

Never Forget - Constructed Notions of Belonging at Ground Zero

A Senior Honors Thesis

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for graduation  
*with research distinction in Comparative Studies* in the undergraduate colleges  
of The Ohio State University

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June 2010

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*Dedicated to my parents and sister, for their endless and continuing support for all my strange endeavors.*

*I am forever indebted to Professor Morgan Liu for advising me through several thesis topic changes over the past couple of years. I express my deepest thanks to Professor Philip Armstrong for agreeing to advise the project at the last minute. I greatly appreciate Professor Leo Coleman for providing useful and insightful feedback and encouragement for the project. I would like to thank Professor Gene Holland for our great debates about the particulars of tourism. To Professor Jennifer Suchland I would like to express thanks for her pep talks during the final stages of writing. Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family for at the very least humoring me with lengthy and interesting discussions about tourism and travel.*

**Introduction:  
American Distance after September 11<sup>th</sup>**

The 2002 edition of *The Best American Travel Writing* features an article written by Scott Anderson, a travel writer who was living in New York in 2001 when two planes flew into the Twin Towers. In his piece titled “Canal St.,” he describes his experience volunteering as a rescue worker immediately after the collapse of the towers. As Anderson talks about his volunteer work, he uses imagery from his experience documenting war scenes.<sup>1</sup> His disorientation with the altered landscape makes him a visitor in his own city.<sup>2</sup> The inclusion of this piece in a travel anthology, one which almost always features stories about the process of travel or non-American spaces, is confusing. But what exactly makes this piece relevant? The trip the two planes took from Boston to Manhattan? His short walk south to the pile of concrete and steel where the towers used to stand? His previous experience as a travel writer? An inability to believe that such an attack actually happened on U.S. soil?

The aim of this paper is to contest the authority of physical space, or rather, the validity of using physical space as a parameter for identity. This argument looks at Ground Zero tourism in order to take an analytical approach to the effects of 9/11 through the lens of tourism, an activity that is generally assumed to be contingent upon movement through unfamiliar space, space that is not one’s home. In the past, tourism sites have been understood as a popular interpretation of which cultures inhabit which spaces, a part of which is an understanding of who ascribes to those cultures (non-tourists) and who views them (tourists). However, looking at 9/11 through the lens of tourism, makes it apparent that the spatial distinctions that generally

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<sup>1</sup> Anderson, Scott. *Below Canal St.* 2001. *The Best American Travel Writing*. 2002 ed. New York, New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002. 11-19. Print.

<sup>2</sup> Anderson, Scott. *Below Canal St.* 2001. *The Best American Travel Writing*. 2002 ed. New York New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2002. 11-19. Print.

identify tourists and non-tourists are insufficient criteria for distinguishing to whom the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> belong – where those cultural boundaries lie.

This paper begins by taking up Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett's discussion of the quarantine of Ground Zero to explore how the quarantine, coupled with news coverage of September 11<sup>th</sup>, simultaneously rendered everyone an outsider to the event and at the same time as an indirect victim. Continuing in this vein, the section following demonstrates that tourism at Ground Zero is situated within the context of a cultural obsession with preservation, perhaps made more evident by the very public display of the mortality of space (the collapse of the Twin Towers) and the massive collection of memorabilia related to September 11<sup>th</sup>. Then, it explains the process by which two tourism sites at Ground Zero, the Tribute WTC Visitor Center and the Ground Zero Museum Workshop attempt to construct a concrete understanding of tourists and non-tourists, using the notion of the 9/11 Community. In the next section, it becomes apparent that the Visitor Center and Museum Workshop's construction of community poorly reflect the many ways in which people were effected by September 11<sup>th</sup>. Finally, the last section ties the construction of the 9/11 Community back to the question of space and belonging.

Since tourism in this sense is considered a practice performed by a demographic that is assumed to possess expendable incomes, this paper relies heavily upon travel reviews, newspaper articles and literature about Ground Zero tourism, all of which are assumed to be accessible by consumers and producers of tourism in the U.S. Additionally, these sources are treated as elements of a wider discourse about tourism, which emerges as a conflict about belonging, cultural ownership and "tourist" as an identity, at Ground Zero tourism sites.

## 9/11 Quarantine

On September 11<sup>th</sup>, a group of terrorists flew two planes into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center; shortly after, both of the towers collapsed killing thousands of people who were still inside and standing around the buildings. The event sent a wave of emotional devastation outward from what is now known as Ground Zero – diminishing in intensity as it moved away, gaining in intensity as it encountered a loved one of a possible (or known) victim. Psychologically, it jolted most of the world – people were afraid of either a follow-up attack or the impending U.S. retaliation. While many people have made generalizations regarding its social impact, the specifics are still difficult to discern almost a decade later.

Immediately after the World Trade Center's North Tower was hit, police and other rescue workers arrived at the base of the building and forced as many people as they could to leave the area. With debris falling from where the American Airlines flight 11 flew into the building, onlookers and workers evacuating the building were led away from the immediate vicinity. However, after the collapse of both towers, those who wanted to experience the tragedy that they (possibly narrowly) escaped were unable to approach the rubble – access was restricted to rescue workers and volunteers only. Although images of September 11<sup>th</sup> were shown repeatedly in the media, the same photographs and footage were recycled until news crews and photographers were finally allowed to enter Ground Zero, escorted by rescue workers. It was not until a week later that the NBC news crew, in the company of FEMA workers, was able to film within the borders of Ground Zero security.<sup>3</sup> However, the general-public, including Manhattan residents and those who worked in the buildings, were denied access unless they volunteered to help with clean up and reconstruction.

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<sup>3</sup> *Headline: America On Alert / One Week Later / Giuliani and Annan Interviews.* By Tom Brokaw and David Gregory. NBC, 2001. *NBC Evening News for Tuesday, Sep 18, 2001.* *Vanderbilt Television News Archive.* Web. 7 May 2010. <<http://tvnews.vanderbilt.edu.proxy.lib.ohio-state.edu/program.pl?ID=645943>>.

