



# THE NATIONAL 9/11 MEMORIAL AND MUSEUM WEBSITE: EDUCATION, COMMEMORATION AND COMMERCIALIZATION

Bachelor's Thesis

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract and List of Keywords .....	4
Preface .....	5
Chapter One: Education.....	12
Chapter Two: Commemoration.....	26
Chapter Three: Commercialization .....	38
Conclusion .....	50
Works Cited .....	54

## ABSTRACT AND LIST OF KEYWORDS

### ABSTRACT:

This Bachelor's thesis seeks to understand as to how the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum website represents 9/11 in terms of education, commemoration and commercialization, examining several aspects within these three major categories to examine what the website offers for its visitors. I have applied the theory of discourse analysis as developed by Foucault and as well as Gillian Rose's visual methodology and Leonard Orr's semiotics to analyze the website's contents. The findings of this research show that the website operates in order to achieve the goal of representing 9/11 in ways corresponding to educating its visitors, commemorating 9/11 and "selling" 9/11 through an online gift store, but also through the use and application of colors, font and typeface.

### LIST OF KEYWORDS:

9/11, National 9/11 Memorial and Museum, National 9/11 Memorial and Museum Website, New York City, Education, Commemoration, Commercialization, United States, September 11, 2001.



## PREFACE

I can clearly recall where I was and what I was doing when I first heard about the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. I was nine years old and just got back home from an ordinary day at the local elementary school. My mother told me that something ‘tragic’ had happened in New York City, and that she was relieved that her flight ascended before the attacks happened and the entire US airspace closed – she works as a cabin attendant for KLM. We switched on the television and the very first thing I saw was a witness, recording the attacks with his cell phone while screaming: “Oh my god, there is a plane flying into WTC 1, and there is another one!”

Ever since that day, I have tried to get involved in each annual commemoration of 9/11, through watching documentaries and movies or reading online news articles. I have not been able to visit the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum in NYC yet, because it was still under construction when I visited the city in 2013. It is still an item on my travel bucket list, but until this can be checked off, I will be satisfied with devoting my Bachelor’s thesis to its online website.

When I visit this website, I already feel as if I am on the actual site of the memorial and museum, because it offers a copious amount of opportunities to explore what has happened on that traumatic Tuesday back in 2001.

## INTRODUCTION

Tuesday morning September 11, 2001, might be considered as a turning point in contemporary American history, when several terrorist attacks took place in New York City, the Pentagon and near Shanksville, PA, resulting in approximately 3000 deaths. Although all of these attacks, or attempts to attack, had a tremendous and tragic impact on American culture, politics, and society, the attack on the World Trade Center is considered to be the most influential (National 9/11 Memorial & Museum). To emphasize the impact that this day had on a global, national and local level, the 9/11 Memorial and Museum were built. This site evokes feelings of grief and anger, but enables visitors to mourn and learn as well. Nevertheless, one might also decide to visit the 9/11 Memorial and Museum website that is devoted to the events on 9/11 and all that relates to it, since the actual Memorial and Museum site and the website work hand in hand. This website facilitates a globally accessible and safe environment in which visitors can learn about, commemorate and participate in the aftermath of 9/11 (National 9/11 Memorial and Museum).

Before plunging into the online medium regarding 9/11, an initial look should be taken at how Ground Zero was transformed into the Memorial and Museum as they are known today. Marita Sturken discusses the contemplations that were made to rebuild Ground Zero in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 in her essay “Aesthetics of Absence.” Sturken claims that Ground Zero was seen as a ‘starting point,’ a blank slate or tabula rasa that was destined to be rebuilt. This idea of a Ground Zero allows for the narratives on 9/11 that, indeed, Lower Manhattan was the symbolic center of the attacks (Sturken 311). However, the rebuilding of Ground Zero lasted for nearly a decade, since different interests were at stake, for example commercial interests, political agendas, urban design in a densely populated city and above all, mourning and the maintenance of grief (Sturken 312). These contrasting interests led to an active tension with regards to mourning and memory on the one hand and representational practices on the other.

