



“I can still see their faces”: An Ethics of Organizational Commemoration

Journal:	<i>Organization Studies</i>
Manuscript ID	OS-23-0533.R4
Manuscript Type:	Article
Keywords:	organizational memory, memorialization, collective memory, fire, Ethics < Theoretical Perspectives
Abstract:	We explore the politics of commemoration at the 10th anniversary of a catastrophic bushfire event to explore how vulnerability to the Other can set the terms for an ethics of commemoration. Through an interpretative analysis of interviews with firefighters and speeches of politicians at the time of the official commemorative event of the Black Saturday fires we respond to calls to better understand our ethical obligation to remember those whose lives are lost during catastrophic events. We draw on

1
2
3
4
5
6
7
8
9
10
11
12
13
14
15
16
17
18
19
20
21
22
23
24
25
26
27
28
29
30
31
32
33
34
35
36
37
38
39
40
41
42
43
44
45
46
47
48
49
50
51
52
53
54
55
56
57
58
59
60

	Levinas' idea of an 'ethics of ethics' to theorise an embodied and emplaced ethics of commemoration. We argue that there are two aspects to this ethics of commemoration. First, it involves recognising that alterity lies at the centre of commemoration and that the obligation to remember comes from the unwilled address of the Other. Second, this response to the other extends beyond remembering and memorialization to actional justice. For the fire-fighters in our study, actional justice involved a commitment to learn the lessons from past fires and to do things differently in the future.

SCHOLARONE™
Manuscripts

‘I Can Still See Their Faces’: An Ethics of Organizational Commemoration

Leanne Cutcher¹ and Graham Dwyer²

¹ University of Sydney Business School, Australia

² Centre for Social Innovation, Trinity Business School, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland

Corresponding author: Leanne Cutcher, Discipline of Strategy, Innovation and Entrepreneurship, University of Sydney, NSW, 2006, Australia. Email: leanne.cutcher@sydney.edu.au

Abstract

We explore the politics of commemoration at the 10th anniversary of a catastrophic bushfire event to explore how vulnerability to the Other can set the terms for an ethics of commemoration. Through an interpretative analysis of interviews with fire-fighters at the time of the official commemorative event of the Black Saturday fires we respond to calls to better understand our ethical obligation to remember those whose lives are lost during catastrophic events. We draw on Levinas to theorise an ethics of commemoration. We argue that there are two aspects to a Levinasian ethics of commemoration. First, it involves recognising that an ethics of commemoration is a response to the unwilling address of the Other. Second, the address from the Other brings a responsibility to ensure that commemoration fosters a commitment to learn the lessons from past fires and to do things differently in the future.

Keywords

Ethics, Levinas, commemoration, memorialization, memory, firefighting

Introduction

The Black Saturday tragedy and the intense emotions that accompany it had a profound impact on those in the Country Fire Authority. I reflect on it a lot and seldom does a day pass that something about the day doesn't cross my mind. Steve Warrington, former Chief Officer of the Country Fire Authority (CFA).

Every day, for ten years the former Chief Officer of the organization charged with protecting lives and properties from bushfires remembers something about Black Saturday. On 7th February 2009, commonly referred to as Black Saturday, the State of Victoria, Australia experienced a firestorm where columns of fire on the ground coupled with forest fires above the tree line rendered the efforts of fire-fighters futile as they scrambled to extinguish embers travelling through the skies causing fires in townships when they landed. People panicked leaving their properties only to find fallen trees, flames, thick black smoke, and poor visibility blocking their escape. Conditions were further exacerbated when the wind changed direction further increasing the fire front. The fires had a devastating impact on the State where c.2000 homes were destroyed or damaged leaving c.7000 people homeless. Furthermore, between 430,000 – 450,000 km of land and forest was burned which severely damaged animal habitats and ecosystems with some wildlife species almost driven to extinction. The townships of Marysville, Flowerdale and Kinglake were almost completely razed and to this day continue their recovery. Most poignantly 173 lives were lost.

The former Chief Officer's reflection is a powerful example of how the past is not simply 'received by' the present rather it is 'haunted' by the past (Assmann, 1997, p. 9). It is not just the Chief Officer of the CFA who remembers. The impact of Black Saturday has prompted calls from within the CFA and other fire-fighting authorities for better ways of remembering those who lost their lives and of commemorating the work of fire-fighters.

This research is a response to those calls and aims to explore our collective responsibility to remember those whose lives were lost and to ensure that commemorative practices are premised on an ethic of openness.

Bernstein (2004) argues that the spectre of the past reminds us that we have an ethical obligation to remember certain events and persons. Yet, as others have argued, we know very little about the ethics of collective memory and how ethics shape our perceptions of the past within mnemonic communities (Coraiola, Foster, Mena, Foroughi & Rintamaki, 2023, p. 393) and the ways in which commemoration can designate moral significance to the past in ways that connects past events to present values (Mena & Rintamaki, 2020, p. 478). Conceptualising an ethics of commemoration is important because when we commemorate, we come back to the things that matter (Casey, 2000, p. xxi). Cutcher, Dale and Tyler (2019, p. 285) argue that as a ‘form of recognition, commemoration constitutes a process of organization through which who or what is to be remembered comes to be classified, categorized and hierarchically ordered and hence made to matter’. Commemoration involves a politics of recognition that might reproduce organizational hierarchies and power relations, however, there is also the potential for an ethos of commemoration based on intersubjective recognition (Casey, 2000; Cutcher, et al., 2019). It is this potential for an ethics of commemoration that we explore in our paper.

To explore the ethics of commemoration our research was conducted around the ten-year anniversary of the Black Saturday bushfires. The official commemorative service was held on 4 February 2019 at the Royal Exhibition Building in Melbourne. In the same year in nearby Treasury Gardens in Melbourne’s central business district, a new commemorative site was unveiled as a memorial to members of the six current Victorian emergency management organizations (and their predecessor organizations) who lost their lives while fighting fires. Ten years on from the Black Saturday fires people held strong views about how those fires

and the people lost to them ought to be remembered. There was debate in the fire-fighting communities about how best to remember and where that remembering should take place. The choice to construct a memorial in Exhibition Gardens far from the spaces where the fires took place was contentious. Against the backdrop of the official commemorative events, we interviewed 25 fire-fighters from three of the six emergency management organizations responsible for preparedness and response to bushfires asking them about their individual memories of Black Saturday and the role that commemoration plays in mediating the effects of remembering.

Our research findings allow us to theorise an ethics of commemoration. Alterity lies at the heart of our theorising of an ethics of commemoration because commemoration involves a ‘component of otherness at every turn’ (Casey, 2000, p. 218). In our theorisation we turn to Levinas’ philosophy of ethics because it begins with alterity, ‘by the presence of the Other’ (1969, p. 43). In our research, the Other are the members of the communities which were ravaged on Black Saturday, those who died, and fellow fire-fighters. Our research explores the inter-subjective processes of recognition in the face of these others that we argue are central to understanding the relationship between ethics and commemoration. We also contribute to our understanding of the need for commemorative practices and memorialisation to be immersive and emplaced (Casey, 2000). We also show how an ethics of commemoration can foster organizational learning and a collective responsibility to the future.

