

Where Were You on That Day?: A Critical Analysis of the National September 11 Memorial Museum

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Abstract

The attacks of September 11, 2001 lasted a total of one hundred and two minutes and killed nearly three thousand people from ninety-three countries. Today, 9/11 is considered to be one of the most historically significant moments in world history. The National September 11 Memorial Museum opened on May 21, 2014, and was erected to tell the story of 9/11 and to recognize the tragic event's enduring impact on the United States and the world. How does the 9/11 Memorial & Museum serve such a vast audience, and manage unavoidable controversies that arise when converting Ground Zero into a place of remembrance? How does a space mark mass suffering? I argue that, considering the unique and varied audience of the museum and due to some of the challenging spaces and objects within the museum, the National September 11 Memorial Museum only accomplishes certain aspects of its mission statement. In this article, I explore the successes and shortcomings of the 9/11 Memorial & Museum using specific exhibitions and museum spaces as the basis for evaluation.

Keywords: 9/11, National September 11 Memorial Museum, 9/11 Memorial & Museum, memory studies, museums of difficult history, critical museology, museum ethics, visitor experience

On September 11, 2001, two passenger jets were flown into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York, New York, with another colliding into the Pentagon in Arlington, Virginia, and a fourth jet crashing in a field near Shanksville, Pennsylvania.¹ These attacks were planned and executed by nineteen members of the terrorist group Al-Qaeda. The attacks of September 11, 2001 (hereafter referred to as 9/11) lasted a total of one hundred and two minutes, killed nearly three thousand people

from ninety-three countries and is considered to be one of the most historically significant moments in world history.²

On September 12, 2001, Ground Zero, the site where the Twin Towers had collapsed, was searched for human remains to be returned to mourning families. The following year on May 30, 2002, the last piece of steel was removed from Ground Zero which initiated discussions regarding the future of the site among city officials, survivors of the attacks, families of victims, and local, national and international

¹ "FAQ about 9/11," National September 11 Memorial Museum, accessed on December 1, 2018. <https://www.911memorial.org/faq-about-911>.

² Jim Dwyer, Eric Lipton, Kevin Flynn, James Glanz And Ford Fessenden, "102 Minutes: Last Words at the Trade Center; Fighting to Live as the Towers Die," *The New York Times*, 2002, <https://nyti.ms/2IJpP6d>.

communities.³ Some believed that the construction of a monument was the most suitable way to commemorate the event and to memorialize the victims. Catesby Leigh states, “a simple but imposing monument situated in a park-like setting” would be most appropriate at Ground Zero.⁴ However, in an attempt to create a space to tell the story of 9/11 and to recognize the event’s enduring impact on America and the world, the plan to erect the National September 11 Memorial Museum (hereafter referred to as the 9/11 Memorial & Museum) was established.⁵ In this article I will explore the successes and shortcomings of the 9/11 Memorial & Museum using its mission statement as the basis for evaluation.

Paul Williams, an assistant professor in Museum Studies at New York University, defines memorial museums as, “specific kinds of museums dedicated to historic events commemorating mass suffering of some kind.”⁶ How does a project like the 9/11 Memorial & Museum commence? How can the museum serve such a vast audience, and manage unavoidable controversies that arise when converting Ground Zero into a place of remembrance? How does a space mark mass suffering? A competition was held in 2003 to determine the design of the museum, and five-thousand two-hundred and one proposals were submitted.⁷ A juried panel selected architects Michael Arad and Peter Walker’s design for the museum.⁸ Ground Zero would be rejuvenated, and 9/11 would be memorialized. In the years leading up to the opening of the 9/11 Memorial

& Museum, the “Museum Planning Conversation Series” was created, which focused on the development and programming for the museum.⁹ From 2006 to 2013, experts on museums, memorialization, American history, and trauma met for this series, as well as family members of victims, survivors, first responders, community members and government officials.¹⁰ Over the course of seven years, topics such as exhibiting sensitive materials, handling of on-site human remains and the consequences of traumatization were discussed.¹¹ The museum was furthermore recognized as a medium for civic renewal.¹² A primary focus for the museum was to remain sensitive to the trauma of 9/11. Considering the experiences that the visitors could bring to the 9/11 Memorial & Museum, being aware of the potential for the re-traumatization of survivors, their families and the average visitor was critical in the development stages of the museum. Slavoj Žižek states, “the essence of trauma is precisely too horrible to be remembered...we have to mark repeatedly the trauma as such.”¹³ This sentiment rings true in the 9/11 Memorial & Museum. The museum and its programming were designed to serve “the public’s need to know, record and remember.”¹⁴