During discussions of the rebuilding of Ground Zero, several options emerged: politicians argued that not rebuilding the Twin Towers would convey weakness (Sturken 319). Rebuilding the towers was eventually ruled out in the design decision process, because it provoked a copious amount of economic and psychological difficulties, for instance, whether these towers would again be targets of terrorism and the increasing number of vacant offices in Lower Manhattan. There was already a discussion about a potential memorial to

commemorate the victims of 9/11 in the meantime. In collaboration with relatives of the deceased and New York politicians, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation opened the World Trade Center Site Memorial Competition, in which architects Michael Arad and Peter Walker won with their so-called *Reflecting Absence* design. Simultaneously, the opportunities for a museum that narrated the events of 9/11 and the WTC bombing in 1993, and that honored the victims as well as the survivors were examined. A construction process followed, and the museum opened to the public on May 21, 2014 (National September 11 Memorial & Museum). Ever since both the Memorial and the Museum are officially accessible to the public, there have been over 23 million visitors to the memorial and over 4 million visitors to the museum. At the same time, due to continuing and increasing developments in technology, one can either visit the Memorial website in preparation for a visit to the actual site or vice versa (National 9/11 Memorial and Museum).

Significant research has been done into the actual 9/11 Memorial and Museum site, but I am interested in what the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum website offers in terms of education, commercializing, and commemorating 9/11 and how a website visit might potentially trigger a real visit to the Memorial and Museum. These categories have been selected, because whenever the Memorial and Museum website is entered for the first time, one's attention is immediately directed to images and headlines that resemble these categories either implicitly or explicitly (e.g. links to information about the attacks that took place on 9/11, links to ways of commemorating 9/11 and the link to the online gift store).

The relevance of this topic can be seen in the fact that one is now living in a society dominated by the Internet, social media and all sorts of technological developments but that there is still a gap in the research into the effectiveness of a website in teaching about, commemorating, and remembering 9/11. My research question will therefore be as follows: how does the website of the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum represent 9/11? The sub questions that will be answered in the three chapters are:

- How does the 9/11 Memorial and Museum website represent education?
- How does the 9/11 Memorial and Museum website represent commemoration?
- How does the 9/11 Memorial and Museum website represent commercialization?

The underlying methodology that will be applied to formulate an answer to this research question will be Michel Foucault's Discourse Analysis. According to Gillian Rose, discourse refers to groups of statements that structure the way a thing is thought of, and the way one acts on the basis of that thinking. In a larger sense, discourse is the culturally

constructed representation of reality, rather than an exact replica (Rose 137). Rose claims “discourses are articulated through all sorts of visual and verbal images and texts, and also through the practices that those languages permit” (135). This coincides with intertextuality, the practice that the meaning of a particular image or text does not solely depend on this one text or image, but also on the meaning that is carried by others (Rose 137). ‘Visuality’ can be perceived as a discourse as well, since it emphasizes certain visible things, while other things are made unseen. A discourse formation is thus of equal importance to discourse analysis, since it implies that meanings are supposed to be connected together in a particular fashion. Although Foucault provides a well-developed theory, his implementations and methodologies appear to be fairly vague, consequently the visual methodology as discussed by Gillian Rose and the study of semiotics will be used to analyze the 9/11 website.

In her book *Visual Methodologies*, Gillian Rose clearly explains how to proceed when analyzing images and photographs. She suggests three ‘sites’ at which the meanings of an image are produced: the site of the production of an image, the site of the image itself, and the site where audiences see the image. This thesis will use the methodology concerning the image itself (Rose 23). Moreover, Gillian Rose discusses Erwin Panofsky, who developed a methodology in which he outlined how he thought that the comparison between visual images and texts should work. He called this “iconography” and distinguished a primary, secondary, and intrinsic level. The primary level is easiest to understand and hardly requires any interpretation. The secondary level includes images that symbolize a specific resonance, whereas the intrinsic level allows for exploration of the general cultural significance. This intrinsic level enables the audiences to interpret a specific historic event (Rose 145). Depending on the images used for this bachelor’s thesis, a variation in the three levels of iconography might occur throughout the chapters.

In order to be able to interpret the texts and images on the 9/11 website, Leonard Orr’s “Intertextuality and the Cultural Text in Recent Semiotics” will be used as a fundamental method (1986). Semiotics is the study of signs, symbols and significance and examines how meaning is created through certain texts and images (Orr 811). A sign is the smallest unit that can communicate meaning, consisting of a signifier and a signified. A signifier is any material thing that signifies, for example, a word or image, while the signified is the concept that this signifier refers to (Orr 814-16). A distinction can be made between symbolic signs and iconic signs: a symbolic sign implies that the relation between the signifier and signified is conventional and specific, e.g. most words. Iconic signs, in contrast, are signs where the signifier resembles the signified, thus pictures and images (Orr 818). To interpret semiotics,

Orr discusses denotation and connotation, two terms that were founded by Ronald Barthes and discussed in his book *Mythologies* (2014). Denotation resembles the literal meaning of a sign. Connotation defines the secondary, or cultural meaning of a sign and associations that go along with it (Orr 819-22). Orr emphasizes intertextuality in his article, but for the purpose of this thesis, his observations will be used to analyze texts and images on the website of the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum.