Organizational Remembering and Commemoration

The notion of collective memory recognises that we remember as members of communities or groups (Zerubavel, 2003). These communities or groups offer us the means to recall or reconstruct our memories (Olick, 1999a) and this will happen differently at different points in time (Olick & Robbins, 1998). Given this, collective memory can be understood as an

ongoing process of negotiation with others through time (Fine, 2001; Olick and Levy, 1987). Through these processes of negotiation, the past is active as it is reconstructed in the present for present purposes (Fine, 2001; Olick & Robbins, 1998). In organizations, these temporal processes of collective memory emerge as ‘culturally and historically situated process and practice, enacted by socially defined and emotionally charged persons in communities of practice’ (Feldman & Feldman, 2006, p. 868). Sometimes remembering together can be painful and organizations may wish to suppress such memories. Yet, some have argued that painful or even traumatic memories can be converted into mnemonic devices that can generate a sense of cohesion amongst organizational members (Crawford, Coraiola & Dacin, 2022).

Rowlinson, Booth, Clark, Delahaye and Procter (2010) has shown overtime, these organizational processes of collective memory are made material through texts, rites, images, buildings, and monuments. These material artifacts act as mnemonic devices helping to anchor collective memories and frame what is remembered and what is forgotten (Eisenman & Frenkel 2021, p. 2). The materiality of mnemonic devices can intensify our memories through interposed agency of text or object in the setting of a social ritual (Casey, 2000). In this way, mnemonic devices can evoke a particular imagination of the past that binds organizational members together, constituting the basis for *material-relational affinities* as people remember together as part of a mnemonic community (Eisenman & Frenkel 2021, italicised in the original).

Commemorating involves the creation of mnemonic devices and rites that embody what must not be forgotten (Coraiola, et al., 2023, p. 380). Indicating that there is an obligation to remember. Organizations engage in commemorative practices to re-establish shared meanings, and maintain stability after disruptive events (Cutcher, Dale & Tyler, 2016). Organizational commemoration may seek to ‘settle’ an ‘actual past’ (Casey, 2000, p. 174) or

put forward a vision for the future (Beyes & Steyaert, 2013). Processes of organizational commemoration can be deliberate, authoritative, and even managerial in focus and as a result the outcome can be more ‘appropriate’ than shared (Alvesson & Willmott, 2002). The organization of commemoration can involve struggles over competing narratives, and in these struggles some memories may be preserved, and others lost (Misztal, 2003). In this way, commemorative practices of remembering (or forgetting) can silence who and what does not fit the organizational order or norms (Feldman & Feldman, 2006, p. 871).

Ethical Commemoration

Casey (2000, p. 218) makes the important observation that commemoration ‘calls on us in our strictly social being’. As he writes, ‘instead of contemplating the past in a private mental space or experiencing it ‘in my bone’ in an almost equally private room, I attain my commemorative aim only via an interpolated ritual and text in the co-presence of others’ (Casey, 2000, p. 218). While Casey’s commemorative focus is on remembering the past together in the company of other people, there are of course, also the Others who are being commemorated. Commemoration is undertaken to memorialise the Other in the co-presence of others.

Commemoration becomes ‘an essentially interpersonal action ... undertaken not only in relation to others and or them also with them in a common action of communalizing’ (Casey 2000, 225). Commemoration relies on an ethos of openness to the other. This ethos of openness is premised on an inter-corporeal, mutual recognition of the Other. It is through the body that one engages with the Other, it is a corporeal intersubjectivity that shapes our relations with others and our being in the world (Hancock, 2008, p. 1368). Mutual recognition and openness to the other relies the senses, the corporeal, the physical – that is, it relies on affective relations (Arnold and Costas, 2023, pg. 3).

A focus on corporeal, affective relations has informed studies of recognition and misrecognition of the Other focusing on age (Cutcher, Riach & Tyler, 2022), homelessness (Reinecke,

2018), gender (Kenny & Fotaki, 2015) and disability (Dale & Latham, 2015). For example, Dale and Latham (2015, p. 170) argue that it is ‘inter-corporeality that allows the possibility for recognition of, response to and responsibility for the other’. They explore this in part through the work of Levinas (1998) arguing he shows how ‘it is through the vulnerability and sensibility of embodiment that the self can be affected by the Other’ and that this comes from ‘recognition of the radical alterity of the Other: ‘proximity, difference, which is non-indifference, is responsibility’ (p. 139)’.

We argue that it is through Levinas’ radical understanding of our openness, to, and responsibility for the Other that we can theorise an ethics of commemoration. As Ezzamel and Willmott (2014) explain, Levinas’ radical Otherness of the other ‘re-members the indivisibility of my relation to the Other’ (p. 1022). For Levinas (1969, p. 43) an ethics of the self is called into being by alterity – ‘by the co-presence of the other’. An ethical relation is initiated by the Other, not by oneself. An ethical sensibility ‘is a vulnerability that comes about in the form of the other in me’ (Levinas, 2000, p. 79). The summons or hail of the other marks the beginning of an ethical relationship. It is the ‘strangeness of the Other, his irreducibility to the I, to my thoughts and my possessions, is precisely accomplished as a calling into question of my spontaneity, as ethics’ (Levinas, 1969, p.43). This is a responsibility for which we can never be absolved. As Levinas writes, ‘to be oneself, the state of being a hostage, is always to have degree of responsibility more, the responsibility for the responsibility of the Other (Levinas, 1998, p. 104). When we come to commemorate, we respond to the call to remember an Other. Following Levinas that call or summons by the Other marks the beginning of an ethical relationship.

For Levinas, this responsibility is not ‘the result of any kind of cognition, the self’s responsibility to the other who faces is immediate, originary and irreducible’ (Robbins, 1991, p. 1052). As Ezzamel and Willmott (2014, p. 1024) point out, ‘a Levinasian understanding of the Other calls me to responsibility in a different way, both in the sense that my relation to

the Other will be different and that I will be different'. They argue that this is a radical otherness of the Other, 'an otherness conveyed in the image of the face' (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2014, p. 1022). The face is central to Levinas' ethics of the self. As Levinas (2006, p. 33) explains, 'the epiphany of the absolutely Other is faced where the Other hails me and signifies me, by its nakedness, by its destitution, an order'. Its presence is this summons to respond. My ethical responsibility to the other does not rely on causal links between a doer and deed (Butler, 2004, p. 85). Rather, we do not 'grasp the Other in order to dominate; I respond, instead, to the face's epiphany' (Levinas, 1989, p.75). It is 'the epiphany of the face qua face [that] opens humanity (Levinas, 1969, p.213). As Levinas explained in an interview in 1986, the 'face is a demand; a demand, not a question. The face is a hand in search of recompense, an open hand.... The face is not a force. It is an authority.... Your reaction to the face is not just a response but a responsibility' (Wright, Hughes & Ainley, 1988, p. 169). For Levinas, an ethical relation is one where I face the other person recognising that I cannot fully comprehend them.

Acting ethically is not something we chose to do; it is a condition of life through which our cohabitation with other people in the world calls us to the responsibility of their needs (Rhodes, 2023, p. 508). The ethical relation is not initiated by the self but by the Other. We can be 'unseated by the Other by a wordless exigency or accusation ... for which I cannot deny my responsibility' (Levinas, 2000, p. 181). Acting ethically is not ours to choose, rather we are passive to the ethical demands of the other: we can choose to do things in response to ethics, but we do not choose ethics itself (Rhodes, 2023, p. 508). Given this, we ask, how can we understand the origin of our ethical obligation to remember, and how might we engage in an ethics of organizational commemoration?