In order to examine how successfully the museum accomplishes its target goals, what the 9/11 Memorial Museum proposes to do and whom it seeks to address must first be recognized. The 9/11 Memorial Museum opened on May 21, 2014, with the following mission statement:

³ “FAQ about 9/11.”

⁴ Catesby Leigh, “A Memorial to Forget,” *First Things*, 2014, 50.

⁵ Leigh, “A Memorial to Forget,” *First Things*, 2014, 49.

⁶ Paul Williams, “A Novel Hybrid: Introducing the Memorial Museum,” in *Memorial Museums: The Global Rush to Commemorate Atrocities* (New York: Berg, 2007), 8.

⁷ “Design Competition,” National September 11 Memorial Museum, accessed December 1, 2018, <https://www.911memorial.org/design-competition>.

⁸ “Design Competition.”

⁹ “Museum Planning Conversation Series Report, 2006 – 2008,” *National September 11 Memorial Museum at the World Trade Center* (2006) i.

¹⁰ “Museum Planning Conversation Series Report, 2006 – 2008,” *National September 11 Memorial Museum at the World Trade Center* (2006) i.

¹¹ “Museum Planning Conversation Series Report, 2006 – 2008,” i.

¹² “Museum Planning Conversation Series Report, 2006 – 2008,” 1.

¹³ Slavoj Žižek, *For They Know Not What They Do: Enjoyment as a Political Factor* (London: Verso, 1991), 272-3.

¹⁴ Gaynor Kavanagh, “Museum as Memorial: The Origins of the Imperial War Museum,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 23, no. 1 (January 1988): 79.

The mission of the 9/11 Memorial Museum, located at the World Trade Center site, is to bear solemn witness to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and February 26, 1993. The Museum honors the nearly 3,000 victims of these attacks and all those who risked their lives to save others. It further recognizes the thousands who survived and all who demonstrated extraordinary compassion in the aftermath.

Demonstrating the consequences of terrorism on individual lives and its impact on communities at the local, national and international levels, the Museum attests to the triumph of human dignity over human depravity and affirms an unwavering commitment to the fundamental value of human life.¹⁵

Governed by a mission statement which Lee Ielpi, father of a 9/11 victim and member of the museum's Board of Directors, called "monumental," the museum intends to serve a broad audience of victims of the terrorist attacks and their families, survivors and their families, and local, national and international visitors.¹⁶ I will argue that, considering the unique and varied audience of the museum and due to some challenging spaces and objects within the museum, the 9/11 Memorial & Museum only accomplishes certain aspects of its mission statement. The museum does honour victims in certain exhibition spaces; however, it only fully achieves the goals of bearing witness to the 9/11 attacks, recognizing first responders, demonstrating the aftermath of terrorism and attesting to human dignity. It meets these parts of the mission through the architecture of the museum, specific exhibitions, and by the inclusion of the certain objects in the exhibition

¹⁵ "The Mission," National September 11 Memorial Museum, accessed on November 23, 2018, <https://www.911memorial.org/mission>.

¹⁶ Andrew Rafferty, "\$700 Million and Counting: 9/11 Museum Opens with Money Worries," NBC News, May 15, 2014, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/700-million-counting-9-11-museum-opens-money-worries-n106536>.

spaces. Guided by one of the main focuses of the "Museum Planning Conversation Series," the museum's design demonstrates sensitivity to the trauma created by the attacks and the potential for re-traumatization. However, I argue that the museum's exhibitions best serve individuals who were and are personally removed from the attacks of 9/11. Furthermore, although the museum does not include the importance of public education in its mission statement, the museum does not communicate peace-keeping lessons to ensure that tragedies such as the 9/11 attacks do not reoccur. In speaking of the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, South Africa, Elizabeth Rankin and Leoni Schmidt suggest that, "the bodily awareness induced by the building and its exhibition strategies engenders an increasing consciousness of self."¹⁷ In order to establish how this statement is true of the 9/11 Memorial & Museum, and to evaluate how successfully the museum accomplishes the goals listed in its mission statement, I will examine six spaces of the museum: the trident stairs, the ramp, *Memorial Hall*, *After 9/11*, *Before 9/11*, the shop, and the plaza.