Within a couple of days following the attack, the city began to treat all Ground Zero onlookers as if they were gawking, irreverent tourists. There was a general immediate panic that the site would be exploited and abused by visitors – that their presence and photographs would somehow disrespect the dead, who were still buried in the rubble at Ground Zero. Mayor Giuliani attempted to ban amateur photography; approximately two weeks after September 11<sup>th</sup>, shaken visitors were confronted by signs saying, “WARNING! No cameras or video equipment permitted! VIOLATORS will be prosecuted and equipment seized!”<sup>4</sup> When photographer Joel Meyerowitz attempted to take photographs of the scene of people standing outside of the Ground Zero barriers, a cop told him “No photographs buddy, this is a crime scene.”<sup>5</sup> An announcement issued by the Mayor’s office said that any photographs or records taken of the area would have to be approved by the Police Commissioner.<sup>6</sup>

Over a week later, areas south of Canal St<sup>7</sup> were still inaccessible to most people. Those who wanted to return to their place of residence in TriBeCa, Battery Park City and Chinatown had to present some form of proof of residency in those neighborhoods. All non-residents were prevented from gaining access to lower Manhattan. However, officers who were working twelve-hour shifts along Canal St. occasionally offered to put up images of missing people for those who could not get past security.<sup>8</sup>

While it was very difficult to gain access to Ground Zero, people found other ways of coping with the collapse of the Twin Towers. American flags accompanied possessions and

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<sup>4</sup> Sonnenfeld, Paula. *World Trade Center / Torres Gemelas*. Photograph. New York. *PicasaWeb*. Google, 23 Sept. 2008. Web. 10 May 2010. <<http://picasaweb.google.com/Paula.sonnenfeld/WorldTradeCenterTorresGemelas#5249062942128699810>>.

<sup>5</sup> "Q&A With Joel Meyerowitz." *Aftermath by Joel Meyerowitz*. 2006. Web. 01 May 2010. <<http://www.phaidon.com/aftermath/qanda.html>>.

<sup>6</sup> Coletti, Elisabetta. "City: No More Photographs of World Trade Center Site." *Associated Press*. Boston.com, 26 Sept. 2001. Web. 27 Apr. 2010. <[http://911research.wtc7.net/cache/wtc/groundzero/boston\\_photoban.htm](http://911research.wtc7.net/cache/wtc/groundzero/boston_photoban.htm)>.

<sup>7</sup> Immediately following September 11<sup>th</sup>, Canal St. became a constructed border to delimited the conceptual edge of Ground Zero.

<sup>8</sup> Simon, Scott. "Analysis: Scene of the terrorist attack in New York City and reaction from people there." *Weekend Edition Saturday (NPR)* (22 Sep. 2001): Newspaper Source. *EBSCO*. Web. 9 May 2010.

pictures of missing people and known victims in a citywide covering of shrines. Three weeks after the towers collapsed, the Department of Parks and Recreation banned shrines from the city's parks. The shrines received so much publicity that travel columns reported on the locations of shrines that the city had not yet dismantled, such as those at St. Vincent's Hospital, Union Square, Penn Station, and Grand Central Station.<sup>9</sup> News articles began to refer to the smoke rising from the altered Manhattan skyline as a national shrine.<sup>10</sup> Residents who were barred from moving through the altered landscape had to find other ways of comprehending the collapse of the towers.

Unable to view the destruction themselves, people began stockpiling memorabilia. However, the memorials and shrines were eventually cleaned up and the existing debris was sold or donated to collectors for museums. The debris that had managed to fall outside of the sequestered zone of Ground Zero was quickly collected and thrown in dumpsters, archived, or incorporated into shrines. Unless New Yorkers volunteered to help in some way at Ground Zero, they were left to experience the collapse of the Twin Towers second-hand. Along Canal St., where people waited to return to their apartments, vendors sold \$5 t-shirts with slogans like "America under attack" and \$2 photographs of planes flying into the Twin Towers.<sup>11</sup> The collapse of the two towers completely changed the landscape of the city. However, the quarantine meant that the new geography could only be explored in either the abstract and virtual realm of the internet and media or the tactile realm of collected rubble and purchased memorabilia. The only accessible evidence in the landscape was the absence of both a shadow over Manhattan and the absence of the deceased among the rhythm of bodies moving through the

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<sup>9</sup> "Planning Your Trip." *Dayton Daily News*. *NewsBank: America's Newspapers*, 14 Oct. 2001. Web. 09 Mar. 2010.

<sup>10</sup> Simon, Scott. "Analysis: Scene of the terrorist attack in New York City and reaction from people there." *Weekend Edition Saturday (NPR)* (22 Sep. 2001): Newspaper Source. *EBSCO*. Web. 9 May 2010.

<sup>11</sup> Simon, Scott. "Analysis: Scene of the terrorist attack in New York City and reaction from people there." *Weekend Edition Saturday (NPR)* (22 Sep. 2001): Newspaper Source. *EBSCO*. Web. 9 May 2010.

city. Residents viewed and learned about September 11<sup>th</sup> with the same resources available to everyone else.

A few years later, anthropologist Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett remembers, “this ban index[ed] the quarantine that separated the disaster from the rest of the city. We knew it was there, but we could not visit the site.”<sup>12</sup> However, the ban was loosely enforced. The same article that announced the ban on photography and video also quoted an officer, who admitted that the city had charged very few people for documentation of Ground Zero.<sup>13</sup> September 11<sup>th</sup> has become one of the most visually documented events in history – through the media as well as amateur video and photography websites like YouTube and Flickr.<sup>14</sup> A YouTube video taken three weeks after the attack reveals that police barricaded the site from visitors. Even the official Tribute WTC Visitor Center video is shot through a hole in the fence surrounding Ground Zero.<sup>15</sup> These visual artifacts depict the severity of the quarantine.