Research Setting: The 10-year Anniversary of Black Saturday

The State of Victoria in south-east Australia is regarded as one of the most bushfire prone areas in the world. Bushfire has presented operational emergency management practitioners (such as fire-fighters and police officers) and strategic emergency management practitioners (such as incident controllers and community engagement officers) with circumstances ‘where individuals struggle to make sense of rapidly changing and dangerous conditions’ (Dwyer, Hardy & Maguire, 2021, p. 1). This was certainly the case for the Black Saturday fires. For eleven days straight prior to Black Saturday temperatures between 40 and 43 degrees centigrade coupled with 13 years of drought resulted in an accumulation of combustible fuel in parks, gardens, and forests. Victoria’s emergency management practitioners were fearful of a catastrophic bushfire so much so that the Victorian Premier warned that 7 February was likely to be ‘the worst day in the history of the State’ (Moncrief, 2009). This concern was heightened when on the 7 February, lightning strikes introduced flame to the landscape and temperatures soared to a record breaking 47 degrees centigrade. These circumstances were exacerbated by arson activity and collapsed powerlines which sparked fire activity that quickly spiraled out of control as a firestorm characterized by columns of flame and embers burned through pastures and on into townships leaving in its wake the most significant losses ever caused by bushfire in Australia. On 9 February 2009, Deputy Prime Minister Julia Gillard addressed the Australian parliament describing Black Saturday as: ‘a tragedy beyond belief, beyond precedent and really beyond words. The 7th February, 2009 will be remembered as one of the darkest days in Australia’s peacetime history’ (see <https://australianpolitics.com/2009/02/09/moving-speeches-in-parliament-for-bushfire-victims.html/>, accessed, 2 February, 2026).

Over 400 paid emergency workers, police, and defence personnel and volunteers from civil society and non-profit organizations worked to control the fires. Mostly, Victorians relied on the 19,000 Country Fire Authority (CFA) volunteers and volunteers from other

agencies to keep their properties and homes safe. The fires were eventually brought under control on 14 March 2009 before recovery efforts commenced. Many of those who responded to the bushfires and the subsequent recovery efforts lived and worked in the areas affected by the fires. Consequently, they were personally touched by the losses from the fires. Some lost their homes, business, family, and friends. That loss is captured here in the excerpt from a speech by then Leader of the Opposition, Bill Shorten, at the time of the 10th Anniversary:

Stella Reid, who ran the Wildhaven Wildlife Shelter, was in the truck with her CFA crew near St Andrews. It was in her words, “an ocean of fire, a tsunami rippling through, rolling off the top of the mountain and landing behind us’. When Stella got back to the station, she saw her husband covered in ash. He said, “I’m sorry, it’s all gone” – their home, their shelter, koalas, wombats, joeys in their pouches. Stella recalls “an emptiness you’ve never felt in your life and a loss of something that you’ll never find again” (Hansard, 12 February 2019).

Ten years on the Victorian government marked the anniversary of the Black Saturday bushfires by holding a commemorative service at the site of the planned memorial site in the Treasury Gardens in the centre of Melbourne (see Figure 1). The memorial garden is now completed.

Figure 1

Emergency Services Memorial Treasury Gardens



Source: Photo by Paul O’Leary, 2020.

The Chief Officer of the Country Fire Authority reflected on the 10th Anniversary event as ‘an important time to honour personal sacrifices’ and that ‘the new memorial site at Treasury Gardens will be an appropriate setting for us to pay our respects to the dead’ . We note that the six emergency-services organizations who responded to the fires were not represented amongst the dignitaries at the formal event which was dominated by politicians and community representatives. The only reference to the fire-fighters was in the Governor’s speech where she referred to their ‘bravery’ and ‘skill’. The focus of the anniversary was very much on community resilience:

There is something else that numbers or statistics can never measure. That’s the resilience of those affected. After the emergency - and through the grief and trauma – individuals and communities found a way to continue, to rebuild and to recover ... new lives were built (Transcript of Governor of Victoria’s speech on 4 February 2019 at the 10th Anniversary).

Our interviewees expressed disquiet about how the official commemoration omitted references to Black Saturday. The fire-fighters expressed concern that the political discourse and the planned memorial site sought to create an alternative narrative of the fires:

What was disappointing, fascinating and mind boggling was the fact that they (the government) removed – the state decided to remove the words Black Saturday from the memorial, ten-year commemoration. They decided to again, remove that term, Black Saturday, and decided that as a style guide we would only be using 2009 bushfires or something, 2000 – yeah. I think that’s again, fascinating that you can – historical revisionism creeps in (Community Engagement Officer 1).

Their dismay at the removal of words ‘Black Saturday’ from the official texts highlights how commemoration can involve a struggle over competing narratives (Mitszal, 2003). As Brigade Captain 1 reflected ‘it’s almost as if, we don’t have loss of life, there’s no formal acknowledgement or recognition’. The lack of recognition of the fire-fighters, particularly those who’d lost their lives, sent a powerful signal about who matters and what makes for a grievable death (Butler, 2004). We investigate how the fires live on in the memory of the fire-fighters and how they choose to commemorate the anniversary and the role of the Other in remembering and commemoration.

Methods

To answer our research question, we adopted a qualitative research approach, grounded in the interpretive tradition which allows for context rich analysis. As social constructionists (see Gergen, 2015) we were concerned with understanding social processes of commemoration and memorialisation. Our analysis is interpretative as we were concerned to understand how our respondents ‘make sense of their personal and social world and the meanings particular experiences or events hold for them’ (Gill, 2014, p. 126).

Data collection

1
2
3 Around the time of the 10th Anniversary, we conducted 25 interviews with fire-fighters who
4 were involved in responding to the Black Saturday bushfires. The interviews were conducted
5 by the second author and a research assistant (RA) both of whom had pre-existing
6 relationships with the organizations that the interviewees worked for. The second author had
7 a close connection to networks within CFA which meant he was provided with access to
8 firefighting personnel who had witnessed firsthand the effects of Black Saturday in townships
9 and the challenges which arose with commemorating and memorialising what had occurred
10 as part of community recovery initiatives. The RA on the project was a former colleague of
11 the second author and was a government agency firefighter deployed as part of a crew to
12 respond to the Black Saturday bushfires which were threatening lives and assets. The RA's
13 networks meant that we were able to interview fire-fighters from Victorian land management
14 agencies who held operational fire response roles on Black Saturday. These pre-existing
15 relationships enabled trust to develop early in the interviews and created an empathic and safe
16 space for the interviewees to share their memories of that day, their emotions, and the
17 ongoing effects of Black Saturday.

18
19 We interviewed 14 members of the Country Fire Authority (CFA) which is an
20 organization made up of predominately volunteer fire-fighters who are responsible for fire
21 management and containment on private land in regional areas of Victoria. We also
22 interviewed seven employees from the Department of Environment, Land, Water and
23 Planning (DELWP) which has responsibility for fires which occur on public land and four
24 employees of Parks Victoria which is a statutory authority with responsibility for managing
25 and conserving Victoria's natural assets which are regularly at risk from bushfire and other
26 human-made and natural hazards. We asked these 22 men and three women about the
27 meaning of the anniversary for them and how they commemorated the anniversary, the role
28 of memorials in remembering and the importance of commemoration for future organizing.

The semi-structured interviews, which were fully transcribed verbatim, ranged in length from 40 minutes to 90 minutes, with an average length of 60 minutes.

While we were undertaking the interviews, we also collected a range of relevant documents. We began by collecting documents in relation to the Anniversary itself including the program of events and a transcript of the full proceedings. We also examined the Hansard records of both the Commonwealth and Victorian governments and identified eight speeches by Federal parliamentarians and five speeches by State parliamentarians that spoke at length about their memories of the fires and how they commemorated the anniversary. We also collected a wide range of print media about the 10th anniversary which we did not analyse but which provided us with information about the broader context.

A summary of our data sources is found in Table 1.