While the architecture of the 9/11 Memorial & Museum has been described by some as "crude minimalism" and as an "anti-monumental memorial," the museum's architects suggest that, "by allowing absence to speak for itself, they have made the power of the empty footprints the memorial."¹⁸ The simplified design of the museum does not distract from the mass destruction and lives lost on 9/11. The museum is also reminiscent of another famed and successful American memorial. Maya Lin, the architect of the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (1982) in Washington, DC and a member of the building committee for the 9/11 Memorial & Museum, stated that in

million-counting-9-11-museum-opens-money-worries-n106536.

¹⁷ Elizabeth Rankin and Leoni Schmidt, "The Apartheid Museum: Performing a Spatial Dialectics," *Journal of Visual Culture* 8, no. 1 (2009): 97, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1470412908100901>.

¹⁸ "Design Competition."

designing her memorial, “I had an impulse to cut open the earth.”¹⁹ Her design is often considered to be a gaping slice in the landscape, much like the everlasting effects of the Vietnam War on individuals, families, and the United States of America. This sentiment can be applied to the architectural design of the 9/11 Memorial & Museum. Built seventy feet into the foundation of the Twin Towers, a location that has endured immense destruction and human suffering, the museum occupies an open wound.²⁰ Comparable to the *Vietnam Veterans Memorial*, working within this irreparable wound reflects the permanent impact of the 9/11 attacks on the world. The museum’s architects suggest that, “by allowing absence to speak for itself, the design provokes the power of these empty footprints the memorial.”²¹

Alongside a soaring steel support salvaged from the façade of the North Tower, visitors gradually descend the trident stairs or an escalator from the naturally lit streets into the dark, solemn cavity of the museum.²² The slow progression into the museum announces to visitors that they are entering a space that differs from the everyday life. Cautious not to construct trauma or re-traumatize visitors, the museum is arranged in a series of separate exhibition spaces. All of the images, videos and audio from 9/11 are contained within these spaces, and visitors have the option to enter the exhibitions or bypass specific rooms. For survivors and families of victims, the museum’s plan ensures that they are able to avoid any material that might trigger trauma and grief.

¹⁹ Maya Lin, "America Remembers: Vietnam Veterans Memorial," *National Geographic* 167, no. 5 (May 1985): 557.

²⁰ "Plaza Details," National September 11 Memorial Museum, accessed on November 28, 2018, <https://www.911memorial.org/plaza-details-0>.

²¹ "Design Competition."

²² Rankin and Schmidt, "The Apartheid Museum: Performing a Spatial Dialectics," 90.

²³ "Museum of Collective Memory," Local Projects, accessed on November 23, 2018, <https://localprojects.com/work/911-memorial-museum-ground-zero>.

Following the descent of the trident stairs, the first space that visitors can enter is titled the ramp. Local Projects, the experience and design firm that produced the design for much of the museum, describes the 9/11 Memorial & Museum as a “museum of collective memory.”²³ This notion is best represented by the ramp. A dark multimedia room with audio of individuals recounting how they received the news of 9/11 or witnessed the attacks firsthand, the ramp sets the tone for the museum. An event witnessed by a third of the world through television broadcasting, there are countless personal stories from 9/11 and this space urges visitors to situate themselves within a larger historical narrative.²⁴ The ramp exemplifies historian Ciraj Rassool’s term “memory work,” which refers to a collective work that aims to rebuild the memory lost following a traumatic event.²⁵ The design of the ramp encourages the participation of visitors to reflect on where they were on September 11, 2001, which ultimately contributes their personal stories to a collective memory that reconstructs the memory of the event. The ramp demonstrates how the museum’s exhibition design encourages visitors to bear witness to the 9/11 attacks. This space is highly effective and it eases visitors into the narrative of the following exhibition spaces.