### **Preserving the Buildings, the Event, the People, the Rubble, etc.... Becoming Memorabilia<sup>16</sup>**

When permanent and semi-permanent memorials and museums finally opened up, New Yorkers were either part of the 9/11 Community or paying for their entrance along with all of the other tourists. The almost immediate historicization of the collapse made it difficult to discern who was and was not a tourist. Even New Yorkers were sneaking photographs and purchasing

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<sup>12</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. "Kodak Moments, Flashbulb Memories: Reflections on 9/11." *TDR (1988-)* 47.1 (Spring 2003): 11-48. *JSTOR*. Web. 22 Apr. 2010. P12.

<sup>13</sup> Coletti, Elisabetta. "City: No More Photographs of World Trade Center Site." *Associated Press*. Boston.com, 26 Sept. 2001. Web. 27 Apr. 2010. <[http://911research.wtc7.net/cache/wtc/groundzero/boston\\_photoban.htm](http://911research.wtc7.net/cache/wtc/groundzero/boston_photoban.htm)>.

<sup>14</sup> For an analytical discussion about the production of visual evidence of ideas as they are proliferated through media and popular culture see Maureen Mahon's "The Visible Evidence of Cultural Producers." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 29 (2000): 467-92. *JSTOR*. Web. 27 Apr. 2010.

<sup>15</sup> *About Us History Channel Video. Tribute WTC Visitor Center*. History Channel, 2007. Web. 02 May 2010. <<http://www.tributewtc.org/aboutus/videoLarge.php>>.

<sup>16</sup> This is a colloquial term referring to someone who hoards mementos. See Harriet Schechter's self-help book *Shedding Sentimental Clutter*.



the 9/11 memorabilia sold on Canal St. The actions of Manhattan residents made it almost impossible to tell who was a tourist. The same people who were taking as many pictures as possible of Ground Zero and collecting any form of memorabilia, said, “I will remember this moment forever.” Although people are still on some level concerned with Ground Zero becoming too touristy, the process of grieving through memorials and museums has rendered the tourist/not-tourist distinction almost obsolete. The documentation of September 11<sup>th</sup> – the production and collection of memorabilia – went viral.

As soon as the Twin Towers collapsed, people were quick to discuss all that they had taken for granted.<sup>17</sup> After 9/11, “the view from your window is all the more precious because it may vanish some day, along with everything you hold ordinary.”<sup>18</sup> The motto of September 11<sup>th</sup> remembrance, “never forget”, has come to refer less to the towers themselves than their disappearance and the people who were killed in the process. The museums and memorials focus on the stark contrast of before and after – now you see the Twin Towers, now you don’t. Businesses with plans to publish materials with the New York skyline photoshopped the buildings out of the image – the image of the skyline without the towers, the nation’s memorial, was the focus of a culture of grief.<sup>19</sup> The absence of the two buildings became the focal point for coping with the event – people were suddenly starkly aware of the mortality of space. Now, in addition to worrying about completing the proverbial checklist of places to visit before we die, we need to worry about their mortality as well. However, in the event that our dream

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<sup>17</sup> It is possible that the fear of taking something for granted was linked to a paranoia of both being tourists and becoming tourists by acting as voyeurs – observing something without an understanding of its larger implications. For a discussion of the fetishizing of horrific events for tourism see Erika M. Robb’s “Violence and Recreation: Vacationing in the Realm of Dark Tourism.” *Anthropology and Humanism* 34.1 (2009): 51-60. *Anthrosource*. Web. 20 Apr. 2010. For an example of voyeuristic tourism that is unrelated to events that are specifically tragic, see Melissa Schrift’s “The Angola Prison Rodeo: Inmate Cowboys and Institutional Tourism.” *Ethnology* 43.4 (2004): 331-44. *JSTOR*. Web. 22 Apr. 2010.

<sup>18</sup> Goldstein, Richard. "Day of Attunement Observing 9/11 The Jewish Way." *The Village Voice*. AlterNet, 4 Sept. 2002. Web. 30 Apr. 2010. <[http://www.alternet.org/story/14031/day\\_of\\_attunement\\_observing\\_9\\_11\\_the\\_jewish\\_way/](http://www.alternet.org/story/14031/day_of_attunement_observing_9_11_the_jewish_way/)>.

<sup>19</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. "Kodak Moments, Flashbulb Memories: Reflections on 9/11." *TDR (1988-)* 47.1 (Spring 2003): 11-48. *JSTOR*. Web. 22 Apr. 2010.

destinations disappear, massive documentation will serve as an ample source for a memorial that we may visit in their place.

The nation has become obsessed with remembrance and preservation. Anything connected to September 11<sup>th</sup> has potential to become memorabilia. As one writer impatiently stated less than a year later, “Mourning in America never ends until the last commemorative coin is sold. Closure is another word for nothing left to show.”<sup>20</sup> However, the world seems to have an endless supply of September 11<sup>th</sup> memorabilia. Seven and a half years later an article reveals that the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey have a PanAm hangar at John F. Kennedy Airport that is full of material that was recovered from Ground Zero and is waiting to be dispersed to appropriate tributes.<sup>21</sup> However, the distribution of the hangar contents means more, rather than less, to show. The material that is stored in the hangar will be shown publicly in various military installations in Colorado Springs. The places to which the material is given will become part of the network of September 11<sup>th</sup> tourism sites throughout the United States.

The museums and memorials themselves are producing additional memorabilia. At the Tribute WTC Visitors Center, visitors are asked to fill out a card answering the question, “How have you been changed by the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, or what action can you take in the spirit of Tribute to help or educate another?”<sup>22</sup> The answers are then posted throughout the website and become a part of the memorial itself.

In January of 2002, a viewing platform was open to the public to allow people to view Ground Zero from a safe distance. During its short lifespan the platform was turned into a

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<sup>20</sup> Goldstein, Richard. "Day of Attunement Observing 9/11 The Jewish Way." *The Village Voice*. AlterNet, 4 Sept. 2002. Web. 30 Apr. 2010. <[http://www.alternet.org/story/14031/day\\_of\\_attunement\\_observing\\_9\\_11\\_the\\_jewish\\_way/](http://www.alternet.org/story/14031/day_of_attunement_observing_9_11_the_jewish_way/)>.

