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Aftermath: Photographs After 9/11, Ground Zero, and the Myth of American Exceptionalism

by

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Introduction

On the morning of 11 September 2001 at approximately 8:46 a.m., a hijacked 747 passenger plane hit the North Tower of the World Trade Center in New York City. Following shortly after, another passenger plane hit the South Tower at 9:03 a.m. Two more passenger planes were hijacked that day; one hit the Pentagon at 9:43 a.m. and one crashed in a field in Pennsylvania at 10:10 a.m. en route to Washington D.C.. The South Tower of the World Trade Center collapsed at 10:05 a.m., and the North Tower followed nearly a half hour later at 10:28 a.m. In total, approximately 3,000 people were killed, including all nineteen of the terrorists involved in the hijacking.¹

Because every available camera was focused on the World Trade Center that fateful morning and throughout the day, the number of images captured and mass-produced is vast. Along with photographs, video cameras were also fixated on the skyline and, according to David Friend's book *Watching the World Change: The Stories Behind the Images of 9/11*, "[In America alone] 80 million prime-time households tuned in to the main national TV news outlets that Tuesday."² The world quite literally watched on through media outlets participating in a spectacle that was unprecedented in the history of terrorist attacks.³ Friend also notes that the timing of this spectacle was pivotal for viewership capacity: 9:00 a.m. Eastern Daylight Time is not yet nighttime in Africa, Asia or Europe. This was key as it allowed the world to view this event, together: "...This could be seen at once, anywhere, in both hemispheres, any latitude, any

¹ "September 11: Chronology of Terror," *CNN*, September 12, 2001.

² David Friend, *Watching the World Change: The Stories Behind the Images of 9/11*, (New York: Picador, 2007), 32.

³ Of the photos taken that day, most them depict the impact of the second plane into the South Tower and the eventual collapse of the two buildings. However, there is not much footage of the plane crash into the Pentagon or of the plane crash in Pennsylvania, because few photographers were there to document those events.

culture, throughout the world, live—something that we’ve never had happen before.”⁴ There are some estimates that up to two billion people watched the 9/11 attacks in real time or through daily news reports, if not hundreds of millions.⁵

The legacy left behind by the photographs has shaped an entire generation of American citizens. Nearly seventeen years have passed and many adults coming of age grew up haunted by the footage and photographs that permeated the media. These same images that dominated media outlets even defined the event for many people who lived through the event but were not there. And the same images have even allowed witnesses to revisit their experience and participate in cycles of postmemory.⁶ Live news had wall to wall coverage focused on the New York skyline; they had helicopters in the air and reporters on the ground, and cameras everywhere in between. Thousands of New Yorkers flooded the streets and took photos with whatever camera device they could find near them—professionals and amateurs alike turned and pointed their cameras to the sky. The spectacle of the attack was caught from every angle: far away and up close, from the sky and from the ground.

⁴ Friend, *Watching the World Change*, 34.

⁵ Friend, 33.

⁶ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory*, (Harvard University Press, 2003) and Marianne Hirsch, “Home,” *Postmemory* (Blog) and “Museum Space: The Ramp,” *9/11 Memorial & Museum*, <https://www.911memorial.org/ramp>. On the site, produced by Marianne Hirsch, it states, “‘Postmemory’ describes the relationship that the ‘generation after’ bears to the personal, collective, and cultural trauma of those who came before—to experiences they ‘remember’ only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up”. And in *Family Frames*, Hirsch writes, “Autobiography and photography share, as well, a fragmentary structure and an incompleteness that can be partially concealed by narrative and conventional connections” (82). The 9/11 Memorial & Museum is full of photographs from that day; in a part of the museum called “The Ramp”, the visitor walks down into the museum while passing by, “a series of multimedia installations, including photographs of people who directly witnessed the attacks and missing person fliers that appeared in the days following 9/11” as described on their website. Even without going to the museum, those who are interested can find some of these images and videos on their website, and they can see these images repeatedly.

Although this vast representation is worthy of critical reflection, I am focusing on the photographs that were taken after the collapse-the so-called ‘aftermath’ photographs that were taken at the site referred to as ground zero where the World Trade Centers collapsed. After the collapse of North and South Tower, the first responders⁷ began swarming the wreckage, and the onslaught of photographs seemed to stop.⁸ Suddenly the spectacle was over, the light faded from the day, and people were in a desperate search for their missing loved ones and for answers to unanswered questions. As the shock of the attack started to fade, the gravity of this event began to settle with the reality of the wreckage and the steaming heaps of steel known as the “pile”. Compared to, or perhaps in response to the flood of images on 9/11, there are relatively few of the aftermath. The area was cordoned off and only two photographers were allowed to document the workers, wreckage, and clean up. They are Joel Meyerowitz, a photo journalist and landscape photographer and John Botte, a New York City police officer; and their work is the subject of this thesis. Joel Meyerowitz and John Botte were two photographers who created projects, both of which were entitled *Aftermath*. Joel Meyerowitz’s project is called *Aftermath: World Trade Center Archive* in full, while John Botte’s is called *Aftermath: Unseen 9/11 Photos by a New York City Cop*.

On the one hand, it makes sense to restrict and documentation of the aftermath out of respect for the dead and to prohibit any voyeuristic inclinations. On the other hand, the strict regulations can also be understood as a way to control representation and make sure that the stories told through images were ones that served the best interests of the nation. Given the types of photographs taken in both projects in addition to their relationship to the term ground zero, I

⁷ First responders refer to the police, the firefighters and other volunteers who worked to either help find people, put out fires, or clean up the carnage.

⁸ "Terror Attacks Hit U.S.," *CNN*, September 11, 2001. *CNN* estimates that more than 10,000 rescue personnel went to the site of the collapse that day.

suspect it was in the best interests of the country to craft a narrative that acknowledged the tragedy and death but focused on survival stories—one that looked forward, rose from the ashes, but also one that sought revenge and justified war. But one can only repress trauma for so long before it rears its head and demands to be acknowledged.

In this thesis, I demonstrate how the photographs in both *Aftermath* projects perpetuate a myth of moral exceptionalism. Both projects use tropes such as the working man, the martyr, and human perseverance to further the concept of the American spirit as special or morally remarkable. My research will compare Meyerowitz and Botte's *Aftermath* projects and demonstrate how each collection of images and the use of the term ground zero contribute to the creation of a myth of moral exceptionalism used in the wake of the September 11th terrorist attacks. The attacks left the United States rattled and in need of direction to approach death and grief and to commemorate the tragedy. Through their lenses, Meyerowitz and Botte both created projects that perpetrated myths of hope and heroes, furthering the image of American moral exceptionalism to the grieving public.

Using ideas put forth by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida* and *Mythologies*, I will analyze the form and content of each project and select photographs in the first and second chapters.⁹ Through close readings of the individual projects themselves and the myths they cultivate, I will be analyzing the form and content of the *Aftermath* projects. I focus on some select photographs from the projects, and how these individual photos demonstrate their cultivation of myth. The third chapter will focus on the term ground zero as an indication of this

⁹ Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, (London: J. Cape, 1972) and *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, 1st American Ed, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1981).

trauma. I consider the use of the term ground zero as a tool for the creation and perpetuation of myth.