Table 1: Summary of data sources

Data source	Quantity
Interviews with fire-fighters	25
Parliamentary speeches	13
Newspaper articles and commentaries	64

Data Analysis

We analysed our data using thematic analysis from a social constructionist paradigm (Braun & Clark, 2022). Our coding schemas developed as we familiarised ourselves with the data, reflecting on our participants responses. We engaged in dual processes of deep engagement with the data, and distancing, allowing time and space for reflection and for insight and inspiration to develop (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 9). Some of this distancing time was spent ‘workshopping’ our analysis in conversations at a seminar and conference. These processes

of engagement and distancing allowed insights to evolve iteratively as our interpretation of the data developed. This process of engagement and distance was important because we were dealing with complex, emotional responses from our participants.

We began our analysis with both authors reading the interview and Hansard transcripts and coding the data with a simple coding matrix drawn from the research on commemoration. The four components of the matrix were: individual memories, collective memories, formal commemoration and informal commemoration. We decided on these four codes after reading the literature on collective memory and organizational memory. The literature on collective memory emphasizes that two distinct phenomena make up collective memory, first, socially framed individual memories, and second, collective commemorative representation (Halbwachs, 1992; Olick, 1999a). While the literature on organizational memory is concerned in part with the formalization of memory (Feldman & Feldman, 2006; Nissley & Casey, 2002).

The matrix allowed us to draw out differences between our two sets of data, our interviews with fire-fighters and the transcripts of politicians from government Hansard. At this stage of the research, we noted that the difference in the depth of responses from our interviewees as opposed to the politicians' speeches in parliament were of such gravity that we could not critically compare this data as we originally intended. We observed that lack of proximity to the fires allowed the politicians to distance themselves from the ongoing impacts of the fires whereas for the fire-fighters the experience of fighting the fires surfaced as individual memories of trauma and loss, what William James (1890) called 'thorns in the spirit'. Accordingly, in our second stage of the data analysis we returned to the transcripts of the interviews only using a deductive approach and iteratively coding the data. During this stage of the analysis, we were particularly struck by references to the 'other' conjured up as the fire-fighters remembered the Black Saturday fires and reflected on the ten-year

anniversary. We identified three categories of the ‘other’ in the fire-fighters’ discourse: members of the communities ravaged by fire, those who had died in the Black Saturday fires and fellow fighters who create a safe space to remember together. We set out the codes that emerged from our coding for the ‘Other’ with representative quotes in Table 2 below.

Table 2
Coding Schema – The Other

Sub-codes of ‘The Other’	Quote
Obligation to remember	It’s a difficult one I guess with such a significant incident such as Black Saturday that led to so many losses is that, you know, probably not appropriate to go out and be lecturing the community about preparedness on the day when you’re remembering 173 people have died. But maybe it is because you’ve got, you know, it is – you know, it’s a teachable moment, it’s a relatable moment (Crew Leader 1)
Remembering with	The closest I got to having a memorial experience, whatever that means, was having my cup of tea with the Lilydale crew on the anniversary of Black Saturday with people who knew what Black Saturday was like, who had been there (Senior Fire Operations Officer 2).
Self in relation to	I also regularly disclose to people, I had an issue with some mental health issues after fatalities which have occurred - those moments really stick in your life. You can look back on them with great clarity. I remember the trauma of the two events. It hit me like I’m there. I can even still smell the smells and sometimes it’s triggered when it’s sunny and smoky outside (Operations Manager 1)
Honouring	I think fire service deaths are the thing for me that strike me in commemoration and remembrance and that whole issue about well good we acknowledge that but how we can make things better? (Senior Fire Operations Officer 2).

Future for	It's important to remember what happened, and to prepare us for the fact that it will happen again. There's no doubt that it will happen again (Firefighter 1).
------------	---

In the first section of our findings, we outline how the Other ‘hailed’ the fire-fighters (Althusser, 1971). In the second section we outline the primary effect of the ‘co-presence of the other’ (Levinas, 1969, p. 43) which was awareness of an ethical obligation not only to remember but also an ethical responsibility to do things differently in the future.

The Other and Commemoration

Fire-fighters expressed a belief that proximity to the fires impacted engagement with commemorative anniversaries and memorials. As Senior Fire Operations Officer 5 reflected, ‘my sense is that people who are really close to the event choose not to commemorate and if they do it’s a very private thing, with a group of trusted people around them’. He went on to explain that those closely involved in the bushfires didn’t attend the commemorative events because ‘it was a little bit early’. Note that it was the 10-year anniversary. He believed that it was easier for ‘those who were arm’s length and didn’t have that connection’ to attend. With another fire-fighter adamant that, ‘only those who have actually been there and faced it (the fire) can know what it was like’ and ‘this scared him’ because others were purporting to know from a distance and construct an alternative narrative (Firefighter 2). The fire-fighter is expressing a sense of responsibility to remember. Throughout the interviews this responsibility was expressed as a responsibility to the Other. These Others were, the communities ravaged by fire, the dead and fellow fire-fighters. This responsibility to the Other influenced ways in which fire-fighters commemorated the fires.

The Other: Community members: Our memories are always intertwined with others as captured in the following reflection from a senior fire-fighter who was talking about what he called the ‘things that are etched in your memory’:

I remember that day, we were in the relief centre, and I was talking to people who were absolutely traumatised. I have never seen people so severely traumatised in my life.

Like, you could see that they were - I don't know how you describe it when you're observing these people, like they were like scared, they were scared out of their wits (Senior Fire Operations Officer 2).

Later in the interview he goes onto lament that ‘you don’t have answers for people, all you can do is hear them’. The members of the communities devastated by the Black Saturday fires continue to hail this firefighter in his memories. Fire-fighters recounted how they can still sense the emotions they felt for others at the time of the fires when they were ‘overwhelmed by the enormity of everyone else’s pain and suffering’ (Firefighter 3). They recalled the ‘emotion on the faces of people who got out of helicopters just going, ‘oh my god we can’t stop this. There is nothing we can do, the water’s evaporating’ (Fire Aircraft Manager 1). Another senior fire-fighter recounted his recurring memories of the faces of people that ‘thought they were going to die, they genuinely thought this is it, we’re gone’ (Operations Commander 1). He went onto explain that there were ‘so many near misses on that day, fire-trucks turned over and burnt out, things nobody else knows about’.

The Other: The Dead. The faces of the dead were also always before the fire-fighters. A fire-fighter shared how when he visited the Kinglake Memorial to the 101 lives lost in that fire that he could ‘still picture the faces (of those who died) It is deeply emotional and powerful’ (Community Engagement Officer 1). As were the faces of those who had survived:

I remember '09, you could tell anyone that had been out in the black the look on their face, because they couldn't process what they'd seen. Their eyes were glazed over. So, anyone that had been exposed to the things that they couldn't talk about, you could just see it in their eyes. You didn't need to ask (Brigade Support Officer 1).

Another shared 'I could tell you where I was in every single case ... where I physically was when I found out about it (a death)' (Senior Fire Operations Officer 2).

The Other: Fellow Fire-Fighters. Some of the fire-fighters shared that a key lesson that came from the informal gatherings at the time of the 10th Anniversary of Black Saturday was providing fire-fighters with the opportunity to remember collectively. A senior fire-fighter shared how the informal get togethers:

Highlighted to me that maybe that's something that, as a crew particularly when people have been through bigger events together, maybe we should be working harder as crews or programs to get people back together when they've been through some significant events. And provide the opportunity to talk and make sure people are okay and quite often in this business, there's a reluctance to seek out professional help and counselling. We're still getting over the social stigma of doing that (Firefighter 1).