<sup>21</sup> Benzel, Lance. "Schriever AFB to Host Reminder of 9/11 Steel, Schriever, Beam – Military – Colorado Springs Gazette, CO." *Colorado Springs Gazette*. 26 Apr. 2010. Web. 03 May 2010. <<http://www.gazette.com/articles/steel-97743-schriever-beam.html>>.

<sup>22</sup> *Tribute WTC Visitor Center*. Web. 10 Apr. 2010. <<http://www.tributewtc.org/index.php>>.

memorial by visitors who covered the bare wood in comments, images and flowers.<sup>23</sup> Rather than disposing of the platform after it closed in June of the same year, New York State museum collected portions and incorporated them into its World Trade Center exhibit.<sup>24</sup> Visitors to the ongoing exhibit at the NYS museum experience a memorial of a memorial – the preservation of one element of the process of memorializing September 11<sup>th</sup>.

The NYS museum is among many museums and memorial sites for September 11<sup>th</sup>. Two in particular, the Ground Zero Museum Workshop and the Tribute WTC Visitor Center in Manhattan, have become focal points for the preservation of everything related to the Twin Towers. The Ground Zero Museum Workshop displays photographs taken by the owner, Gary Marlon Suson, as well as artifacts he collected from Ground Zero or saved from dumpsters. Among photographs he took of the recovery inside Ground Zero are numerous photographs that document his own experience as the official FDNY photographer. Like other memorials, Suson's museum displays detailed documentation of the creation of the museum and the acquisition of the artifacts and photographs displayed.<sup>25</sup> Many of the captions describe the difficulty of photographing rescue workers. One of the captions is so thorough that a visitor commented:

I really admire the hours he put in and the emotion he captured. But in this setting I do not want to hear about being in the right position or luckily avoiding debris hitting you [...] That being said, I would recommend this [museum] to everyone. Holding a piece of metal from the debris or especially for me, seeing a piece of the airplane that hit the building will bring home the events of 9/11 in a tangible way.<sup>26</sup>

It is important to note that the visitor, despite their complaint, still appreciated the museum.

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<sup>23</sup> "The Public Viewing Platform." *The Ground Zero Memorial*. ArtAID, 2005. Web. 03 May 2010. <<http://www.artaid.org/publicviewingplatform.html>>.

<sup>24</sup> New York State Museum. *PHASE 2 OF WORLD TRADE CENTER EXHIBITION OPENS FEB.1 AT NYS MUSEUM*. Press Releases. Jan. 2003. Web. 9 May 2010. <<http://www.nysm.nysed.gov/press/2003/wtc2.cfm>>.

<sup>25</sup> *Ground Zero Museum Workshop Tours*. Web. 30 Apr. 2010. <<http://www.groundzeromuseum.com/lh.htm>>.

<sup>26</sup> Joekg. "Moving Experience with One Small Exception." Rev. of *Ground Zero Museum Workshop*. *Ground Zero Museum Workshop: Traveler Reviews*. TripAdvisor, 28 Apr. 2010. Web. 30 Apr. 2010. <[http://www.tripadvisor.com/ShowUserReviews-g60763-d626630-r62666754-Ground\\_Zero\\_Museum\\_WorkshopNew\\_York\\_City\\_New\\_York.html](http://www.tripadvisor.com/ShowUserReviews-g60763-d626630-r62666754-Ground_Zero_Museum_WorkshopNew_York_City_New_York.html)>.

While no one was entirely uncritical of the extent to which all things related to September 11<sup>th</sup> were documented, it seems that the desire for preservation resonates stronger than a concern for public duplication, repetition and commercialization of material. Similar to the willingness of individuals to compromise individual freedoms immediately following the attack, people quickly set aside their unease with perpetual historicization in order to ensure that nothing is forgotten.<sup>27</sup>

After the Twin towers collapsed, the availability of large quantities of photographs and footage almost immediately historicized the event. After they recovered from the shock, people began posting visual documentation of September 11<sup>th</sup> on the internet. Many organizations started to collect these images in order to place them in exhibits.

The families of people who had been inside the towers during their collapse posted a large number of “Missing” flyers around the city when rumors of unidentified survivors sitting in hospital beds or wandering around Manhattan with amnesia started to circulate among them. With the help of National Guardsmen, Louis Nevaer collected the flyers for preservation. A year later, the flyers were part of a traveling exhibit titled *Missing: Last Seen at the World Trade Center on September 11<sup>th</sup>*.<sup>28</sup> Many people were uncomfortable with the exhibit’s display of images of people who died on 9/11. They felt that the deaths of September 11<sup>th</sup> victims were still too fresh to be displayed around the U.S.<sup>29</sup> Was *Missing* sharing an event or selling out?<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> For another example of meticulous preservation, see the UNESCO World Heritage Foundation, which preserves “legacy from the past, what we live with today, and what we pass on to future generations,” (“World Heritage Centre - World Heritage.” *UNESCO World Heritage Centre - Official Site*. Web. 10 May 2010. <<http://whc.unesco.org/en/about/>>). To see a list of all the sites that are preserved or have had applications submitted for preservation, visit <http://whc.unesco.org/en/tentativelists>, “Tentative Lists.” *UNESCO World Heritage Centre*. United Nations, 1 May 2010. Web. 01 May 2010.

<sup>28</sup> *Missing: Last Seen at the World Trade Center*. Bronston Jones, 2002. Web. 10 May 2010. <<http://www.bronston.com/missing/>>.

<sup>29</sup> Franke-Ruta, Garance. “Missing Sensitivity: Washington, D.C., Offers a Very Crude Commemoration of 9/11.” *The American Prospect*. 20 Mar. 2002. Web. 30 Apr. 2010. <[http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=missing\\_sensitivity](http://www.prospect.org/cs/articles?article=missing_sensitivity)>.