After exiting the ramp, visitors may enter *Memorial Hall* by descending either stairs or an escalator that flank a salvaged staircase from one of the Twin Towers. Walking alongside the recovered staircase, visitors are encouraged to imagine themselves attempting to escape one of

²⁴ Alison Landsberg, "Memory, Empathy, and the Politics of Identification," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 22, no. 2 (June 2009): 222, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10767-009-9056-x>.

²⁵ Ciraj Rassool, "Community Museums, Memory Politics, and Social Transformation in South Africa: Histories, Possibilities, and Limits," in *Museum Frictions: Public Cultures/ Global Transformations*, ed. Ivan Karp, Corinne A. Kratz, Lynn Szwaja, and Tomas Ybarra-Frauston (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2006), 297. <https://doi.org/10.1215/9780822388296-016>.

the Towers, with firefighters ascending the narrow smoke-filled staircase while they squeeze down the other side. The inclusion of this recovered staircase, itself a bystander or survivor of 9/11, is an example of how the museum deliberately incorporates objects that enable visitors to witness the attacks. Once in *Memorial Hall*, visitors confront the flurry wall, which was built to withstand the lateral forces of landfill and the Hudson River.²⁶ Visitors also meet an art installation that spans the length of *Memorial Hall*.²⁷ Created by artist Spencer Finch, and titled *Trying to Remember the Color of the Sky on That September Morning* (2014), the piece is composed of two thousand nine hundred and eighty-three watercolour tiles, each a different shade of blue, to commemorate each victim of the attacks.²⁸ The tiles surround a quote by Roman poet Virgil which reads, "No Day Shall Erase You from the Memory of Time," and is written in letters created from pieces of recovered World Trade Center steel.²⁹ This art installation speaks to the museum's mission of honouring the victims of the attacks of 9/11. While this artwork is visually and emotionally captivating, Spencer Finch's piece furthermore holds the significant role of housing the repository of nearly eight thousand unidentified human remains of 9/11 victims.³⁰ This space is separate from the public and only 9/11 family members and are permitted to access it, as well as the Office of Chief Medical Examiner of the City of New York who continues to identify the human remains.³¹

²⁶ Karissa Rosenfield, "9/11 Memorial Museum / Davis Brody Bond," *Arch Daily*, March 21, 2014, <https://www.archdaily.com/488508/davis-brody-bond-releases-new-details-of-the-9-11-memorial-museum>.

²⁷ Rosenfield, "9/11 Memorial Museum / Davis Brody Bond."

²⁸ "Memorial Hall," National September 11 Memorial Museum, accessed on November 23, 2018, <https://www.911memorial.org/memorial-hall>.

²⁹ "Memorial Hall"

³⁰ "Remains Repository at the World Trade Center Site," National September 11 Memorial Museum, accessed on November 23, 2018, <https://www.911memorial.org/remains-repository-world-trade-center-site>.

³¹ "Remains Repository at the World Trade Center Site."

The recovery and handling of human remains at Ground Zero has always been controversial and the matter of families going underground to pay their respects to their lost loved ones has been widely criticized. Jim Riches, the father of a 9/11 victim, stated, "if it were up to me, I would rather keep [the remains] in the medical examiner's office than have them interred seventy feet below ground."³² An object known as the "composite" has further provoked disputes among 9/11 victims' families.³³ The composite is comprised of four or five floors of one the Twin Towers, compressed by the immense force of the collapsing towers.³⁴ The meteor-like object is made of concrete, steel, furniture, drywall, carpeting, and paper with writing preserved through carbonization.³⁵ During the conversation series organized by the museum's planning committee, several families of victims were against the inclusion of the composite as they believed it could contain human remains, and felt that the object should be buried.³⁶ Other families of victims felt it was the museum's responsibility to display the composite as evidence of the mass destruction of the 9/11 attacks.³⁷ After several years of forensic testing of the composite, it was determined that the exterior of the object did not contain human remains.³⁸ The composite is displayed in the museum today in a dark, quiet alcove. The museum stated that the inclusion of the composite is reflective of the museum's commitment to authenticity and historical

³² Karen Wilson Baptist, "Incompatible identities: Memory and Experience at the National September 9/11 Memorial and Museum," *Elsevier* 16 (August 31, 2015): 6, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emospa.2015.05.003>.