My argument includes an analysis of the book structures themselves and how this plays into the total messages and myths of the books. I place emphasis on the difference in the structure of the books themselves in comparison with one another, fixating primarily on chapters, chronological order, use of captions, size of the photographs, or anything unique about how they are formatted. There I engage the background in education and experience of the photographers; a NYC police officer in comparison with a landscape photographer, and the stylistic and technical differences that were influenced by their disparate backgrounds. This changed how they took photographs, and who the subjects of their photos were. I also look at who authorized them to be on site taking photos, when most people were only allowed in if they were working a labor job to disassemble and clear out the wreckage. I analyze who worked to help or paid for these projects to come together; who paid for the books to be published, and which publishers selected their projects.

My image analysis compares six photographs, three from each project, using Barthes terms *studium* and *punctum* from *Camera Lucida* to frame my analysis. The first category of photographs is called “The Search for Evidence.” Evidence in this case is meant to refer to any trace of human life or human remains, including but not limited to bones, clothes, shoes, and ID badges. I analyze what and or who is the subject of their individual photos, when they documented the photograph, if they documented the time or setting of a photograph, how, and from what angle. The second category is entitled “The Workers.” These photos are of the people on site that Botte and Meyerowitz captured on film. I analyze what the workers are doing, who they are within the categories of police, firefighter, welder, or volunteer, and the captions of the

photos—if there are any. The third category is called “The Tower Wreckage.” These shots are of the wreckage they recorded and published in the *Aftermath* projects. In my analysis, I have focused on the form and the content of the photos, and how these are situated in their social historical moment. Using Barthes *Mythologies*, I use his semiological method to frame the creation of myth through photographs and their relationship to their projects to show how they contribute to the myth of American exceptionalism.

In the final chapter, I analyze the use of the term Ground Zero, and how it plays into a myth of American exceptionalism that was reinvigorated following 9/11 in the United States as a means to overcome tragedy and grief, but also as a way to prepare a nation for war.

Chapter 1

Projects

The photographs of the World Trade Center site after the attack are limited in comparison to those of the attacks and the towers immediate collapses because people were not allowed onto the construction site, and people could not clearly see or take pictures of the devastation left behind from afar. The only photographs readily available were those taken by the two photographers Joel Meyerowitz and John Botte. *Aftermath: World Trade Center Archive* and *Aftermath: Unseen 9/11 Photos by a New York City Cop* are their two respective projects that came out of their time working at the site, but both were not published until 2006.¹⁰ Both were able to get permission to stay on site and take photographs of the events they witnessed, and each of them had a vision and wanted their projects to make a lasting impression. These photos brought to light what it was truly like on the site; they could show how hot the fires burned, how

¹⁰ John Botte, *Aftermath: Unseen 9/11 Photos by a New York City Cop*, (New York City: Regan Books, 2006) and Joel Meyerowitz, *Aftermath: World Trade Center Archive*, (New York City: Phaidon, 2006).

many first responders flocked the pile. These photographs made viewers feel like they were on the site but, able to view them in a safe environment, whether that be the comfort of their homes or perhaps surrounded by others who mourn as well. Photography is the connection between those who were there and those who were not, and through them the myth of *ground zero* and those who worked there was constructed. Before I analyze the individual photographs, it is important to consider the structure of the projects.

Both men were the only two who were authorized to be on site just to take photographs that were focused on public documentation rather than for official police and government use. Following the attacks, Joel Meyerowitz tried relentlessly to get onto the site and to take photographs of the carnage left in the wake until he was finally granted permission. John Botte was a New York City cop who had been taking photos his whole life, and during the events, took photos while following his fellow police officers around the site. Their projects included photographs and stories that would go on to influence public opinion and the development of the myth around 9/11.

They can't do this to us, I thought. No photographs meant no visual record of the one of the most profound things ever to happen here. We had been attacked. Now we had to bury our dead and reclaim our city. There needed to be a record of the aftermath. As I walked north past the press corps, penned in and waiting, my fury gave way to elation. I was going to get in there and make an archive of everything that happened at Ground Zero. This was something that I knew I could do.¹¹

Joel Meyerowitz felt personally responsible for recording and archiving what was happening, and he understood the weight of the project. His motive, as he states, is his desire to help

¹¹ Meyerowitz, *Aftermath*, 16.

“reclaim” New York City. As a New York native, Meyerowitz had often photographed the World Trade Center before its demise. His *Aftermath* project is meant to serve as an archive to those who were unable to get into Ground Zero. The structure of Meyerowitz’s project is straightforward; it is a heavy book at about six pounds and 350 pages, published in 2006.¹² In total, Meyerowitz took just over 8,500 photos in the eight and a half months of the cleaning at Ground Zero.¹³ The photographs are in chronological order with page numbers and chapters divided by season, starting in Fall 2001 and ending in Spring 2002. Under every photo is a caption, and every few pages a date gives the reader a timeframe. Some pages are made of four photos, some of six, and sometimes one photograph will span over four pages. He has a few pages that pull out to reveal a large photo of a landscape, and there are some pages with no photos at all, only captions. All his photos are in full color, opting instead to give the viewer a better idea as to what being on site looked like and what it really felt like to be there. This structure was intentional on Meyerowitz’s part as he wishes for those who read the book to experience the grief and share in the devastation.

For Meyerowitz, his background in art history and landscape photography influenced how he framed certain shots, why he took certain photos, and why he decided to keep others in the final draft of his book. The subjects of his photographs are mostly the workers¹⁴ and the landscape around them. Many of his photos imitate famous art works and paintings from the past, something he recognizes both in the moment and in reflection of his project. In his

¹² Some of these photos were also a part of a traveling exhibition entitled *After September 11: Images from Ground Zero*.

¹³ Lawrence Weschler, “Echoes at Ground Zero: A Conversation with Joel Meyerowitz” in *Everything that Rises: A Book of Convergences*, (San Francisco: Mcsweeney's Books, 2006), 4-22.

¹⁴ Workers include the first responders, however in this case he mostly focuses on the steel and construction workers as well as many of the volunteers who took care of the workers by making food, bringing them water and helping in First Aid tents.

conversation with Lawrence Weschler, Meyerowitz says, “...I had the same sense of history repeating itself, people assembled after carnage or destruction or before battle, and they’re dispersed in a way that is casual, from fatigue or just...I felt myself in a continuity with the past”. Meyerowitz mentions several times in this article that while taking photographs he often would reflect on past events and pieces of art and did at times take photos intentionally referring them. By intentionally taking photographs that resemble famous artworks, Meyerowitz exalts the American experience and universalizes victimhood.

Like Meyerowitz, John Botte also wanted to universalize suffering, however, his project used a different method.