However, the immediate historicization was unavoidable. After Pearl Harbor, Franklin Delano Roosevelt declared that it is, “a date which will live in infamy.” By September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001, it seems that history had caught up with the present; after 9/11, cameraman Evan Fairbanks pointed out, “this event just became history.”<sup>31</sup>

## **Building Communities from Tourism Memorabilia**

The Ground Zero Memorial Workshop, the Tribute WTC Visitor Center and other Ground Zero tourism sites have been able to avoid accusations of unauthorized historicization by aligning with a group of people who were directly affected by September 11<sup>th</sup> – the 9/11 Community. On the Tribute Center employment page, the 9/11 Community is defined as “a community of survivors of the attacks, Lower Manhattan residents and workers, rescue workers, volunteers and family members.”<sup>32</sup> Ground Zero tourism sites invoke the idea of a 9/11 Community to legitimize their authority to establish September 11<sup>th</sup> spaces. By advertising some explicit connection to the community, they can claim both the right to commemorate September 11<sup>th</sup>, as well as the authenticity of the materials on display. They draw connections to September 11<sup>th</sup> and the 9/11 Community in order to appear to have grown organically from the attack itself – in this way they become “natural” landmarks of post-9/11 recovery and grief, despite the fact that the media’s portrayal of the event removed the spatial distinctions that are generally applicable to tourism.

The official memorial site at Ground Zero is still under construction and is not expected to be ready for public viewing until at least 2011. However, the Tribute WTC Visitor Center

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<sup>30</sup> This concern is a common theme in tourism literature (and concern among more general critics of tourism). For a specific example of this see Alexis Celeste Bunten’s “Sharing Culture or Selling Out?” *American Ethnologist* 35.3 (2008): 380-95. *Anthrosource*. Web. 03 Apr. 2010.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. “Kodak Moments, Flashbulb Memories: Reflections on 9/11.” *TDR* (1988-) 47.1 (Spring 2003): 11-48. *JSTOR*. Web. 22 Apr. 2010. P31.

<sup>32</sup> “Volunteer.” *Tribute WTC Visitor Center*. Web. 7 May 2010. <<http://www.tributewtc.org/aboutus/work.php>>.

provides a physical location for the 9/11 community – consolidating a geographically disparate group of people. Although the Tribute Center is not located on Ground Zero, the Deli, what used to be in the building that the Center occupies now, distributed supplies as well as food to the rescue crew. It was a resource for the 9/11 Community while they cleared the rubble of collapsed buildings and crushed people from Ground Zero, making it their metaphorical home.<sup>33</sup>

The Tribute Center was created to serve as a comprehensive collection of information related to September 11<sup>th</sup> while the WTC Memorial and Museum remains under construction on Ground Zero, along with a number of commemorative buildings. Although most tourism sites strive to make the visitor's experience seem as personalized as possible, the Tribute Center makes visitors feel as though they were directly affected by September 11<sup>th</sup>. This is demonstrated by a video about the Center on their website, which not only claims that their approach to memorializing the collapse of the Twin Towers is not only unique, but advertises a wholly emotional experience.

During the opening of the video, an old photograph of a woman embracing her children at the beach floats onto the screen while the voice of a visitor with an accent attests, "You just felt a part of it."<sup>34</sup> The video, like much of the exhibit, combines visual and audio stimulation to bring their visitors as close to tears as possible.<sup>35</sup> The emotional intent is highlighted via the tissue boxes scattered throughout the galleries. However, a visit to the Tribute Center provides something that the website only provides in part – in-person stories from members of the 9/11

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<sup>33</sup> "About Us." *Tribute WTC Visitor Center*. 2007. Web. 02 May 2010.  
<<http://www.tributewtc.org/aboutus/index.php>>.

<sup>34</sup> While it isn't discussed in this paper, another component to the notions of community that were produced by the many political reactions to 9/11 is the ironic tendency to exclude the rest of the world from the grieving process. While this exclusion effectively created a nationalistic community, many foreigners described their visits to Ground Zero using a language of personal loss that is almost, if not identical, to that used by American visitors.

<sup>35</sup> *About Us History Channel Video*. *Tribute WTC Visitor Center*. History Channel, 2007. Web. 02 May 2010.  
<<http://www.tributewtc.org/aboutus/videoLarge.php>>.

Community. This is part of the Center's unique exhibit style – what they term a “Person to Person History”; everyone working at the center is a member of the 9/11 Community.<sup>36</sup>

The tour guides share their personal stories of how they became a member of the 9/11 Community while they lead visitors through the exhibit. The authority with which the tour guides – members of the 9/11 Community – tell the visitors about the content of the exhibit renders any visitors to the Tribute Center outsiders by comparison. The experience puts visitors in contact with individuals who were involved with Ground Zero, recreating the guilt of privilege of the survivors who neither helped with the recovery nor lost a family member – something that was felt by people all over the nation after 9/11. The people in the images were crushed in the collapse and the guides telling their stories are either among the people who dug out their bodies or immediate family members. In contrast, all visitors to the Tribute Center who are not part of the 9/11 Community become tourists, if only for the duration for their visit – outsiders who have been granted an insider's perspective.