³³ "Museum Planning Conversation Series Report, 2006 – 2008," 4.

³⁴ "Museum Planning Conversation Series Report, 2006 – 2008," 4.

³⁵ "Museum Planning Conversation Series Report, 2006 – 2008," 4.

³⁶ "Museum Planning Conversation Series Report, 2006 – 2008," 5.

³⁷ "Museum Planning Conversation Series Report, 2006 – 2008," 4.

³⁸ "2013 Museum Planning Conversation Series Report," *National September 11 Memorial Museum at the World Trade Center*, 2013, 5.

documentation.³⁹ Karen Wilson Baptist, a professor of Architecture at the University of Manitoba, suggests that for survivors of 9/11 with no bodies to mourn, emotional closure is difficult and objects such as the composite and spaces such as the repository of unidentified human remains complicate the mourning process.⁴⁰ I argue that if a family member of a victim believes that the display of an object or the resting place of human remains is disrespectful to the bodies and families of the victims, plans for these projects should not resume. The inclusion of the composite is not critical to the narrative of 9/11, and the remains of victims do not need to be included in a repository to honour the lost individuals. There are innumerable images, videos and objects displayed throughout the museum that demonstrate the severity of 9/11, such as a twisted piece of steel from the north tower which was hit directly by one of the airplanes.⁴¹ Other spaces in the museum, such as the *In Memoriam* exhibition, honour victims in a thoughtful and respectful way.

Located off of *Memorial Hall*, the exterior of the *In Memoriam* exhibition is a stark concrete cube which does not indicate the material contained behind its walls. Once in the exhibition space, portrait photographs of victims encourage visitors to stare into the faces of those lost. As a result, this space is tremendously impactful and connects to Adam Gopnik's statement, "he may be lost now, but he is not faceless."⁴² Visitors are able to pay their respects and exit this space if they wish. However, those who wish to hear more about individual victims can choose to enter a space in the centre of the exhibition. A dark room with seating for visitors to rest and spend time, this space plays recordings of victims' family members narrating short anecdotes while

specific victims' photographs are projected onto the walls. The *In Memoriam* exhibition speaks to the museum's mission of honouring the victims and displaying the consequences of terrorism. Its architectural design is also mindful of the potential for creating and recreating trauma, as visitors are given the option to explore the space in the centre of the exhibition should they want to learn more about specific victims. In my view, despite the success of the *In Memoriam* space and the art installation by Spencer Finch, the inclusion of the repository of human remains and the composite do not honour the wishes of victims' families. In turn, the exhibition does not honour the victims themselves.

As visitors leave the *In Memoriam* exhibition and transition into the simple and concrete space of *Memorial Hall*, they are reminded that the museum occupies the site where the individuals, whose faces they just viewed, lost their lives. Objects such as large steel supports, contorted by the force of the collapsing towers, and an elevator motor from one of the towers are appreciated with a new perspective. Imagining these colossal pieces of architecture raining from the sky and destroying everything in their path enforces the notion that objects in museums hold immense power, especially in museums of difficult histories. While some of the objects in the museum's collection are salvaged pieces of architecture from Ground Zero, the institution also acquires objects by donation from survivors, victim's families and bystanders of the event.

The museum holds more than sixty thousand artefacts in its collection, which are displayed in the permanent exhibition space *After 9/11*. The museum's Chief Curator Jan Seidler Ramirez suggests that the objects

³⁹ "2013 Museum Planning Conversation Series Report," 4.

⁴⁰ Baptist, "Incompatible identities: Memory and Experience at the National September 9/11 Memorial and Museum," 6.

⁴¹ "Museum Construction is Progressing with Large Artifacts Installation," National September 11 Memorial

Museum, 2013, <https://www.911memorial.org/blog/museum-construction-progressing-large-artifacts-installation>.