Another fire-fighter shared how fellow fighters ensured he received the help he needed to overcome the ongoing impact of being involved in the Black Saturday fires:

I was highly anxious every time I was duty officer – every time I was on-call, because in essence I was waiting for the next person to die or the next catastrophe to occur. And I found that at the end of those shifts of being duty officer I needed to drink alcohol to go to sleep at night. So, I was obviously starting to self-

medicate. There became a point though where colleagues recognised something in me. They called my father, and they said, ‘we don’t think Frankie’s travelling right.’ And then he took a gentle hand, intervened, spoke to me, and from there diverted me into the support networks, and I was fine (Firefighter 2).

Fellow fire-fighters play a crucial role in helping fire-fighters deal their memories of what happened on Black Saturday. ‘People can come together and share stories and a lot of this would be storytelling around what we do in this business... sometimes we jokingly call it the war story side of this business’ (Senior Fire Operations Officer 3). The kind of stories shared in those spaces is captured here:

So, you find yourself in a room with three other people that were all at this traumatic event, and you recognise that you were all there and you speak about it almost like that unwritten rule that, okay, we’re in this safe boundary now where it’s just us now. We can talk about that time we saw that dead person (Operations Manager 1).

Being with others who had the same experience was an important part of mediating the memories of the fire-fighters:

Around the Black Saturday anniversary, I had my bit of a meltdown. We’d arranged for a gathering of that group of people who were very close, to get together on the day. I wasn’t going to go – I just had a picture of myself sitting in the corner crying my eyes out all night and it’s the first time that group had come together since the first anniversary; and as it turned out it was brilliant, it was exactly what we needed (Senior Fire Operations Officer 4).

Embodied and Embedded Commemoration

Many of the fire-fighters we interviewed preferred informal way of commemorating. Some eschewed the formally sanctioned memorials and found their own mnemonic devices through which they could remember. As one fire-fighter shared, ‘an old fire tower lost to Black Saturday’ was his own memorial with ‘its simplicity helping me to tap into the gravity of what occurred in Marysville on Black Saturday’ (Brigade Support Officer 1). See Figure 2 below.



Figure 2: Burnt out communications tower – Mount Gordon
Source: <https://www.firelookoutsdownunder.com/Victoria/mtgordon.html>

For others it involved simply gathering in ‘a quiet space, a park, and if you wanted to come you did and if you didn’t want to, you didn’t have to go’ (Brigade Support Officer 1). Or sharing a meal with colleagues:

There’s one ex-colleague who I have dinner with every 7 February, and that’s what happens no matter what is going on in our lives. It is like we will sort of get

together and reflect on that day. But I tend to not get involved in I suppose the more formal or more organised events (Community Engagement Officer 2).

By coming together to collectively remember, fire-fighters walk a fine line between evoking memories that could cause them pain, as captured in the image of ‘sitting in the corner crying my eyes out’ and benefitting from the support that comes from remembering together because as Firefighter 3 explains, ‘you’re all trying to share - relive, in a sense, or share experiences that you’ve had and you want to kind of keep them alive’.

Ethical Commemoration

For the fire-fighters commemoration of fire events and memorialisation of the dead were only valuable if it allowed for reflection on the past to offer a warning about future fires and the need for fire-fighting organizations to develop better ways of preparing fire-fighting organizations and communities for those fires. The fire-fighters were clear that commemoration of the anniversary of fire events was invaluable if it did two things: (i) fostered a ‘cultural memory’ at the national level (cf. Bernstein, 2004) and (ii) changed practice within the fire-fighting organizations.

Remembering as a nation was important because of the increasing frequency and size of fires. A few of the fire-fighters we spoke to talked about the effects of climate change framing it as ‘the biggest threat to our existence it’s the biggest change for fire management’ (Senior Fire Operations Officer 5). However, all fire-fighters expressed concern about messaging by the media, politicians and leaders within fire-fighting organizations which they believed overstated the agency of fire-fighters through messages such as ‘we’ve come along so far since then and we’ve got aircraft, we’ve got better systems, it won’t happen again’ (Senior Fire Operations Officer 3) This fire-fighter warned against what he called ‘cultural

complacency’ which can happen when ‘commemoration doesn’t acknowledge and confront the true horror of fires’. Another stressed the need to recognise the reality that ‘these big catastrophic bush fires are occurring more frequently. So, you need to use the memory of the big catastrophic bushfires to say it will happen again’ (District Officer 1). There was an ethical obligation to:

Keep memories alive so that hopefully when a code red day occurs in the future, people make the connection between what's happened numerous times in the past and what could happen again. I think it's extremely important to keep the memory alive, otherwise we face the prospect again of having to – as they say in the reports – learn from history all over again and repeat past mistakes. It was a national tragedy owned by everybody and we should be able to build up a cultural memory from it (Community Engagement Officer 1).

A few of our interviewees pointed to the role of ‘staff rides’ in ensuring that lessons from the past were used to train firefighters in the present. Staff rides combine practices of remembering, commemorating and learning. They involve taking teams of firefighters onto sites of major fires, including where lives have been lost to reflect and to learn. As Senior Station Officer 1 explains:

What I wanted to do with the staff ride is talk about my decision-making taken on the day (of the Linton Fires) - to put the participants of the staff ride in the shoes of a decision-maker on that day is very powerful. It’s very powerful to see the look on their faces because they’re thinking about how they would deal with what’s happening.

However, while building ‘cultural memory’ could foster learning and aid preparedness, care needed to be taken not to over-state the capacity of fire-fighters. For the fire-fighters organizational commemoration should serve two, interconnected objectives. It had a role to

play in helping to manage the long-term psychological effects of fires on fire-fighters and how to learn from those emotions. It also needed to aid the capacity to learn from the past and to develop new organizational approaches to the firefighting

Learning from Emotions

Brigade Support Officer 1 was concerned that while ‘we need the memorials and to commemorate the dead we also need to be conscious of the coping and the impact’ of remembering. The complex range of emotions that would be experienced at the time of the 10th Anniversary was also set out by Dr Gordon, a trauma expert and consultant to the Victorian Government and the Red Cross. He advised people to make a plan about how they wanted to reflect and commemorate the tragedy:

It will give you a greater sense of control, it will give you a sense of history, of survival,’ he said. ‘Some people might like to come down to the official process, other people might like to go to the local event, other people might like to just have a barbecue in the backyard with close friends - that's fine, everything's right (Dr Gordon as reported by Offer, AAP, 300119).

One senior fire-fighter was acutely aware of this and in preparation for the ten-year anniversary had ‘pulled together psychologists, mental well-being people, chaplains and peers’ to find out ‘what might happen to them (the fire-fighters) and how we might protect them’ (Operations Manager 1). He believed that fire-fighting organizations need to ‘find a balance between working with the community for them to commemorate but focusing on ourselves for us to be able to heal from it’ (Operations Manager 1).

Learning from the Past

Several fire-fighters talked about how remembering together through the sharing of stories was an important way in which fire-fighters learnt from the past. As an Emergency Service Worker explained:

Everyone has war stories, and everyone wants to have a good chat and always catch up with the crew or people that you have been on deployments with before or there's always someone telling a story about remember the time when? And I think informally that gives the opportunity to discussion. It's probably more about having a good, 'Oh, remember when that happened and how we avoided that,' or how we - so I think yeah. You can learn from that mateship (Regional Manager).

This was echoed by another Emergency Service Worker who reflected how when fire-fighters learnt from past fires:

Oh, you were at this fire. Remember what happened then?' And, 'That's what happened. That's why they did that.' So, I think that happens quite a bit. In this business you will often go to a fire and catch up with people who you were fighting another fire with, and it might be years ago, but there's this connection that people have by the very fact that they were working together at a particular fire. So that sharing of stories is quite a strong part of the firefighting business. (Senior Fire Operations Officer 3).