### **An American Tragedy**

At Ground Zero, the notion of who is sharing and who is learning about September 11<sup>th</sup> has been turned on its head. While people from other parts of the U.S. are generally thought of as tourists when they come to NYC, many people felt an intimate connection to the site and considered September 11<sup>th</sup> to be an American tragedy, rather than a story uniquely specific to New Yorkers. On the other hand, September 11<sup>th</sup> tourism sites in lower Manhattan have tried to make the preservation of 9/11 the responsibility of the 9/11 Community, a practice which has

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<sup>36</sup> "Volunteer." *Tribute WTC Visitor Center*. Web. 7 May 2010. <<http://www.tributewtc.org/aboutus/work.php>>.

effectively excluded residents who, using the definition of the 9/11 Community, were not directly affected by the event.<sup>37</sup>

At the Tribute Center, the presence of tourists, as well as their relationship to the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, is used to elicit an emotional reaction.<sup>38</sup> Rather than an environment in which visitors are omniscient, invisible tourists, the Tribute Center and the Ground Zero Museum Workshop attempt to create as much visitor participation. At the Tribute Center, visitors move through buildings that gained historical significance on September 11<sup>th</sup>; at the Ground Zero Museum Workshop, visitors can touch pieces of rubble that were recovered from dumpsters by the curator. Many visitors describe their experience as “impossible to leave without a dry eye”<sup>39</sup> and having “more emotion than you can imagine.”<sup>40</sup> While this aspect of the Tribute Center is intended to communicate the tragedy to an outside perspective, it ends up highlighting the fact that September 11<sup>th</sup> had an intense emotional effect on many people outside of the 9/11 Community.

Of course, almost all of the visitors have their own personal stories about September 11<sup>th</sup>. They know someone who is a member of the 9/11 Community; they remember where they were when they first heard about planes crashing into the Twin Towers or the buildings collapsing; they can articulate the way in which their ideas about United States security changed after the

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<sup>37</sup> For another example of a community that was produced by tourism see Alyssa Cymene Howe’s “Queer Pilgrimage: The San Francisco Homeland and Identity Tourism.” *Cultural Anthropology* Feb 16.1 (2001): 35-61. *JSTOR*. Web. 10 Apr. 2010.

<sup>38</sup> A general critique of cultural tourism is that the cultures are manipulated to appear idealized and make the travelers seem “omniscient, sophisticated and invisible.” Casella, Ronnie. “Pedagogy as View Sequence: Popular Culture, Education and Travel.” *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 30.2 (1999): 187-209. *Anthrosource*. Web. 20 Apr. 2010.

<sup>39</sup> CariboriusJames. “Unforgettable experience.” Rev. of *Tribute WTC Visitors Center. Tribute WTC Visitor Center*. TripAdvisor, 7 May 2009. Web. 30 Apr. 2010. <[http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction\\_Review-g60763-d1065660-Reviews-Tribute\\_WTC\\_Visitor\\_Center-New\\_York\\_City\\_New\\_York.html](http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g60763-d1065660-Reviews-Tribute_WTC_Visitor_Center-New_York_City_New_York.html)>.

<sup>40</sup> charlottebea. “A Must.” Rev. of *Tribute WTC Visitors Center. Tribute WTC Visitor Center*. TripAdvisor, 24 Oct. 2010. Web. 18 Aug. 2009. <[http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction\\_Review-g60763-d1065660-Reviews-Tribute\\_WTC\\_Visitor\\_Center-New\\_York\\_City\\_New\\_York.html](http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g60763-d1065660-Reviews-Tribute_WTC_Visitor_Center-New_York_City_New_York.html)>.



attack.<sup>41</sup> The writer of an article in a South Carolina newspaper, the *Columbia*, describes a non-New York perspective on the personal connection to September 11<sup>th</sup>:

It can be a strange thing to be untouched literally, no bleeding wounds, but touched so deeply anyway, sure you are irrevocably changed because you were a witness. The distance and the means don't seem to matter, in a way. No, you didn't run from the buildings. You aren't digging with your hands, filling a plastic pail, scraping away by the inch 200,000 tons of steel, 425,000 cubic yards of concrete and 14 acres of glass window pane...But you are a witness, to your good fortune and others' suffering and deaths. The count now goes like this: 188 dead at the Pentagon, 266 dead on the four hijacked planes, 5,400-plus missing from the World Trade Center.<sup>42</sup>

The views expressed in this quote are similar to those of Manhattan residents that are excluded from the 9/11 Community. September 11<sup>th</sup> became an event that belonged to people living in other parts of the U.S. as much as it did to New Yorkers. While people visiting New York might be better referred to as tourists in other parts of the city, at Ground Zero they are tourists just as much as New Yorkers are. However, at the Tribute Center, their personal stories can never be as personal as those of the members of the 9/11 Community – at the Tribute Center, the event is not theirs to share, but to learn about as a tourist experiencing second-hand what the *other* group of people has been through.

The founders of the Tribute Center and the Ground Zero Museum Workshop incorporate their own connections to the 9/11 Community into the Museums. Lee Lelpi, co-founder of the Tribute Center, tells viewers of the video that after the collapse of the towers he was among those who spent the nine months following, picking through the rubble. Similarly, Gary Suson, founder of the Museum Workshop, talks about his time as a photographer at Ground Zero during

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<sup>41</sup> See comments left on tripadvisor.com: Cityplaner1234. "Well worth the time & money." Rev. of *Ground Zero Museum Workshop*. *Ground Zero Museum Workshop: Traveler Reviews*. TripAdvisor, 26 Apr. 2010. Web. 30 Apr. 2010. <[http://www.tripadvisor.com/ShowUserReviews-g60763-d626630-r62666754-Ground\\_Zero\\_Museum\\_Workshop-New\\_York\\_City\\_New\\_York.html](http://www.tripadvisor.com/ShowUserReviews-g60763-d626630-r62666754-Ground_Zero_Museum_Workshop-New_York_City_New_York.html)>; JaniePet. "Very Humbling." Rev. of *Tribute WTC Visitors Center*. *Tribute WTC Visitor Center*. TripAdvisor, 4 Feb. 2010. Web. 30 Apr. 2010. <[http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction\\_Review-g60763-d1065660-ReviewsTribute\\_WTC\\_Visitor\\_CenterNew\\_York\\_City\\_New\\_York.html](http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g60763-d1065660-ReviewsTribute_WTC_Visitor_CenterNew_York_City_New_York.html)>.