As I look at each picture I can still smell that intensely thick and rancid air. Photographing the aftermath of 9/11 was the single most difficult thing I have ever done. These images are the purest forms of expression for me. They’re not about documentary photography, photojournalism, or any other form of photography. I didn’t have any particular agenda or preconceived visual concept as I took them...I tried to capture as much of the horror of the aftermath as possible, but also to go beyond the horror. I want these images to live forever inside all who see them. And I want people to return to them again and again and take something with them every time.¹⁵

In this quotation from the forward in Botte’s book, he specifically states that he had no “particular agenda”, however, in the next few sentences it becomes apparent that this is not true. His motive was to capture images that would “live forever”. Botte’s project, like Meyerowitz’s, is also a book, slightly smaller at nearly four pounds and with only one photograph per page, and

¹⁵ Botte, *Aftermath*, forward.

sometimes there will be a page with no photo at all. Unlike Meyerowitz's project, whose meticulous timekeeping records the days for the viewer, Botte's project is less structured with no chapters, hardly any captions, and out of chronological order. Within the 214 pages, the reader follows the order as it jumps around Botte's scattered timeline. The few dates he includes skip around. For example, at one point he skips from September 11th to December 23rd and then backtracks to September 14th within twenty pages.¹⁶ All of his photos are shot in black and white and there is no color in his entire project except the title in the front of his book that reads white capital letters pressed onto a bright red background: "UNSEEN PHOTOS BY A NEW YORK CITY COP. JOHN BOTTE".

Botte writes in the beginning of his book that the film he used was not meant to be used for multiple quick shots, but instead he chose all his shots very carefully. Botte says of his project,

Sometimes I would have the camera up to my face holding onto a shot for five or ten minutes with only three or four frames left on the roll. If I took a chance and reloaded, I may very well miss my shot. So I'd study the scene through the camera eye and shoot only when it was time.¹⁷

Every single photo in his book he studied first, then shot, then developed by hand in a darkroom, and then chose to be in his final project. Although he says he did not have a preconceived visual concept, there was *something* behind each shot that convinced him this moment was important to capture, these people or that building as he would "shoot only when it was time".¹⁸ As for color, Botte states that he did not wish to use color as he "never found lasting stimulation in color

¹⁶ Botte, *Aftermath*, 24-46. 9/11 on page 24, 12/23 on page 40, 9/14 on page 46.

¹⁷ Botte, forward.

¹⁸ Ibid., forward.

work. Black and white film always allows [him] the purest form of expression and grants viewers greater freedom of interpretation”.¹⁹ The fact that he decided to take every shot in black and white tells that he did have a visual concept that he wanted to abide by; to him ‘color is color’ and black and white photos create a timeless effect.

That said, the division of his project is unclear and leaves the reader wondering what his motivation was considering there is no clear theme between the photos in any given section. Although Botte’s lack of timeframe seems to imply that the dates are irrelevant, it also serves to release the trauma and grief of these images from time itself and universalize it. After all, memory is not always in chronological order either. In addition, because Botte has a background in law enforcement as with friends and co-workers out on the site with him as he worked, the photographs he took and published in his book demonstrates his tendency to romanticize first responders, many of whom were his friends, a technique that also exalts the American hero.

Meyerowitz and Botte have very different backgrounds and approaches to photography, which is made clear in both the layout and the content of their book projects despite that they both claim the same name, *Aftermath*. These projects are their truth, their point of view, but it was critical for me to remember their backgrounds, as a NYC police officer and a landscape photographer respectively and keep their point of views in mind when analyzing their photographs. As I analyze their photographs in the section below, I keep in mind how the structures of these projects show that they are not merely documentary but informed and intentional choices. Within their books, they both show their desire to create lasting impressions and universalize the victimhood.

¹⁹ Botte, *Aftermath*, forward. Quotes from his *Aftermath* project on the unnumbered pages before the photos begin. The first printed picture begins the project as page 1.

Myth

Just days after the massive attacks, the U.S. had to start the process of dealing with the terror of the attacks and their devastation, but where to begin? With the growing use of the term ‘ground zero’, the feelings of anger, of fear, of the need for vindication, and even some repressed feelings of guilt, rose to the surface. There were many questions: how could this happen on American soil? Who was responsible? How did we not know there was danger? Will this happen again? And—most importantly—why exactly did they attack us in the first place? The myth of American moral exceptionalism was called into question with this event, but the U.S. was not ready to let go of this myth just yet. The answers required introspection and critical reflection that has been a strong point of the U.S..

In Roland Barthes’ renowned work *Mythologies*, he creates a new system based on Ferdinand de Saussure’s semiotic system to explain how the natural process of language production can eventually create myth. Saussure defines the linguistic sign through the *sign*, *signified* and *signifier*. He writes, “The linguistic sign unites, not a thing and a name, but a concept and a sound image. The latter is not the material sound, a purely physical thing, but the psychological imprint of the sound” (Figure 1.2.3).²⁰ The *concept* and *sound image* together become a *sign*, and Saussure then proposes that *concept* becomes *signified* and *sound image* becomes *signifier*.²¹

²⁰ Ferdinand De Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 66.

²¹ Saussure, *Course*, 66-67.

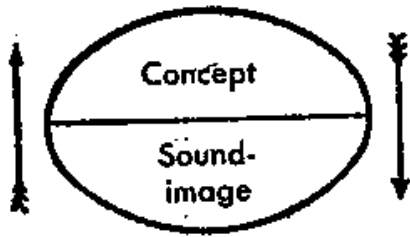


Figure 1. Concept - Sound Image

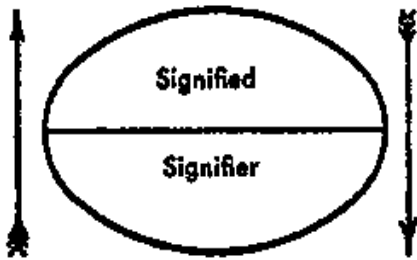


Figure 2. Signified – Signifier



Figure 3. "Tree" Example

The power of language is in how rules are created in social institutions. As Saussure points out many are unconscious of the laws of this complex mechanism and therefore are manipulated by it.

Barthes takes Saussure's first-order semiotic system and applies this creation of language to the creation of myth. He uses the same words *sign*, *signified* and *signifier*, however he takes this one step further through a 'second-order semiological system'. Through the second-order first-order *signs* such as language, pictures, paintings, posters, rituals, etc., become mere *signifiers*.²² This begins the creation of myth as Saussure's 'sign' becomes the *signifier* in

²² Barthes, *Mythologies*, 224. Barthes writes, "It can be seen that in myth there are two semiological systems...a linguistic system, the language (or the modes of representation which are assimilated to it) ...it is the language which gets hold of in order to build its own system; and myth itself, which I shall call the metalanguage".

Barthes' larger system. Once a new *signified* (concept) is placed onto the *signifier* (sound-image), it creates a new *sign*, and this new *sign* is the myth.