For Senior Fire Operations Officer 2 'remembering of Black Saturday and commemoration of service dead' was intrinsically linked to 'the issue about how do we make things better'. Similarly, for Crew Leader 1 memorialisation of the dead was entirely 'tokenistic if as an organization we haven't learnt anything from that'. He acknowledged the importance of recognition and memorialisation of fire-fighters, 'even those you didn't know or never meet' but it also required 'the organization to put its hand on its heart and say well, you know, as a

result we've learnt, and we've changed'. Remembering together had to focus not just on sharing technical aspects of firefighting, but also 'the human impact and what they did to overcome it. And here's what we now do to make sure that you are never put in a similar situation, or the tools or resources you've got to look after yourself or others' (Operations Manager 1). As one Emergency Service Worker explained:

It's not necessarily the rational, it's more the irrational stuff about, 'How did you respond? How did you feel? How did you go during those events?' That's not necessarily about how well the infrastructure's in place or whether we used the right firefighting technique (Emergency Management Officer).

The fire-fighters desire that commemoration create a cultural memory at the national level and changes in organizational practices is their response to the demands of the Other. For the fire-fighters commemoration cannot simply honour the dead and those who fought the fires, but commemoration must be a response to the demand to assume responsibility and to do things differently.

Discussion

The honest reflections and painful memories shared by our research respondents have enabled our theorisation of an ethics of commemoration. For the fire-fighters in our study the past haunted the present (cf. Assman, 1997). Anniversaries and commemorative events evoked painful and sometimes traumatic memories with fire-fighters brought face to face with the Other. The fire-fighters talked about the faces of the dead always being before them. For Levinas (1983), it is the face that 'signifies the fact of summoning, of summoning me – in its nudity or its destitution, in everything that is precarious in questioning ... a questioning which, ipso facto, summons me' (cited in Hand, 1989, p. 5). This summons sets the terms of the responsibility for the Other. As Levinas argues, 'the face is, from the start, the demand ...

it is the frailty of the one who needs you, who is counting on you' (Levinas in interview with Wright, et al., 1988, p. 171). This is a responsibility that I can never be absolved from because 'to be oneself, the state of being a hostage, is always to have one degree of responsibility more, the responsibility for the responsibility of the other' (Levinas, 1997, p. 117). The fire-fighters were hostage to the Other and it is from this vulnerability to the Other that an ethical responsibility is forged (Rhodes, 2023). In this case forged by fire. For Levinas, the origin of ethics comes from a primary responsibility to the Other. In our case these others were the members of the communities ravaged by the fires, those who had died and fellow fire-fighters who shared the loss caused by the fires. The fire-fighters were passive to the ethical demands of these Others. As Rhodes (2023, p. 508) drawing on Levinas writes 'ethics is vulnerability to the needs of the other, hostage to their incessant needs'. Otherness lies at the centre of an ethics of commemoration because ethical responsibility emerges because of being subject to the unwilled address of the Other (Butler, 2004; Casey, 2000). For Levinas (1969, p.50) 'my orientation toward the Other can lose the avidity of the gaze only by turning into generosity, incapable of approaching the other with empty hands.

For the fire-fighters in our study their responsibility to the Other, the response to the demand of the Other, was a commitment to do things differently in the future. Fire-fighters were concerned that official commemorative events and memorials allowed authorities and communities to relegate the fires and their impact to the past. For the fire-fighters, the formal commemorative event and the memorial in Exhibition Gardens, as Young (1992) has argued, allowed the politicians to divest themselves of an obligation to remember. For the fire-fighters memorialisation of the past needed to be carried through to the future. It needed to elicit a call to action. The fire-fighters echo Olick's (1999b) invocation that through commemoration the past can offer a warning about how to do things differently in the future. Some fire-fighters pointed to staff rides a form of commemoration that could lead to doing

things differently in the future. As Becker and Burke (2014, p.513) explain storytelling in place offers a purposeful reflection, ‘bridging experience and learning through cognition and feeling’.

Casey (2000, pg. 256) argues commemoration can enable the past to ‘traverse the present on its way to becoming the future’. The responsibility for the future comes from past-oriented experience. Commemoration must do more than ‘pay tribute to honourable actions undertaken the past and at another place, it has to construct the space, and continue the time, in which the commendably inter-human will be perduringly appreciated’ (Casey 2000, p. 250). In these commemorative spaces, a memorialisation of the past occurs as ‘ritualistic, textual, or intrapsychic’ that allows for the past to borne forward. As Rhodes (2023, p. 507) points out acceptance to the passive ethical relation in the face of the Other can still be present in organizational systems of ethics. In our study, the the ethical relation to the Other required organizational commemoration to happen in a way that shifted organizational narratives (Cruz, 2014, p. 459). Commemoration needed to play a crucial role not only in the efficient functioning of the organization but also its moral culture (Feldman & Feldman, 2006, p. 880).

Commemorative practices could be building blocks for organizational learning and change (Cruz, 2014). Commemorative practices could help ensure that lessons were not forgotten and that remembering with others could be a form of vicarious learning (Haunschild, Polidoro & Chandler, 2015). The fire-fighters recognised that we learn from the Other what we cannot learn from ourselves and that ‘new thinking was required in the face of the Other’ (Levinas, 1969, p. 40). As Madsen and Desai (2010) argue the ability of organizations to meet challenges is the outcome of individual and collective memory systems that are embodied in shared mental models. Further, for the fire-fighters in our study the

commemoration of major fires had to sustain the cultural memory of the nation and an awareness of the need to be better prepared for future fires and to act on the causes of extreme fires. As the fire-fighters implore an ethics of commemoration requires us to not only look back, but it also requires us to confront ‘what, lasting, comes toward us’ (Casey, 2000, p. 251). An ethics of commemoration must consist of action to curb the threat of catastrophic fires and the trauma that the fire-fighters know they and others will experience in the aftermath of those fires. In this way commemoration ‘can carry the past forward through the present so that it can perdue the future’ (Casey, 2000, p. 256).

This inter-subjective way of understanding ethics, as always coming from the Other does not obviate the need to memorialise the dead and commemorate the anniversary of significant events. It does however require us to reflect how organizations might develop more inclusive and intersubjective forms of commemoration (Casey, 2000; Cutcher, et al. 2019). The official commemorative site for the Black Saturday fires is located a long way from the site of the fires. It is here that the politicians and officials came to commemorate the Black Saturday fires. In contrast, the fire-fighters commemorative practices and sites were embedded in the communities ravaged by the fires. They were drawn to informal ways of commemorating with other fire-fighters in their workplaces or where the fires were fought. The official commemorative events were marked by ‘distance and deference’ whereas the fire-fighters’ practices were proximate and embodied. The fire-fighters belong to a ‘fraternity of proximity’, and it is this proximity that signifies intersubjectivity, ‘the very establishing of the one-for-the-other’ (Levinas, 1997, pp.83-85). Levinas (1997, p.89) explains that ‘proximity is a disturbance’ and this was the case for the fire-fighters. Whereas the politicians spoke at the commemorative events and in the parliament about a past that is ‘settled and actual’, the body of the fire-fighters was ‘the lived site of a co-presence of past and present, self and other’ (Casey, 2000, p. 174).