<sup>42</sup> Claudia Smith, Brinson. "We the survivors can still help." *State, The (Columbia, SC)* (20 Sep. 2001): *Newspaper Source*. EBSCO. Web. 10 May 2010.

the cleanup.<sup>43</sup> He boasts that he and one other photographer, Joel Meyerowitz, “captured everything necessary to document this period in New York history.”<sup>44</sup> However, for some visitors, the emotional gimmickry of the exhibits was too much. A review of the Tribute Center stated, “We did not enjoy seeing the photos of all the people that were lost, they should leave that to the memorial. More than a museum, this place is a mausoleum.”<sup>45</sup> Many of the reactions to the Ground Zero tourist sites reveal that the number of ways that people relate to September 11<sup>th</sup> cannot be reduced to inclusivity in or exclusivity from the 9/11 Community.

### Conflating Space and Event

The term tourist is usually applied to individuals who could be said to have traveled to a space from out of town. In line with this, tourism historian Hal K. Rothman has defined tourism and tourists relative to space and distance.<sup>46</sup> However, on September 11<sup>th</sup>, these metaphorical distances that brought definition to notions of spatial belonging were destroyed with the literal destruction of the Twin Towers. The tourism industry’s notions of hosts and guests are permanently shaken. *Whose* event was September 11<sup>th</sup>? Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, forces of globalization had been forcing people to reevaluate notions of spatial belonging. However, what had been easily-contoured, geographic identities have since lost their original significance as individuals coped with the collapse of the World Trade Center Towers.

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<sup>43</sup> *About Us History Channel Video. Tribute WTC Visitor Center.* History Channel, 2007. Web. 02 May 2010. <<http://www.tributewtc.org/aboutus/videoLarge.php>>.

<sup>44</sup> "Frequently Asked Questions: Marlon Suson: Ground Zero Museum Workshop: September 11: World Trade Center." *Ground Zero Museum Workshop Tours.* Web. 09 May 2010. <<http://www.groundzeromuseumworkshop.com/qa.htm>>.

<sup>45</sup> guidill. "Very small and disappointing." Rev. of *Tribute WTC Visitors Center. Tribute WTC Visitor Center.* TripAdvisor, 7 Apr. 2010. Web. 30 Apr. 2010. <[http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction\\_Review-g60763-d1065660-Reviews-Tribute\\_WTC\\_Visitor\\_Center-New\\_York\\_City\\_New\\_York.html](http://www.tripadvisor.com/Attraction_Review-g60763-d1065660-Reviews-Tribute_WTC_Visitor_Center-New_York_City_New_York.html)>.

<sup>46</sup> Rothman, Hal K. *Devil's Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-century American West.* Lawrence, Kan.: University of Kansas, 1998. Print. P39.

Immediately following the Towers' collapse, no one knew precisely who was responsible and what or which group of people was the target – the media repeatedly spun the event in various ways. The documentation of September 11<sup>th</sup> filled in the unknowns created by the security restrictions at Ground Zero, “occupying the same moment and place as the event” – as Kirshenblatt-Gimblett put it, “the ‘map’ threaten[ed] to become the territory.”<sup>47</sup> In the time that it took for people to learn about the collapse of the Twin Towers from a news report, images and personal narratives linked the United States together in a way that had only been accomplished in fictionalized worlds.

In an article about the Disneyworld Company, Baudrillard identifies a phenomenon present in theme parks – the elimination of reality by juxtaposing varying spaces and moments in time with one another in order to create a unidimensional time, “an immediate synchronism of all the places and all the periods in a single atemporal virtuality.”<sup>48</sup> In a similar manner, there was a widespread rush to document everything about the event during the aftermath and since then. Technology allowed the documentation to almost immediately circulate throughout the internet and the media. The news covered stories about memorials and shrines and any new footage was added to the cue of images that were already playing on peoples' televisions. At shrines, the juxtaposition of the lives of victims with the collapse of the Twin Towers made everything that was destroyed that day part of a singular event. The media coverage and political speculation about September 11<sup>th</sup> recovery and remembrance used imagery and discourse to juxtapose the United States, New York City, citizens of America, Manhattan, the World Trade Center,

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<sup>47</sup> Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, Barbara. "Kodak Moments, Flashbulb Memories: Reflections on 9/11." *TDR (1988-)* 47.1 (Spring 2003): 11-48. *JSTOR*. Web. 22 Apr. 2010. P26.

<sup>48</sup> Baudrillard, Jean. "Disneyworld Company." Trans. Francois Debrix. *Liberation. The European Graduate School*. 4 Mar. 1996. Web. 20 Apr. 2010. <<http://www.egs.edu/faculty/jean-baudrillard/articles/disneyworld-company/>>.

Capitalism, Democracy and Freedom – ideas, places and people were equated with one another as targets of one massive assault.<sup>49</sup>

Akhil Gupta and James Ferguson, in an analytical discussion about the spatial determination of culture, state that “space becomes a kind of neutral grid on which cultural difference, historical memory, and societal organization is inscribed.”<sup>50</sup> While this concept is at the heart of tourism’s distinction of tourists and non-tourists, the attacks on September 11<sup>th</sup> demonstrated that space, something that is usually imagined to be concrete, has its own mortality. With the literal destruction of the Twin Towers came the metaphorical destruction of people’s notions of space – the distance between two points on a map lost its clout. At the same time, the security that quarantined Ground Zero from the rest of NYC made everyone an outsider. While New Yorkers were Othered from September 11<sup>th</sup>, the media reduced the nation to one inclusive body – if you appeared American, then September 11<sup>th</sup> was just as much your event as it was that of New Yorkers. The images and narratives used to unify the nation, especially after FEMA started to let newscasters film at Ground Zero, became the way in which people overcame the quarantine.

At Ground Zero, the “home” from which a tourist has traveled can refer to a different section of Manhattan as much as it can to a different city or state. Those who are treated as tourists at Ground Zero are not just out-of-towners, but Manhattan residents as well. In the almost nine years since the event, Ground Zero has been largely inaccessible; first it was designated a crime scene, then a demolition site and now, projected until at least 2011, a construction site. While the Museum Workshop and the Tribute Center have tried to fabricate an inclusive community of individuals – one that graciously makes itself available for curious

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<sup>49</sup> *What Another Country Saw on 9/11/2001*. Dir. Freedomlost2007. *YouTube*. 16 Nov. 2007. Web. 02 May 2010. <<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uY7r9nFQqvs&feature=related>>.