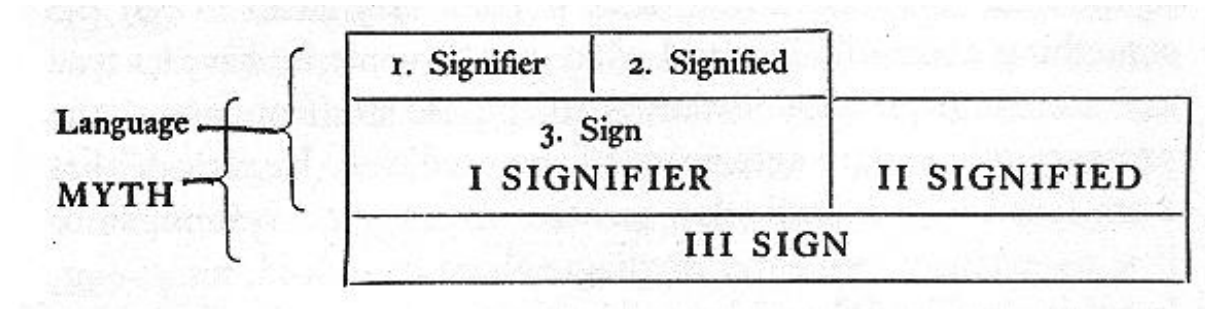


Figure 4 Barthes Myth Semiological System²³

Myth serves two different functions according to Barthes: to point out and notify (“to make us understand something”) and it then imposes this understanding unto the viewer. However, it is significant to note that myth does not hide anything from the viewer, it merely distorts. The language may be obscured by the myth; however, it does not obliterate the meaning. On the contrary, myth alienates the meaning, and to learn their functions, these myths must be deciphered. The photographs from these projects become the *signifiers* and the added layer of certain tropes and intentions from the authors become the *signified*, and ultimately become the new *signs*, or the myth (Figure 4).²⁴ I intend to use Barthes second semiological system to show the relationship between the photographs and the projects they belong to, and how they work together to perpetuate the myth of American exceptionalism.

²³ Barthes, *Mythologies*, 224.

²⁴ Hirsch, “Masking the Subject” in *Family Frames*, 83-85. Hirsch writes, “...we can see the mask as a metaphor for the semiotic lenses or screens through which we read photographs, and through which the images themselves are constructed as objects of social meaning”. These photographs are shots of moments, but with the layered narrative from the author and historical context, these photographs attempt to become stories. But it is important to note that photos are “fragments of stories, never stories themselves” (83-85).

Chapter 2: The Photo Analysis

The Search for Evidence

The search for evidence is not just a search for human bodies, but also an attempt to find anything material left over in order to help identify victims for their families.



Figure 5. Meyerowitz, *Aftermath*, 317

Meyerowitz's photograph (Figure 5) depicts a search for evidence and can be found on page 316-317 in the "Spring" chapter, spanning over two pages with a date, caption and story:

05.28 This is it! The last day of work on the site. Here the workers are raking through the debris one final time. I find myself thinking of Millet's *Gleaners*, and I wonder why it is that so many of these late images stimulate connections to the art of the past. Is it that things are simpler now, and therefore more clearly seen? Or am I holding on to these images, fixing them in my mind by referencing works of

the past to establish continuity? Is it wrong not to simply let them be what they are, people over fields?²⁵

The caption alone says, “Gardeners in the garden of the dead”. When looking at the studium—the content—of this photograph, the viewer can see twenty-one workers on the more cleaned-up site of where the towers collapsed. Most of the workers in the scene are holding rakes and are working through the leftover debris, those that are without rakes are taking a break behind a concrete traffic barrier. Everyone is wearing yellow or orange reflective vest, except two in overalls and hard hats. Behind the workers one can see construction of a new building starting to grow, as well as a mixture of the old and new buildings making up the landscape. In 2006, after his project has been published, Meyerowitz reflects on this particular photograph saying, “...Here we have Millet’s *Gleaners*, and my picture of the rakers. Without a doubt I was referencing - not the painting so much, as in trying to remake the painting, but the act”.²⁶ He says that these men who were cleaning up this area had been on the site for nearly five months cleaning up and searching through the dust, looking for “bones, relics, that would give some identification”.²⁷ Meyerowitz references back to the sturdiness of these people, the devotion and tenacity, that seemed to be an ancient gesture. To Meyerowitz, this is the punctum of the photograph: the sense of hopeless perseverance.

²⁵ Weschler, “Echoes at Ground Zero,” 17.

²⁶ Weschler, 17.

²⁷ Ibid., 17.



Figure 6. Botte, Aftermath, 197.

To compare, consider Botte's image of workers searching for evidence. This photograph is vertical, taking up only one page on the right-hand side of the book (Figure 6). It is on page 197 while the caption for the photo is on 196, alone with no further information. In this photograph one can see steel beams sticking out of the ground, creating a hill upon which at least eleven visible firefighters are nearly all are looking down at the same spot (save two firefighters who appear to be walking away from the scene at the bottom of the photograph). Up the hill, standing on a platform, one lone police officer looks down on the scene. Unlike many of Botte's photographs, this one does have a caption, a single line reading: "Standing on a beam from one of the fall towers, a police officer looks down at the firefighters as they prepare to remove the

remains of a victim.”²⁸ As all his photographs are all in black and white, it is hard to say if they wear different colors, or if there are any major differences between the police officer and the firefighters. The firefighters all wear hard hats and overalls over their dark colored t-shirts and long sleeve shirts. All the men visible are wearing face masks and gloves. The police officer above wears similar attire, minus the overalls, and he carries with him a shovel. The desolation continues in the background until the photograph ends.

When using Barthes’ *Stadium*, I have first examined what exactly is happening in this scene and what has Botte pointed out about it. To start, one is immediately drawn to the police officer, he stands alone above the others looking down on a cluster of firemen. As Botte does not often caption his photographs, it is important to note what he does caption this photo saying, “A police officer looks down as the firefighters.”²⁹ Why is he not also looking at the victim’s remains? Botte is choosing his words carefully, obvious from his lack of use of them, and the wording of this caption matters. Botte phrases it so that the officer is looking down at the firefighters. This gives the impression that Botte has placed the officer above the firefighters, and like a guardian angel, the police officer watches from above the carnage.

When reading the caption, we realize as an audience that these men are attempting to retrieve the remains of someone who has died—it is unclear if this person was a civilian or a first responder. Knowing this, the photograph takes on a new meaning, we are not simply looking at a photograph of destruction, but a photograph full of grief and heartache. The punctum—a pricking sensation—is the part of the photograph that grabs and haunts the viewer.

When placed side by side, the photographs show the evident differences in who they are taking photos of, and how their backgrounds play into why these photos were taken. Botte’s

²⁸ Botte, *Aftermath*, 197.