Casey (2000, xi) writes that commemoration is not separable from ‘place memory’ and ‘body memory’. Concrete places retaining the past which is reanimated by our remembering through our bodies. Crawford, et al. (2022, p. 55) have argued that situatedness in place itself becomes an integral part of remembering past destruction. Their concept of ‘phantasmatic places which have been destroyed or permanently altered’ in some way becoming re-embodied into mnemonic devices resonated with the image of the burnt-out tower shared by one of our fire-fighters (Crawford, et al., 2022, p. 73). Eisenman and Frenkel (2021, p. 9) argue that the topography of mnemonic devices can give them salience. In this case, the burnt-out tower held this topographical salience, it had become a symbol of collective pain, destruction, and trauma: a phantasmatic place. The burnt-out tower shows us that commemoration has the potential to be an embedded process of recognition premised on an ethic of openness to Otherness (Cutcher, et al 2019, p. 287). It was only those who had experienced the fires first hand who felt connection to such phantasmatic places. The materiality of places like the burnt-out tower are ‘perceived sensorially’ whereas the official commemorative sites rely on ‘conscious cognitive interpretation’ (Eisenman & Frenkel, 2021, p.8). The sensorial reaction to salient commemorative sites heightened the fire-fighters inter-subjective response to the Other. This was powerfully conveyed by the fire-fighter who shared how the Kinglake memorial evoked the faces of those who had died: ‘I can still see their faces’. It is the face that makes moral claims on us, ones that we do not ask for, ones that we are not free to refuse (Butler, 2004, p. 131). The materiality of mnemonic devices also strengthened the fire-fighters sense of responsibility to one another. As Eisenman and Frenkel (2021, p.7-8) have argued ‘sensory reactions to mnemonic devices create an affinity’ that can bind organizational members to each other and to the organization. Our research raises important questions about the sensory effects of material mnemonic devices and their role in fostering an ethics of commemoration in organizations. Co-remembering engenders a

‘vulnerability that comes about in the form of the other in me’ (Levinas, 2000, p. 179). The others here are not just those we commemorate with but those we are commemorating. As Levinas (2000, p. 12) writes ‘the death of another who dies affects me in my very identity as a responsible ‘me’’. In commemoration it is the ‘wordless exigency or accusation’ of the dead that ‘I cannot respond (to) with words, but for which I cannot deny my responsibility’ (Levinas, 2000, p. 181).

Responding to the call of the other means accepting that my relationship to the Other will be different and that I will be different (Ezzamel & Willmott, 2014, p. 1024). Being open to the Other is beginning of an ethical relation to the Other but as Butler (2004) acknowledges vulnerability to the other can expose one to risk of harm (Tyler, 2020 p. 116). The fire-fighters in our study suffered psyche harm in the face of the Other but they did not turn away from this responsibility. Rather, they recognised a mutual vulnerability between themselves and the Other in order that things might happen differently in the future. Informal practices of commemoration with their focus on communing, reflection and shared experiences open up powerful and poignant opportunities for coping as well as learning. Mnemonic communities of remembering can foster a strong sense of belonging, a shared fate and create a sense of cohesion across organizations (Coraiola, et al, 2023; Crawford, et al 2022). Practices grounded in mutual vulnerability could extend to others experiencing trauma and loss caused by the dangerous nature of work itself or by the ways in which organizational systems and practices cause harm. For example, the ways in which organizations deal with instances of sexual harassment and discrimination. An ethic of openness to the Other and a recognition of our mutual vulnerability can create ‘a shared scene of recognition in the hope that we might be able to reconstitute that scene in order to distribute the possibilities of liveability more ethically’ (Tyler, 2020, p. 193).

Conclusion

Our research shows how this has implications for the moral culture of organizations. Organizations have an obligation to ward off forgetting and embrace an ethics of

commemoration which can be an important source of healing at the individual level and learning at the organizational level. Governments need to ensure that fire-fighting organisations have the resources needed to not only fight fires but also offer ongoing support for fire fighters as they deal with the long-term psychological effects of fighting fires.

Our research has theorised a human-focused ethics of commemoration. The faces evoked by the fire-fighters are human faces but what of the billions of animals lost to catastrophic fires? (Rumpff, Legge, van Leeuwen, Wintle & Woinarski, 2023). Future research could explore how an ethics of commemoration might extend to non-human actors and whether a Levinasian ethics could contribute to the ethics of multispecies justice (Sturman, Celermajer, McDonald & Blanch, 2025). A multispecies justice project requires action to prevent catastrophic bush fire events. Relatedly, an ethics of commemoration requires that we remember to mitigate future fires. While firefighters are keen to stress that future action focus on pre-fire preparedness, active fire suppression, and postfire recovery (Celermajer, Lyster, Wardle & Couzens, 2022) more is needed. Urgent action is required to mitigate the scale of climate change. In response to the ethical demand of the Other, governments need to act to prevent repeated climate induced disaster by enacting laws that address carbon emissions and protect biodiversity to prefigure and enact just futures.

Acknowledgements: We would like to sincerely thank our senior editor, Professor Peter Felming, and our three expert reviewers for their highly constructive engagement with our manuscript throughout the review process. We are also very grateful to those who participated in the research from the Victorian emergency services and express our deep gratitude to them for sharing their stories about Black Saturday. We would also like to acknowledge the support of Tom Lowe, Polygraph Productions as a research assistant and for

his work in translating translate our findings into video format for sharing with our research partners and the wider Victorian community. The short video can be viewed [here](#). We also acknowledge the diligent work of Shimi Witkop as a research assistant on this project.

References

Althusser, L. (B. Brewster, trans.) (1971). *Lenin and Philosophy, and Other Essays*, New York: Monthly Review Press.

Alvesson, M., & Willmott, H. (2002). Identity regulation as organizational control: Producing the appropriate individual. *Journal of Management Studie*, 39, 619-644.

Arnold, P., & Costas, J. (2023). From silence to noise – The politics of the other in Organization Theory, *Organization Theory*, 4, 1-21.

Assmann, J. (1998). *Moses the Egyptian: The Memory of Egypt in Western Monotheism*, Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Bernstein, R. J. (2004). The Culture of Memory, *History and Theory*, 43(4), 165-178.

Becker, W. S., & Burke, M. J. (2014). Instructional staff rides for management learning and education. *Academy of Management Learning & Education*, 13, 510-524.

Beyes, T., & Steyaert, C. (2013). Strangely familiar: The uncanny in organizational analysis. *Organization Studies*, 34, 1445-1465.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2022). Conceptual and design thinking for thematic analysis. *Qualitative psychology*, 9(1), 3.

Butler, J. (2004). *Precarious Life*, New York: Verso.

Casey, E. (2000). *Remembering: A phenomenological study*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Celermajer, D., Lyster, R., Wardle, G. M., Walmsley, E., & Couzens, E., The Australian bushfire disaster: How to avoid repeating this catastrophe for biodiversity. *WIREs Climate Change*, 12(3), 1-9.

Coraiola, D. M., & Derry, R. (2020). Remembering to forget: The historic irresponsibility of U.S. big tobacco. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 166: 233–252.

Coraiola, D. M., Foster, W. M., Mena, M., Foroughi, H., & Rintamaki, J. (2023). ‘Ecologies of memories: memory work within and between organizations and communities’, *Academy of Management Annals*, 17(1), 373-404.

Crawford, B., Coraiola, D. M., Dacin M.T. (2022). ‘Painful memories as mnemonic resources: Grand Canyon Dories and the protection of place, *Strategic Organization*, 20(1), 51-79.

Cruz, J. (2014). ‘Memories of trauma and organizing: Market women’s sus groups in post conflict Liberia, *Organization*. 21(4), 447-462.

Cutcher, L., Riach, K., & Tyler, M. (2022). Splintering organizational subjectivities: Older workers and the dynamics of recognition, vulnerability and resistance. *Organization Studies*, 43, 973-992.

Cutcher, L., Dale, K., & Tyler, M. (2019). ‘Remembering as Forgetting’: Organizational commemoration as a politics of recognition. *Organization Studies*, 40(2), 267-290.