<sup>50</sup> Gupta, Akhil, and James Ferguson. "Beyond "Culture": Space, Identity, and the Politics of Difference." *Culture, Power, Place: Explorations in Critical Anthropology*. Durham and London: Duke UP, 1997. 33-51. Print. P34.

visitors – not everyone who is technically part of the 9/11 Community identifies themselves as an insider. Some people still feel alienated from the event by the separation of Ground Zero from the rest of the city.

## **Conclusion: A Black Hole Within Tourism Studies**

Earlier I stated that this essay looks at Ground Zero in order to take an analytical approach to 9/11 through the lens of tourism. However, this approach has a second purpose – to contest the validity of the distinction between tourists and non-tourists, upon which scholars writing about tourism and tourism related issues depend heavily.

Travel has always been an important activity in the U.S. Centuries after a number of explorers came to the future United States under employment of European Empires, expendable incomes and convenient transportation allowed travel in the U.S. to become a cultural practice with at least one foot in capitalism – tourism. In the seventies, Jon Rosenow stated, with an almost ironic lack of foresight, that the (at the time of publication) recent energy crisis in the United States has taught Americans a lesson in appreciation; “The important thing in America is to go.”<sup>51</sup> However, in the past twenty years, very little has been written about tourism in the United States by anthropologists and other cultural and social theorists. Literature on tourism has largely been taken up by social theorists who are sensitive to the effect of tourism on their area of study – most commonly those who work with communities in developing nations.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Rosenow, John E., and Gerreld L. Pulsipher. *Tourism, the Good, the Bad, and the Ugly / Editorial Assistance by Kathryn Collura*. Lincoln, Neb.: Century Three, 1979. Print. PP 6-7.

<sup>52</sup> For a good overview of the prevailing arguments and publications about tourism, see Malcom Crick’s “Representations of International Tourism in the Social Sciences: Sun, Sex, Sights, Savings and Servility.” *Annual Review of Anthropology* 18 (1989): 307-44. *Arjournals*. Web. 05 Apr. 2010.

Consequently, the arguments of tourism theorists tend to take a good-or-bad stance on tourism, which almost always focus on the effect of tourism on a group of people.<sup>53</sup>

The tourism industry in the U.S. has a very different past from the places that tourism scholarship generally focuses on – most people living in the United States have visited a tourist site as “tourists” at least once.<sup>54</sup> Rather than examine the way in which tourism has affected the U.S., this paper approaches tourism as an industry and an activity that exist within the context of much larger issues, such as the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>.<sup>55</sup>

The consequences of September 11<sup>th</sup> have made it an incredibly personal event for a very large number of people, both living and not living in Manhattan. At Ground Zero, the museums and memorial sites use grief to portray the collapse of the Twin Towers to visitors. The collapse of two of the world’s largest towers is remembered with installations of photographs and memorabilia throughout lower Manhattan. People from all over the world, especially the U.S., come to feel connected to the event. The exhibitions, museums, and memorial sites that have opened around Ground Zero have attempted to create a specific notion of inclusivity and exclusivity, which regulate who possesses the authority to present the event to visitors. However, spatially contingent definitions of identity – tourists (visitors) and non-tourists (locals) are insufficient tools for describing the ways in which people think about the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>, as well as their experiences upon visiting tourism sites at Ground Zero.

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<sup>53</sup> While most of the literature focuses on the negative impact of tourism, in 2009 Tim Wallace edited a collection of writings in *Tourism and Applied Anthropologists: Linking Theory and Practice*, in which all of the essays are focused around positive and practical contributions of anthropology to the field of tourism studies. Wallace, James M. Tim. “Introduction.” *Tourism and Applied Anthropologists: Linking Theory and Practice*. Arlington, VA: National Association for the Practice of Anthropology, 2005. Print.

<sup>54</sup> For the history of leisure travel, see Orvar Löfgren’s *On Holiday: a History of Vacationing*. Berkeley: University of California, 1999. Print.

<sup>55</sup> For a historical approach to the way in which the tourism industry has affected the U.S. west, see Hal K. Rothman’s *Devil’s Bargains: Tourism in the Twentieth-century American West*. Lawrence, Kan.: University of Kansas, 1998. Print.

The distinction between tourists and locals has been taken for granted by many writers about tourism.<sup>56</sup> While this distinction might be less debatable in discussing international tourism,<sup>57</sup> in the United States, as can be seen with annual family vacations, tourism can become a routine of an individual's life, putting into question whether or not they are a tourist or resident (of sorts) of multiple locations. In the United States, it is common for people to visit local tourist sites, as is seen at Ground Zero. If the relationship of tourists to Ground Zero tourism were to be analyzed using the out-of-towner distinction, the oversimplification would obfuscate the social dynamics present.

Furthermore, using identity distinctions that are contingent upon space neglects to take into account the many immediate and long-term reactions to September 11<sup>th</sup>. As an event that greatly affected people all of the world, regardless of the distance between themselves and Manhattan, even an activity that seems to be as harmless as tourism has implications reaching much farther than the scope of family vacations. The horrific event has become one that will remain unresolved as long as people continue to collect and distribute of the virtual and tactile memorabilia associated.

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<sup>56</sup> For example, Amanda Stronza relies heavily upon the distinction of tourists and non-tourists to discuss the impact of tourists and tourism on the environment. Stronza, Amanda. "ANTHROPOLOGY OF TOURISM: Forging New Ground for Ecotourism and Other Alternatives." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30 (2001): 261-83. *Arjournals*. Web. 07 Apr. 2010.

<sup>57</sup> Writings about international tourism usually deals with tourists on trips that would only be possible for people with privileged backgrounds, such as the effect of a resort hotels in Jamaica.

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