²⁹ Botte, 197.

photo continues the myth of the police officer, standing over the firemen, like that of an omnipotent, benevolent being. This plays into the hero romanticism that was revived shortly after September 11, firemen and police officers alike were martyrs and their bravery was used as a shield to block out any critique of September 11. The mythical trope of the human perseverance and how Americans are naturally attuned to this quality—it is, after all, part of the fundamental morals of Americans. Those who work get what they deserve, and only by pushing through the darkness do they obtain good things. This is the American Dream. Meyerowitz's photo of the hopeless men raking through the debris shows that this myth is still functioning today and that is not a new concept. These workers looking through the debris desperately hoping to find something of use shows Americans as loyal citizens who will never give up. The devotion of these people working tirelessly for months is described as Meyerowitz as 'permanent': "Look...how sturdy they are. They're bent...they do down there-they never have to get up".³⁰ By referring back to an older time when humans were struggling as they are now, it creates a sense of hope in which life will go on and ultimately strengthens the idea that as long as Americans retain their sense of perseverance, they will never fall. These photographs are a type of signifier, and, when placed next to a signified—in this case, Meyerowitz's reference to *Gleaners*, and Botte's language in his captions—it creates a secondary sign. Botte's photograph does not show "hero", but it connotes hero when coupled with other indicators.

The Workers

The workers include first responders, carpenters, steel welders, First Aid volunteers, and anyone else who worked on the site.

³⁰ Weschler, "Echoes at Ground Zero," 18.

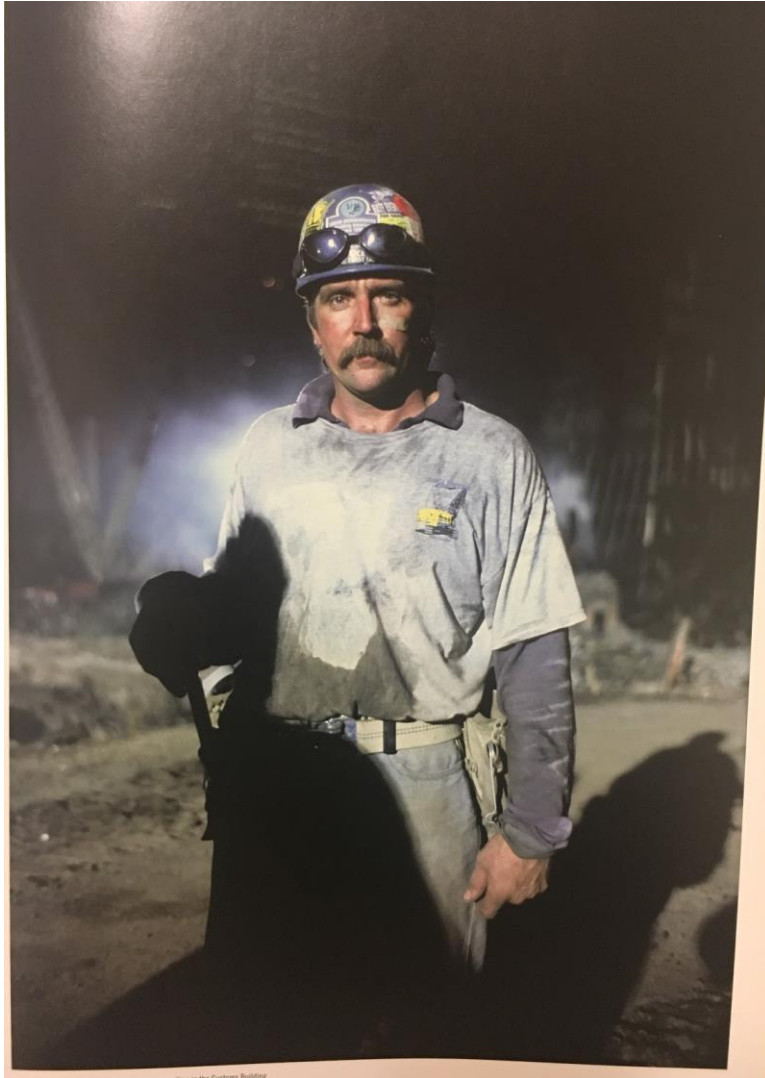


Figure 7. Meyerowitz, *Aftermath*, 147.

Meyerowitz's photograph—the signifier—can be found on page 147 of his project, with a small paragraph on the preceding page giving context to the photograph (Figure 7). The caption-signified-under this photograph says, “A welder wounded by an explosion of buried ammunition in the Customs Building” and right above this caption stands a tall man, a welder, whose face is laden with dust and burn marks. Outside it is dark, but the floodlights from both behind Meyerowitz and behind the man in the photograph keep the area well lit. The top half of the man is bathed in light, while the bottom half is completely in the shadows of other workers on site. The man wears a blue long-sleeved collared t-shirt, with another t-shirt on top. It appears this t-

shirt used to be white, or perhaps a light shade of blue, but now is covered in dirt and dust and is slightly bleached from sun exposure. The man also wears a tool belt over his jeans and a blue hard hat with black sunglasses on top. Multi-colored stickers cover the hard hat, but one sticker in the front identifies him as a Union Ironworker. On his face we see a band-aid under his left eye, indicating the part of him that was hit in the explosion earlier in the day. However, his eyes immediately draw the attention of the viewer- it is Meyerowitz's punctum. There is a slight sheen to his eye, as if holding back tears, and as Meyerowitz writes:

Just after the trumpeter finished [playing Taps], a welder walked up the hill and into the glare of the lights. I could see that he, too, had been affected by the music. I stepped in front of him and made this portrait. Earlier that day, he told me, while he'd been burning down some thickets of rebar and steel in the Customs Building, his welding torch had exploded some buried ammunition, and a piece had flown into his cheek. Five stitches later, he'd gone back to work.³¹

The worker stands in the middle of the frame and is the only part in focus. Behind him we can see the site, the top half almost total darkness, and the ground exposed by the light. There stands a tall building over the worker's right shoulder with many floors lit up, but over his left shoulder we see a leftover piece of wall from one of the WTC towers.

³¹ Meyerowitz, *Aftermath*, 146.



Figure 8. Botte, *Aftermath*, 70.

Botte's photograph I have chosen to analyze for this section is found on page 70 in his book (Figure 8). The photo stands alone, no caption, date or name, just a vertical photograph taking up the entire left page. Without context, the studium is left to what only the eye can see, and in this photo all one can see is a shot of an exhausted police officer resting on an upturned bucket, arms splayed out across a wooden police barricade with both his legs laid out in front of him. He wears a hard hat, gloves, and his goggles. Around his neck lays a breathing mask, and across his chest, in line with his splayed-out leg, rests a shovel. The shovel covers most of the lettering on his shirt, but the letters "-ICE" can be made out. The man does not appear to be making eye contact with either the camera or with Botte himself; he stares off into the distance,

not seeming to see anything besides the vast destruction in front of him. Behind the man are rows of what appear to be large white tubes or plastic tubs, possibly even buckets of some kind. The lightness of the tubs is in stark comparison with the dark clothes the officer wears. Along the ground there is dirt and an empty cup behind the bucket. This photograph is telling us that those working on the ground zero site are exhausted, and this work is draining. Not only is it physically demanding, but the toll of searching through the wreckage is emotional draining.