⁴² Adam Gopnik, "Stones and Bones: Visiting the 9/11 Memorial and Museum," *The New Yorker*, July 7, 2014, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/07/07/stones-and-bones>.

"animate the actors" of 9/11.⁴³ While this statement is slightly theatrical, the objects in the 9/11 Memorial & Museum do seem to transform into human beings themselves.

Shoes, backpacks, identification cards, and firefighter's helmets, to name a few, are among the artefacts that rest in the *After 9/11* exhibition space. These objects belonged to the victims of this horrific event. It is what has happened to the objects that add meaning, and as Reesa Greenberg suggests when discussing objects in the Jewish Museum in Vienna, "each object becomes a surrogate for a victim."⁴⁴

In the published *Museum Planning Conversation Series Report* from 2013, attendees address what is said to be the "crucial decision of how to portray the hijackers in the museum's historical exhibition."⁴⁵ The President and CEO of the 9/11 Memorial & Museum at the time, Joe Daniels, stated that when the museum opened, "the world will know who did this, and that those men were absolute criminals."⁴⁶ This aggressive tone is echoed in one of the final spaces of the museum, the *Before 9/11* exhibition. The museum's floor plan, which allows visitors to determine a self-guided route, poses a problem at this point in a visitors' tour. When visitors reach the *Before 9/11* exhibition, they have likely travelled through *Memorial Hall* and *After 9/11* beforehand. In the *In Memoriam* exhibition space, visitors face the victims and are confronted with the aftermath of 9/11. Therefore, following this space, the most natural transition is to enter the *After 9/11* exhibition. While the plan of the museum displays sensitivity to the possibility of creating or recreating trauma, and allows visitors to avoid

certain exhibitions, the floor plan is not in the best interest of visitors who aim to visit each space.

As visitors enter into the exhibition space *Before 9/11*, they are greeted with a seven-minute video titled "The Rise of Al-Qaeda," which is accompanied by several wall panels that describe other attacks by the extremist group. As some visitors enter this space following *After 9/11*, they have already relived the emotionally exhausting events of September 11, 2001. If visitors even reach this room, which is optional to enter, they are then expected to witness an exhibition about Al-Qaeda and terrorism. This task requests the emotional and intellectual strength of the museum audience and presents the difficulty of balancing emotions and education in museums of difficult histories. Several visitors considered *Before 9/11* to be an "afterthought," as the video displayed does not explicitly state the difference between Al-Qaeda and Muslims, and furthermore only discusses Islam in the context of terrorism.⁴⁷ Considering the museum's audience, which includes visitors of varied cultures, ages, and educational backgrounds, the lack of information presented is not responsible. Museum visitor Carol Sperber said of the exhibition, "I mean it just said, 'Terrorists, Islamic terrorists,' that's all."⁴⁸ The presented material's ability to reinforce Islamophobia is not considered by the museum, nor is the experience of a Muslim visitor. As Gopnik writes, "nothing is really taught" in this space.⁴⁹ In the *Museum Planning Conversation Series Report*, it was indicated that this space was not meant to be comprehensive about the long history of

⁴³ "Acquiring Artifacts," National September 11 Memorial Museum, November 9, 2017, video, 1:25, <https://youtu.be/VMqZ6MauPIs>.

⁴⁴ Reesa Greenberg, "The Jewish Museum, Vienna: A Holographic Paradigm for History and the Holocaust," in *Image and Remembrance: Representation and the Holocaust*, ed. Shelley Hornstein and Florence Jacobowitz, (Bloomington IN: University of Indiana Press, 2003), 240.

⁴⁵ "2013 Museum Planning Conversation Series Report," 2.

⁴⁶ "2013 Museum Planning Conversation Series Report," 2.

⁴⁷ Sharon Otterman, "Visitors Fault Sept. 11 Museum's Portrayal of Islam," *The New York Times*, June 1, 2014, <https://www.nytimes.com/2014/06/02/nyregion/sept-11-museum.html>.

⁴⁸ Otterman, "Visitors Fault Sept. 11 Museum's Portrayal of Islam."

⁴⁹ Gopnik, "Stones and Bones: Visiting the 9/11 Memorial and Museum."

