a visit last summer by representatives of the United Nations Development Program, the Organization of American States, and the Carter Center, an agreement was reached to install a roundtable dialogue under their auspices. By the end of October, when the roundtable was set to begin, the sense of political crisis was acute. The Coordinadora Democrática, the umbrella association representing the opposition, had successfully organized a one-day strike for October 22. The following day, eleven military officers declared themselves in civil disobedience, calling on their fellow officers and citizens to join them and leaving the country in political limbo for six hours until the Armed Forces High Command declared its support for Chávez, thereby averting another coup. The Coordinadora's failure to distance itself from the rebel officers, many of whom had been involved in the April coup, left it open to many criticisms. It could not credibly pursue dialogue with the government or campaign for a referendum on Chávez if it simultaneously encouraged the military subversion of the legal order.

It was under this cloud of political hostility that the dialogue between the government and the opposition began. Since then, the crisis has only worsened. The Coordinadora seemed to gain the upper hand in December, when it began an open-ended national strike that brought PDVSA, the state-owned oil industry, to a halt. Chávez's government has lost around \$2 billion in unrecoverable revenues in the intervening weeks, and it is perilously close to defaulting on its domestic loans. The Coordinadora's resolve shows no sign of abating. Indeed, it has increased its pressure on the government with the addition of bank executives who announced in January that they would join the strike in support of the oil workers.

And yet, all the Coordinadora's efforts notwithstanding, Chávez has been able to ride out the strike and its crippling effects, and also slowly to regain some control of PDVSA with an ambitious restructuring plan. Most remarkably, he has done so without recourse to a state of emergency or to the brutal use of force, even when there have been violent confrontations between his supporters and the opposition. Chávez is still standing, but Venezuela is edging closer to the brink of civil war.

## Democracy's Pains

By NAOMI DAREMBLUM

In the Shadow of the Liberator:  
Hugo Chávez and the  
Transformation of Venezuela  
by Richard Gott

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### I.

**L**AST APRIL, HUGO CHÁVEZ, the president of Venezuela, was deposed in a dramatic coup reminiscent of more troubled times in Latin America. With tear gas in the air, sharpshooters and armed gunmen exchanged fire across a crowded street, turning an opposition march heading toward the Presidential Palace into a bloody melee. Images of the terrible scene were shown across the country (and across the world) on half of a split screen, while on the other half Chávez denounced an ongoing strike and the march. The televised images did not last long. Accusing the private television stations of incitement, Chávez took them off the air and continued his speech without mention of the violence. But these images had tremendous consequences. By day's end, in response to the violence, the Armed Forces' High Command had stepped in and demanded that Chávez resign, and the next morning Venezuela awoke to find that it had a new president, a dull business leader by the name of Pedro Carmona.

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What followed next brought back other memories. After swearing himself in, Carmona dismantled the National Assembly, dismissed the judiciary, and suspended the Constitution. Television images then showed the members of Chávez's Cabinet and the dismissed Assembly being taken prisoner, while other Chávez supporters were run out of their homes by crowds administering vigilante justice.

Yet miscalculation gave this story an unexpected twist. Almost immediately, Latin American governments expressed concern about Carmona's suspension of constitutional rule. Their fears seemed confirmed when leaked information revealed that Chávez had not resigned but had instead been forcibly removed from power. By the afternoon, thousands of Chávez's supporters had taken to the streets and were marching toward the Presidential Palace clamoring for his return. With help from troops loyal to Chávez, the citizens who voted for him accomplished what many considered impossible: the next morning he returned as president of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. A victory over the retrograde forces of oligarchic authoritarianism was declared.

Whether it was a victory for democracy remains an open question. In the months