And yet, it is familiar. Without a framework or caption, the ego attempts to order the photo—the signified—is its compositional alliance with recognizable and well-known depictions of a crucified Christ. Time and time again has the Western world been confronted with the image of Jesus Christ dying on the cross, his arms spread wide, one leg bent and one leg straight out. Jesus Christ, the ultimate martyr, lives in this photograph (Figure 9). This seems to be implying that even though this work feels impossible to complete, there are those out there who are strong enough and willing to make that sacrifice. The point of this photograph is to tell the audience this man is making an ultimate sacrifice; it exalts the common man while engaging a religious understanding to reclaim a land that was attacked with a religious agenda.



³²Figure 9. Diego Velázquez, “The crucified Christ”.

The two photos of heroes and martyrs correspond to their descriptions: Botte and Meyerowitz are attempting to evoke both. For Meyerowitz, before him stands a strong, brave warrior, sad and tired but persistent nonetheless and he refers to this man as if he is *noble*. In an interview with Lawrence Weschler, Meyerowitz says the man is heroic. During the conversation he reveals that the man’s name is Paul Pursley, and that despite knowing that this man is not a nobleman, he still reveres him as such:

Lawrence Weschler: This is some guy who is a working-class guy, patently not a nobleman, you don’t think?

Joel Meyerowitz: No, not a nobleman

LW: And yet a god...

JM: A beautiful combination.³³

He then becomes a mythical hero who is, in reality, just a working man. The welder worker has just been hit by hot metal that forced him to get 5 stitches and yet right after he gets these stitches

³²Diego Rodríguez de Silva y Velázquez, “The crucified Christ,” ca. 1632, oil on canvas, 248 by 169 cm, (Museo Nacional del Prado, Madrid, ES).

³³ Weschler, “Echoes at Ground Zero”, 16-17.

he continues with his work. Meyerowitz points this out, that this average working man was scarred on the job and yet, continues persisting throughout the day. The image of this man, coupled with the caption and story behind the photo, together they take on a different meaning. This is an American hero—his soundtrack is *Taps*, he is almost killed by ammunition, but he doesn't let it stop him. He preserves and continues welding.

The same can be seen from Botte's photograph, as it is reminiscent of Jesus Christ as he dies on the cross; a martyr revered by many as someone who paid the ultimate price. Botte is showing this hero and comparing him to a martyr. This unnamed, anonymous man is taking a break from the heavy load of the day, and the viewer can see plain as day that his job is a struggle, and yet we know that he will eventually get up, brush himself off and continue working along with the others. This is a civil servant and worker at the site who is sacrificing himself for the sake of the greater good—it is not the only reference Botte make to religion-specifically Christian iconography. He also includes a Christmas tree³⁴ on site that, like flags raised at the time, reclaim the site as a Christian site and not one that will be victimized by a holy war.

These working men turn into heroes and martyrs, a kind of person to be admired for working on such a good cause. They are doing the hard work and taking hard blows, but morality keeps them going. It is a survival story of triumph and overcoming a devastating blow as dignified and beautiful- but it can also be understood as something more sinister when viewed as a form of propaganda that prepares a grieving public for retaliation and war. Through the trope-signified-of the average working man placed on top of these photos-signifier-they create a new meaning-a sign. This new sign is the myth of American moral exceptionalism, and it is continued, and the critical questions altered.

³⁴ Botte, *Aftermath*, 40.

The Tower Wreckage

This category is for the carnage left behind, a moment to focus not just on the human lives destroyed but the man—made monuments that defined the New York City skyline for decades. This attack not only took lives, but it also destroyed prominent American symbols that stood for wealth, aspiration and power.



Figure 10. Meyerowitz, *Aftermath*, 136.

Meyerowitz's photograph is in the "Fall" chapter on page 136 (Figure 10). On the bottom half of the image, all that is visible is debris and dusty red construction excavators, and the few humans we can see in the photo blend seamlessly into the landscape. Large beams and pieces of metal cover the surface of the site, and everything is covered in ash. On the right side, much of

the wreckage has created a mound, and from it rises one of the remaining walls. Panning left, the studium of the image transitions to rising smoke from a nearby fire and then to a stream of water arching through the air from a firehose. On the far left, between two circular standing buildings, a stream of sunlight breaks through and bathes the water, the smoke, and the remaining wall in gold. The reflection of the sun can also be seen in the buildings surrounding the site. A large crane stands tall in the middle of the photograph, angled towards the sunlight. This mixture of the death and destruction of ground zero, and the beauty of light and water and air creates an awe-inspiring image. Meyerowitz himself stands in the wreckage, looking up towards the sky, and in between stands fire, water, debris and cranes. The caption of the photos is simple: "Inside the pile, looking west". It is not clear what day he took this photo, but from the context of the book it is between the days of 10/21 and 10/24. The caption of the photo on the following page is: "Inside the pile, looking northwest". Barthes' punctum helps to explain why the image on 136 grabs his attention more, and it is because of the sublime feeling that comes with this destruction. It is the sunlight shining down over the pile that invokes this feeling of excellence and of beauty. But how can there be this juxtaposition from a photograph about September 11? Even Meyerowitz himself had his own doubts on taking photographs of 'beautiful' moments:

It was a stunning fall afternoon. As I stood there- the sun warm on my back, the air so clear, the color so intense - it felt good to be alive. Instantly I felt the shame of that involuntary sensation, as I remembered that I was standing among the dead. It was a defining moment for me. Do I make a photograph of this, or should I let it go? But if I don't make a photograph, what am I doing here? As I watched sunlight and shadow pass in waves over the site, I thought about nature's indifference to our passage on earth. Throughout history, great tragedies have happened on days like

today. And yet it is often nature and time that eventually help move us away from grief, and grant us perspective and hope. I decided to set up my camera.³⁵

In his interview with Weschler, Meyerowitz confesses to being struck by the sublime over the months while on site, “I was recognizing that I was in a new definition of the sublime. That awesome, horrific transformation of this place-although it wasn’t nature itself- it was man acting as nature”.³⁶ Meyerowitz is confronting the passage of time, and nature’s indifference to human suffering in this photograph, all while taking a photo and evoking the sublime.³⁷

³⁵ Meyerowitz, *Aftermath*, 91.

³⁶ Weschler, “Echoes at Ground Zero”, 8.

³⁷ "Sublime, adj. and n.," OED Online, Oxford University Press, <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/192766?rskey=7dIzKw&result=1>. Sublime: Belonging to or designating the highest sphere of thought, existence, or human activity; intellectually or spiritually elevated.



Figure 11: Botte, *Aftermath*, 58-59.