Islam and its relationship with the West.⁵⁰ While a goal of educating visitors of the consequential actions of the United States of America by presenting historical context is also not included in the museum's mission statement, a seven-minute video does not provide visitors with a complete history. The *Before 9/11* exhibition should aim to provide a more comprehensive explanation of the relationship between Islam and the West. A more comprehensive history should be situated earlier in the museum's floor plan to ensure that visitors have a clear and emotionally collected mindset to absorb the integral information presented.

Exiting the exhibition spaces of the museum, visitors confront the museum's gift shop. The shop is often discussed as a problematic feature of the museum, and as Gopnik writes, is an example of, "commerce dwarfing commemoration."⁵¹ Vending clothing, jewellery and books about 9/11, it is clear why the museum's gift shop is frequently debated by visitors, loved ones of victims and survivors. Diane Horning, the mother of the victim Matthew Horning, argues, "to me, it's the crassest, most insensitive thing to have a commercial enterprise at the place where my son died."⁵² While the museum is an institution that requires funding for continued operation, every aspect of the museum, from the presented material to the merchandise in the gift shop, should be cohesive with the mission and audience's needs. The shop does not speak to the museum's mission of honouring victims. Tom Hennes, the Lead Exhibition Designer of the museum, claims that to some, the 9/11

Memorial & Museum is a pilgrimage site.⁵³ It has become an essential New York City tourist attraction, and the shop operates for this audience. It does not serve the victims, survivors or their families. Despite views of the shop as an unethical service in the museum, the inclusion of retail spaces in museums of difficult histories is occasionally used to reintroduce visitors to the everyday world.⁵⁴ This view is presented by Elizabeth Rankin and Leoni Schmidt in regards to the Apartheid Museum in Johannesburg, South Africa.⁵⁵ In addition to the contemplative ascension of the trident stairs, the museum's shop acts to reacclimatize visitors. As previously stated, a visit to the 9/11 Memorial & Museum can be emotionally fatiguing, and the slow transition back to the busy streets above through the trident stairs and the gift shop prepares visitors for the final stop of their visit, to the plaza.

Located at ground-level beside the entrance of the museum, the plaza is a meditative space. Two fountains, which architects Michael Arad and Peter Walker refer to as "voids containing recessed pools," flow into an abyss where the Twin Towers once soared.⁵⁶ The colossal square fountains are bordered by lush trees, and by bronze railings inscribed with the names of those who lost their lives on September 11, 2001.⁵⁷ The inscriptions remind visitors of the "widening circle of pain emanating from each name."⁵⁸ Imagining the mothers, fathers, wives, husbands, families and friends of each victim urges visitors to pause and face the human reality of terrorism.⁵⁹ Unlike other memorials, such as the Vietnam Veterans

⁵⁰ "2013 Museum Planning Conversation Series Report," 8.

⁵¹ Gopnik, "Stones and Bones: Visiting the 9/11 Memorial and Museum."

⁵² Joe Coscarelli, "9/11 Museum Gift Shop Sells Dog Vest," *Intelligencer*, May 19, 2014, <http://nymag.com/intelligencer/2014/05/911-museum-gift-shop-sells-dog-vests.html>.

⁵³ Leslye Davis, Alicia Desantis, Graham Roberts and Matt Ruby, "A New Story Told at Ground Zero," *New York Times*, May 14, 2014, <https://nyti.ms/2vj4LIQ>.

⁵⁴ Rankin and Schmidt, "The Apartheid Museum: Performing a Spatial Dialectics," 96.

⁵⁵ Rankin and Schmidt, "The Apartheid Museum: Performing a Spatial Dialectics," 96.

⁵⁶ "Design Competition."

⁵⁷ R. R. Reno, "The Failed 9/11 Memorial," *First Things*, 2011, 3, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2011/12/the-failed-9-11-memorial>.

⁵⁸ Marita Sturken, "The Wall, the Screen, and the Image: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial," *Representations* 35 (Summer, 1991): 126, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2928719>.

⁵⁹ Gopnik, "Stones and Bones: Visiting the 9/11 Memorial and Museum."