Cutcher, L., Dale, K., & Tyler, M. (2016). Spaces and places of remembering and commemoration. *Organization*, 23(1), 3-9.

Dale, K. & Latham, Y. (2015). Ethics and entangled embodiment: Bodies-materialities-organization. *Organization Studies*, 22, 166-182.

Dwyer, G., Hardy, C., & Maguire, S. (2021). Post-inquiry Sensemaking: The Case of the ‘Black Saturday’ Bushfires. *Organization Studies*, 42(4), 637-661.

Eisenman, M., & Frenkel, M. (2021) Remembering materiality: a material-relational approach to organizational memory. *Organization Theory*, 2, 1-24.

Ezzamel, M., & Willmott, H. (2014). Registering ‘the ethical’ in organization theory formation: Towards the disclosure of an ‘invisible force’. *Organization Studies*, 35(7), 1013-1039.

Farnwoth, M. (2009) Black Saturday Bushfires: Moving Speeches in Parliament for Victims. *Australian Politics*, <http://australianpolitics.com/2009/02/09/moving-speeches-in-parliament-for-bushfire-victims.html>, accessed 28 June 2023.

Feldman, R. M., & Feldman, S. P. (2006) ‘What links the chain: an essay on organizational remembering as practice’, *Organization*, 13(6): 861-887.

Fine, G. A. (2001). *Difficult reputations: Collective memories of the evil, inept, and controversial*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Gergen, K. J. (2015). From mirroring to world-making: Research as future forming. *Journal for the theory of social behaviour*, 45(3), 287-310.

Gill, M. J. (2014). ‘The possibilities of phenomenology for organizational research’, *Organizational Research Methods*, 17(2): 118-137.

Halbwachs, M. (1992 [1925]). *On Collective Memory*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Hancock, P. (2008). Embodied generosity and an ethics of organization. *Organization Studies*, 29, 1357-1373.

Hand, S. (1989) *The Levinas Reader*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishing.

Hardy, C. (2022) *How to Use a Discursive Approach to Study Organizations*, Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham, UK.

Haunschild, P., Polidoro, F., & Chandler, D. (2015). Organizational oscillation between learning and forgetting: The dual role of serious errors. *Organization Science*, 26(6), 1682-1701.

Kenny, K., & Fotaki, M. (2015). From gendered organizations to compassionate borderspaces: Reading corporeal ethics with Bracha Ettinger. *Organization*, 22, 183–199.

Levinas, E. (2006). *Humanism of the Other* trans Nidra Poller, Chicago, University of Illinois Press.

Levinas, E. (2000). *God, Death and Time* trans Bettina Bergo, Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Levinas, E. (1974/1997). *Otherwise than being or beyond essence*. The Netherlands: Kluwer Academic Publishers.

Levinas, E. (1969). *Totality and infinity: An essay on exteriority* trans. Alphonso Lingis. Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press.

Madsen, P, M., & Desai, V. (2010). Failing to learn? The effects of failure and success on organizational learning in the global orbital launch vehicle industry. *Academy of management journal*, 53(3), 451-476.

Mena, S., & Rintamaki, J. (2020) ‘Managing the past responsibly: a collective memory perspective on responsibility, sustainability and ethics’. In O. Lassch, R. Suddaby, R.E. Freeman & D. Jamali. (Eds.). *The Research Handbook on Responsible Management*: Cheltenham, UK: Elgar, 470-483.

Moncrief, M. (2009). 'Worst day in history': Brumby warns of fire danger, *The Sydney Morning Herald*, 6 February. Available at: <https://www.smh.com.au/national/worst-day-in-history-brumby-warns-of-fire-danger-20090206-7zf1.html>

Misztal, B. A. (2003). *Theorises of Social Remembering*, Maidenhead, Open University Press.

Nissley N., & Casey, A. (2002). 'The politics of the exhibition: Viewing corporate museums through the paradigmatic lens of organizational memory', *British Journal of Management*, 13 (SI), S35-S46.

Olick, J. K. (1999a). 'Collective memory: Two cultures', *Sociological Theory*, 17: 333-348.

Olick, J. K. (1999b). 'Genre memories and memory genres, *American Sociological Review*, 64: 381-402.

Olick, J. K., & Levy, Daniel. (1997). 'Collective memory and cultural constraint: Holocaust myth and rationality in German politics', *American Sociological Review*, 62: 921-936.

Olick, J. K., & Robbins, J. (1998). 'Social Memory Studies: From 'Collective Memory' to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices', *Annual Review of Sociology*, 24: 105-40.

Phillips, N. & Cynthia. H. (2002). *Discourse Analysis: Investigating Processes of Social Constructionism*. Thousand Oaks, Sage.

Reinecke, J. (2018). Social movements and pre-figurative organizing: Confronting entrenched inequalities in Occupy London. *Organization Studies*, 39, 1299-1321.

Rhodes, C. (2023). 'The Ethics of Organizational Ethics', *Organization Studies*, 44(3), 497-514.

Rhodes, C. (2012). Ethics, alterity and the rationality of leadership justice. *Human Relations*, 65, 1311-1331.

Robbins, J. (1991). Visage, figure: Reading Levinas' s *Totality and Infinity*, *Yale French Studies*, 79, 135-149.

Rowlinson, M., Booth, C., Clark, P., Delahaye, A. & Procter, S. (2010) 'Social remembering and organizational memory', *Organization Studies*, 31(1): 69-87.

Rumpff, L., Legge, S., van Leeuwen, S., Wintle, B., & Woinarski, J. (2023). *Australia's Megafires: Biodiversity Impacts and Lessons from 2019-2020*. Melbourne, CSIRO Publishing.

Schrempf-Stirling, J., Palazzo, G., & Phillips, R. (2016). Historic corporate social responsibility. *Academy of Management Review*, 41: 700–719.

Sturman, A., Celermajer, D., MacDonald, F., & Verlie, B. (2025) Prefiguring multispecies justice: how communities are challenging and transfiguring care, labour, and belonging in the midst of climate catastrophe, *Environmental Politics*, doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2025.2467527: 1-20.

Tyler, M. (2020) *Judith Butler and Organization Theory*, London: Routledge.

Tyler, M. (2019). Reassembling difference? Rethinking inclusion through/as embodied ethics. *Human Relations*, 72(1), 48-68.

Wright, T., Hughes, P., Ainley, A. (1988) The Paradox of Mortality: an Interview with Emmanuel Levinas. In Bernasconi, R. & Woods, D. (Eds). *The Provocation of Levinas: Rethinking the Other*, New York: Routledge, 168-180

Young, J.E. (1992). The counter-monument: memory against itself in Germany today. *Critical Inquiry*. 18(2), 267-96

Zerubavel, E. (2003). *Time maps: Collective memory and the social shape of the past*.
London: University of Chicago Press.

Author biographies

Leanne Cutchner is a Professor of Management and Organisation Studies in the Business School at the University of Sydney. Her research explores discourse and practice and how they impact equality and inclusion in organizations and the communities they serve. Leanne has undertaken research in a wide range of organizational context including global engineering firms, insurance companies, financial services organizations, fire-fighting authorities and co-operatives. Her current research funded by an ARC Discovery grant explores the role of culture in shaping strategy and practice in Aboriginal community-controlled organizations.

Graham Dwyer is an Associate Professor and Co-Director, Centre for Social Innovation, Trinity College Dublin. He is also an Honorary Fellow at the Faculty of Business and Economics, University of Melbourne. His research sits at the intersection of sensemaking and learning from natural hazards, and he is an author of *Making Sense of Natural Disasters* (Palgrave Macmillan).