This photograph from Botte's *Aftermath* spans over two pages (58-59), forcing the viewer to physically turn the book vertically if they wish to see the entire picture properly (Figure 11). Using Barthes' *studium* as a frame, in this photograph, the viewer gets a birds-eye-view of almost the entire wreckage site. Surrounding the destruction are tall surviving New York City buildings, in the background is the Brooklyn Bridge, and everything is shrouded in smoke and dust that still seeps from the site. Amidst the tower wreckage, one can see cranes and other construction equipment. Half the site is covered in shadows from other buildings, but there is

plenty of the site that is illuminated by the sun. It seems as if Botte is also evoking the sublime here with the depiction of the devastating landscape as the light touches places where buildings once stood. All in black-and-white and far away from the devastating site, Botte seems to be floating above the scene like an angel. There is no caption, and no date associated with the picture, however on the pages 100-101 there is another shot from the helicopter and a caption on the next page saying:

September 13. Early morning. This was the first flyover of Ground Zero for Police Commissioner Kerik to inspect the scene. There were about six or seven people in that ship, plus the pilots. As Sgt. John O'Hara circled the site from the pilot seat, you could feel the tension of the cabin, even through the thunderous roar of the rotor blades of the helicopter. It was an absolutely incredible site. We made what felt like one hundred laps around the destruction, observing and staring in stunned silence.³⁸

Though it is not altogether clear whether the photograph on pages 58-59 was taken at the same time as the photo on September 13th, the destruction does still look fresh and one can assume it may have been done the same day or on a day around this time.

The two photographs when placed side by side have a 180-degree effect. From Meyerowitz's point of view, the viewer looks up to the sky and in the background, one can see two circular buildings rising from the smoke and in between them the sun peeks through. This photograph invokes the feeling of the sublime; of nature and its terrifying, awe-inspiring indifference to man-kind. In stark contrast, from Botte's point of view, the viewer is in the sky looking down upon the destruction through the clouds. And in the front right hand side of the

³⁸ Botte, *Aftermath*, 101.

photo there are two circular buildings where once can see the start of the end of the destruction. The points of view are completely opposite in these photo, and yet their effect is the same: terrible, awe-inspiring beauty.

Meyerowitz's invocation of the sublime, and sun and the water and the beautiful sky is seen in art throughout U.S. history - as seen in a painting from Albert Bierstadt titled "Among the Sierra Nevada Mountains" (Figure 12).³⁹ Finding beauty in the destruction is another example of American perseverance that depicts U.S. citizens as victims who found the strength to persevere. Not to say, of course, that they were not entitled to healing, however, evoking the sublime masks a lot of the problems that did lead to the attacks. Botte's use of a religious tone also invokes that feeling of the sublime. Flying above the site, one takes on the feeling of looking down from the heavens but more similar to that of an angel looking down in sadness at the scene laid before her. The myth (sign) is the sublime and angels—again universalizing victimhood and recalling Christian religious icons in the face of a holy war.

Another example, or possible reading, would be to compare these images to photographs taken of Hiroshima just after the U.S. dropped Little Boy on the city. However, unlike the projects and photos that came after September 11, the photos of Hiroshima and Nagasaki are not viewed as tragically beautiful- only tragic (Figure 13).

³⁹ Albert Bierstadt, "Among the Sierra Nevada, California," 1868, oil on canvas, 183 by 305 cm, (Smithsonian American Art Museum, Washington, D.C.).



Figure 12. *Among the Sierra Nevada Mountains, California* by Albert Bierstadt, 1868.



⁴⁰Figure 13: *Hiroshima after the first atomic bomb.*

⁴⁰ "In Pictures: Hiroshima, the First Atomic Bomb," *BBC News*, last modified August 6, 2015.

The Projects

Both Meyerowitz and Botte perpetuate the myth of American moral exceptionalism through their projects by creating images that universalize suffering by using historical and religious tropes. Christian iconography has led to crusades and justified holy wars in the past, and these images are showing up again in these projects. They strip the U.S. of its history, of the contexts, of the social and political climate, but instead they show only the pain—the tragedy left behind by this attack. The U.S. public after the devastation of 9/11 began a war; the War on Terror, the so-called ‘Good War’, and these projects and the myths they sold helped to smooth the way, and eased the guilt and reminded the U.S., and the entire world, that they will “never forget” September 11. After the attacks, war mongering become more common in politics, ads, and even in films. Using the term ground zero was just the beginning for the U.S. public in rebranding its history and creating the myths around September 11. These two projects contain photographs at the site commonly referred to as “ground zero”. A term that itself evokes a sense of devastation and loss.

Chapter 3: Ground Zero

Initially the site of destruction where the towers collapsed was called the Pile due to the pile of rubble, ash, steel and human remains that first responders struggled to clear out and search through for months between 2001 to 2002. Eventually the Pile began to be called Ground Zero, and with this dramatic change, the implications changed. When the term ground zero—a signifier—is coupled with 9/11—the signified—it now connects 9/11 to its previous meaning. Before it seemed a hopeless heaping pile, but then a heaping pile of rubble became a locus of devastation semantically vaulted to one of the greatest crimes against humanity; the dropping of the atomic bombs.

The first use of the term Ground Zero was when the U.S. dropped atomic bombs in two separate attacks in Japan during the Second World War. In August of 1945, over the span of three days, the U.S. dropped two atomic bombs; Little Boy in Hiroshima on August 6th, and Fat Man in Nagasaki on August 9th. Between the two attacks 150,000, and up to 250,000, people were killed with most remains vanishing in the aftermath. Another 100,000 people were hurt, and lasting effects are still seen today.⁴¹ The fires that started after the bombings, as well as the bombings themselves, destroyed large percentages of the cities themselves, leaving behind massive destruction. According to the Campaign of Nuclear Disarmament, nearly 92% of the buildings in Hiroshima were destroyed and 22.7% of Nagasaki also destroyed after the initial blast and the fires that started after.⁴² How can the U.S. then use the term “Ground Zero” when describing an attack on their own land without understanding the semantic link it has to the past and their crimes against humanity with so-called “weapons of mass destruction” that formed the basis of all wars since?

Ground Zero in this case is used to describe the rubble left behind, the place of death, of massacre, and though its original use does not differ much, it did have a very different outcome.⁴³ The attacks in Japan were absolutely lethal, in less than one second, people were vaporized by the blast.⁴⁴ The U.S. took the signifier and applied a new signified (meaning);

⁴¹ Barton J. Bernstein, "The Atomic Bombings Reconsidered," *Foreign Affairs* 74, no. 1 (1995): 135-52.

⁴² "The Bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki," *Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament*, last modified April 4, 2018.

⁴³ Tom Geoghegan. "Is It Time to Retire 'Ground Zero'?" *BBC News*, (Washington D.C.), September 8, 2011. "The term was first used in 1946 in a New York Times report about the bombing of Hiroshima in Japan, according to the Oxford English Dictionary, and it soon came to mean the ground underneath an exploding bomb. Its first use in relation to 9/11 came within a few hours. "Ground Zero" is thought to have first been mentioned by a survivor in a television interview and subsequently by reporters." The use of the term "ground zero" is not accidental, though it is commonly thought that the term came about originally from a victim of the event when speaking with reporters and then it continued being used by other mass media.