Memorial in Washington, DC where names of victims are listed alphabetically, the names of 9/11 victims in the plaza are recorded according to social ties.⁶⁰ During the initial planning stages of the Memorial & Museum, relationships between victims came to light. As the deaths of 9/11 victims did not occur in a linear manner, artist Jer Thorp and design firm Local Projects developed an algorithm to arrange individuals' names based on the discovered associations and interactions between the victims.⁶¹ The railing lists victims alongside their colleagues, acquaintances and friends; likely the last interactions they had before their deaths. This thoughtful design speaks to the 9/11 Memorial & Museum's mission of honouring victims.

How does one begin a project like the 9/11 Memorial & Museum? How can the needs of such a vast audience be met, and the unavoidable controversy regarding the reestablishment of Ground Zero be managed? These questions cannot be resolved with straightforward answers. In the cases of museums of difficult histories, it may be that that "commemoration, commodification and appropriation are indivisible."⁶² Andreas Huyssen suggests that the purpose of remembering is to create a narrative of a shared identity and to maintain a shared history.⁶³ The 9/11 Memorial & Museum creates a shared history and experience among visitors with no personal connection to the 9/11 attacks.⁶⁴ The restoration of Ground Zero proved to be, and remains, a challenge for those involved. With such a broad mission statement and a varied audience, not completely attaining certain goals and meeting each visitors' needs is inevitable.

⁶⁰ Sturken, "The Wall, the Screen, and the Image: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial," 128.

⁶¹ "Museum of Collective Memory."

⁶² Rankin and Schmidt, "The Apartheid Museum: Performing a Spatial Dialectics," 97.

⁶³ Andreas Huyssen, "Escape from Amnesia: Museum as Mass Memory," in *Twilight Memories* (London: Routledge, 1996), 125.

⁶⁴ Sarah Senk, "The Memory Exchange: Public Mourning at the National 9/11 Memorial Museum," *Canadian*

The architecture of the museum, the exhibition design, specifically the ramp, and the objects presented, encourage visitors with no personal ties to 9/11 to bear witness to the terrorist attacks. However, despite the effort to honour victims through the *In Memoriam* exhibition, Spencer Finch's art installation in *Trying to Remember the Color of the Sky on That September Morning* and the plaza, the inclusion of the repository of human remains in the composite and the shop hold the 9/11 Memorial & Museum back from fully achieving this part of its mission and fully serving victims, survivors and their loved ones. Some of the objects, especially the objects donated by victims' families and survivors, recognize the first responders and demonstrate the effects of terrorism on individual lives and on communities at local, national, and international levels. However, I have shown that the *Before 9/11* exhibition space does not serve the plural communities of these local, national, and international levels.

Museum consultant Dr. Harold Skramstad suggested in 2006 that the memorial at Ground Zero called for a provisional mission statement that could be altered after several years.⁶⁵ It has been four years since the inception of the 9/11 Memorial & Museum and this statement should not be forgotten. As Holland Cotter wishes for the National Museum of African American History and Culture in Washington, DC, the future of the 9/11 Memorial & Museum and its exhibitions should become more "fluid and critical."⁶⁶ The museum undoubtedly elicits emotional responses from its visitors, but it does not demonstrate or encourage a peace-keeping mentality to ensure

Review of American Studies 48, no. 2 (2018): 257, <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/701613>.

⁶⁵ "Museum Planning Conversation Series Report, 2006 – 2008," 8.

⁶⁶ Holland Cotter, "Review: The Smithsonian African American Museum Is Here at Last. And It Uplifts and Upsets," *New York Times*, September 21, 2016, <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/22/arts/design/smithsonian-african-american-museum-review.html>.

that events such as 9/11 are not repeated. When considering the victims' names encircling the infinity fountains in the plaza, Catesby Leigh suggests that, "as time passes, the names will inevitably lose their poignancy and attract fewer visitors."⁶⁷ The 9/11 Memorial & Museum must continue to evolve to ensure that it creates meaningful, respectful and, ideally, healing experiences for every visitor of the museum, and to guarantee that for future generations, 9/11 never loses its importance.

⁶⁷ Leigh, "A Memorial to Forget," 52.

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