

The Impossibility of Thinking WTC7: Philosophy and the Disappearance of the Uncomfortable

1. Introduction

Amid philosophical discussions about ontology, time, reality, and knowledge, the topic of **WTC7**—the third skyscraper of the World Trade Center that collapsed on September 11, 2001—appears as an alien body—not because of a lack of relevance, but because it has been discursively excluded. This exclusion is itself philosophical: It concerns the boundaries of what is considered thinkable, sayable, and analyzable—and the role of narratives as epistemic control mechanisms.

This essay takes a dual starting point: first, the physical and epistemological anomaly of the WTC7 collapse; second, the philosophical debate on the ontology of time, as developed, for example, in Fabrice Correia’s lecture “*Higher-Order Tense Realism*” (USI, 2025). In this juxtaposition, it becomes clear that philosophy not only has the means but also the responsibility not to let the uncomfortable disappear—even when it has long been erased from societal discourse.

2. The Collapse of WTC7 – Fact, Anomaly, Taboo

WTC7, a 47-story building located in close proximity to the Twin Towers, collapsed on the afternoon of September 11, 2001—without ever having been hit by an airplane. The official explanation from the NIST (2008) attributes the collapse solely to fire—a unique event in the history of steel-reinforced high-rise buildings.

Critics, including thousands of architects and engineers, point to symmetrical collapse, free-fall acceleration, and structural improbabilities. An independent study from the University of Alaska Fairbanks (2020) concluded that fire cannot plausibly explain the collapse. Nevertheless, the topic remains socially marginalized—even within academic and philosophical discourses.

3. The Narrative as an Epistemological Filter

Why is this the case? The answer lies in the concept of the narrative—understood as a socially effective interpretive structure that does not merely describe reality but shapes it. Noam Chomsky speaks in *Manufacturing Consent* (1988) of the systematic production of public consent through media framing and selective information. A narrative—such as that surrounding the events of 9/11—determines what counts as fact and what as speculation.

Philosophy is traditionally the discipline that reflects on such limits of thinking. Yet it is precisely here that defensive reactions often occur. The objection that WTC7 is a “side issue compared to greater problems” is not a factual counter-argument but a performative act of exclusion: a topic is declared irrelevant to avoid engaging with it.

4. Philosophy and Discursive Blindness

Michel Foucault analyzes in his works on the power of discourse (*The Archaeology of Knowledge*, 1969) how truth in societies is not determined by facts but by orders of the sayable. The silence about WTC7 is not the absence of information but the presence of a taboo.

Hannah Arendt reminded us that truth—especially when politically inconvenient—is often not combated but simply ignored (*Truth and Politics*, 1967). Philosophy must not be complicit in this ignorance—through looking away, silence, or premature delegitimization.

5. Connection to the Ontology of Time: “Higher-Order Tense Realism”

In Fabrice Correia’s lecture (USI, 2025), it is argued that reality consists not only of facts but also of temporally structured second-order facts. The so-called “higher-order” ontology of time allows reflection not only on events but also on our access to events over time.

This is crucial for the WTC7 debate:

The truth about the collapse is not just a physical fact but is covered by a persistent narrative presenting itself as timeless truth—although it is historically, politically, and epistemologically contingent.

Correia and Rosenkranz speak of *Dynamic Absolutism*—the idea that objective facts can change or be newly disclosed over time. The attempt to rethink WTC7 today is an expression of precisely this dynamic sense of truth.

6. Conclusion: Memory, Truth, and the Challenge of the Real

Thinking about WTC7 is not only a physical or political question but a philosophical test: How does philosophy deal with the systematically repressed, the discursively “inadmissible”?

The thesis of this essay is:

The dominant 9/11 narrative acts epistemically—it prevents certain questions from being considered legitimate at all.

The case of WTC7 is not a side issue but a test case for the relationship between truth, memory, and public reason.

It is philosophy’s task to pass this test—through openness, courage, and the willingness to think even the uncomfortable.

7. References

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