⁴⁴ "Hiroshima and Nagasaki Bombing Timeline," *Atomic Heritage Foundation*, last modified April 26, 2016, <https://www.atomicheritage.org/history/hiroshima-and-nagasaki-bombing-timeline>.

instead of being the site of an atomic blast that the U.S. initiated, it became a place in which destruction of a U.S. site caused a re-establishment. This term shifted into a new sign to take on both a connotation of victimhood and a new American myth of martyrdom. Once mass media began using this term, the language around ground zero began to form a clearer shape; a symbol for how the U.S. felt after such an attack.⁴⁵ It was now their Hiroshima, but they were the victims “of evil”. And yet, the U.S. had repressed their actions against Hiroshima that they declared justifiable at the time because of Pearl Harbor. The usage of this term would seem to indicate that the U.S. was (quietly) attempting to acknowledge the devastation of their attack in 1945, but, this claim on victimhood was really justification for their future actions. Gene Ray writes in his novel *Terror and the Sublime*,

In a catastrophic ethical and political failure, U.S. leaders committed a crime against humanity for which they have never been held to account and which U.S. citizens have so far avoided confronting. For more than 50 years, American denial of Hiroshima and Nagasaki has been protected by a carefully administered myth according to which the obliteration of those cities and the people who lived in them was a 'necessary' action.⁴⁶

The dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima was seen as a morally sound action, but the attacks on 9/11 were not. This, of course, is not an attempt to justify the terrorist attacks or to say the U.S. did not have a right to self-defense, however, one needs to analyze the use of ‘ground zero’ nonetheless.⁴⁷

⁴⁵ Geoghegan, “Is It Time,” 2011.

⁴⁶ Gene Ray, *Terror and the Sublime in Art and Critical Theory: From Auschwitz to Hiroshima to September 11*, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 53.

⁴⁷ Ray, *Terror*, 58.

In 2011, the Mayor of New York City, Michael Bloomberg urged others in a speech to stop referring to this area as ground zero, that NYC can start a new chapter of healing.⁴⁸ Mayor Bloomberg said in his speech, “We will never forget the devastation of the area that came to be known as 'ground zero.' Never...but the time has come to call those sixteen acres what they are: The World Trade Center and the National September 11th Memorial and Museum.” Today, the term Ground Zero is no longer the official title of the area, and many- especially those in New York, do not call it by that name. Instead it is referred to the World Trade Center Memorial and Museum, and now there is the One World Trade Center right across the street from the memorial.

Outside of New York City, the term ground zero has not been so easily replaced, and understandably so as the trauma and terror of that day undoubtedly hit those who had to continue living through it day in and day out for the following years harder than those who do not and did not live in the city. Chris Smith, a contributing editor to the New York Magazine is quoted as saying: “What's interesting is that Ground Zero doesn't really have much currency as a term in everyday New York life now.”⁴⁹ As the nation continued to call the site “Ground Zero”, the term began to immortalize the site to just the moment the towers fell. For the city to heal, they had to let go of the tragic name and the implications it carried that plagued their memory when it came to the World Trade Center.

The term “Ground Zero” has changed over the years, going from the pile to ground zero to now the World Trade Center 9/11 Memorial and Museum and One World Trade Center. In Susan Sontag’s *Regarding the Pain of Others*, she states that we cannot compare others pain with our own. But what does it mean to those who have experienced a true “Ground Zero” that we

⁴⁸ Geoghegan, “Is It Time,” 2011.

⁴⁹ Geoghegan, 2011.

have called the World Trade Center destruction site “Ground Zero” as well? Ground Zero’s initial meaning was in reference to the location in which an atomic bomb directly hit and from which there are no remains.⁵⁰ If it is true that we cannot compare other’s pain to our own, how can the U.S. claim such a title it has not truly experienced. This victimization of their own spoke heavily on how the U.S. public viewed the attack; unprompted, underserved and unexpected. Not to disregard the lives lost, of course, such violence as was committed on 9/11 was completely undeserved by those who suffered. However, the U.S. government and public maintained this feeling of victimhood with hardly any attempts to figure out *why*.

The aftermath of 9/11 was devastating, and many still today do not know how to talk about it properly, but it did create a sense of unity in the United States against their enemy: "The term 'ground zero' zips together a discourse that sets up an equivalence between Pearl Harbor and September 11 in order to indulge a popular demand for ferocious vengeance and at the same time justify it with false-moral and false-historical authority".⁵¹ This asserts that the acceptance and use of ground zero as a term was in the same context Pearl Harbor was used, in order to placate the general U.S. public into thinking that any action committed by the US after this event was morally justified. It was not the U.S.'s fault, and all the blame was shifted onto Al Qaeda and the Taliban. With the acceptance of this term, the U.S. absolved itself of any further guilt and simultaneously then hid any of their actions leading up to this event. By applying the tropes of the average working man, the martyr, the hopeful and hopeless, and religious iconography, it universalized suffering and the myths were made stronger by hiding the guilt of how the U.S. reacted and how it justified its use of violence in the aftermath of the attacks of 9/11.

⁵⁰ Michael Quinion, "Ground Zero," *World Wide Words*, November 24, 2001.

⁵¹ Ray, *Terror*, 57.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

Today the site is now called the World Trade Center 9/11 Memorial and Museum, and no longer does it officially bear the term ground zero. Out of respect for the victims and their families, the name has been retired and changed. However, what does the new name mean? The memorial is the layout of the ground floor of the buildings, two large black square pools with names inscribed in every inch for every life lost. The museum goes underground, showing the viewer an exact timeline of the events that day, a picture of all the victims and their names. The U.S. mourns these losses by putting together all the information about the victims that they can, they go through every step of the day repeatedly, as if one day the videos will change, and the terrorists will be stopped at airport security and not let on the plane. As if to change this event from every happening. The U.S. has changed its airport security, who it lets in and out, who can fly on planes, who they watch more closely; there have been many questions asked as to how the U.S. can better protect itself to keep this from happening again. However, this was no senseless act, and America's myth of guiltless martyrdom will need to be examined further if we wish to understand such violence.

The U.S. will need to go through a dramatic self-analysis by the incoming generations to fully enlighten themselves. By looking at the actions of the United States in Japan and in Afghanistan, and by trying to understand how the language and the myths have had a significant impact on their response, the U.S. can finally, hopefully, begin the process of truly healing.

“Finally, that's what mourning means: accepting the burden of change. Going on, not as before, but differently - with the awareness that in the wake of a disclosure, more, and not less, is demanded of us”⁵²

-Gene Ray, *Terror and the Sublime in Art and Critical Theory: From Auschwitz to Hiroshima to September 11*

⁵² Ray, *Terror*, 2.

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