Before analyzing the efforts that the website put into reflecting education, commercialization and commemoration, a closer look will be taken at the research that has already been done into the actual site of the Memorial and Museum, thus the following section will review previous literature and research. This will be done to prove that there is a current gap in 9/11 Memorial and Museum research, because the website has not been examined before and the research that is done throughout this thesis is therefore unique. Marita Sturken's essays "The Aesthetics of Absence" (2004) and "The 9/11 Memorial and Museum and Remaking of Ground Zero" (2015) and her book *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero* (2007) shed light on the reconstruction of Ground Zero, starting at its immediate aftermath when piles of dust covered Lower Manhattan and continuing all the way through the design, construction and development of the Memorial and Museum and ending with her analysis of the impact of the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum. Sturken claims that it is not only the site of the Memorial and Museum that impresses the visitors, but the (personal) items that are on display, the audio recordings that can be heard, and even more the 9/11-related merchandize that can be bought in the gift shop or online (Sturken 478). This commercialization will be highlighted in chapter three of this thesis.

An important aspect of the Memorial, both online and at the site is commemoration, as David Simpson acknowledges in his book *9/11: Culture of Commemoration* (2006). Simpson argues that elements of the culture of commemoration and remembering (e.g. grieving the dead, providing summaries of their lives in obituaries and building memorials in their memory) indicate political advantages. Likewise, he criticizes those who perceive 9/11 as an apocalyptic event, condemning the exploitation of 9/11 for the purposes of defense (Simpson 2007).

It is clear that the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum have become one of New York City's main tourist attractions, though these attractions provoked resistance among relatives of the deceased, survivors and ordinary New Yorkers. Various scholarly and news articles have been written and published in which contradicting opinions are stated. For

instance, Chip Colwell and Alice Greenwald investigate the power of the dead in the aftermath of 9/11 according to family responses to the actual Memorial and Museum. They conclude that relatives of victims feel as if the Memorial and Museum are “prolonging their grief instead of giving closure of a burial and the solace of a memorial” (Colwell and Greenwald 10). There are a few things that stand out when reviewing opinions on the museum, e.g. relatives disagree on the fact that the Museum holds a room where the unidentified victims’ body remains are kept. It expresses the tensions caused by developing a Museum of public memory that found its origins in the sufferings of individuals. The Museum should therefore acknowledge and respect both the memories of the deceased and the demands of the survivors, recognizing that the victims never gave consent to be buried in a museum and that relatives are concerned about the treatment of their loved ones (Colwell and Greenwald 10).

Moreover, families are not satisfied with tourists’ treatment of the actual Memorial. According to articles posted in *The Telegraph* and *The New York Post*, tourists treat the Memorial as a ‘playground’ or ‘Disney attraction’ by sitting on victims’ names on the edges of the Memorial Pools, leaving trash, taking selfies and spitting Starbucks Coffee on the memorial itself (Allen 2012, Karni 2012). Similarly, what frustrates these relatives and survivors is that the Memorial and Museum have become such an outstanding tourist attraction, rather than a site to commemorate a tragic event. It has the status of a top destination to check off one’s bucket list while visiting New York, and not even being interested in what actually happened on 9/11 or the impact that it had on a global, national, and local scale (Corleto 2016; Del Signore 2015; Johanson 2011).

Therefore, relatives and survivors even refused to visit the Memorial and Museum when they first opened. Some claim that they do not need a public exhibition to remind them of the unforgettable tragedy, whereas others will not find relief or healing at the site, only more pain (Feuer 2014). Other witnesses and surviving responders state that the Museum leaves mixed emotions that confuse them, or that they do not want to go back because the memories of 9/11 heavily impacted them, or that they prefer to visit the Museum in private rather than surrounded by tourists who do not understand the things they went through (Feuer 2014). In contrast, it is also claimed that some survivors or relatives would visit the Museum to honor their lost loved ones, even though it forced them to go back to this traumatic destination. In general, New Yorkers actively encourage tourists to visit the 9/11 Memorial and Museum to learn about 9/11, only if they treat the site as a place of education and commemoration rather than a local playground.

Although this does not apply to visiting the online Memorial and Museum website, visiting the 9/11 Memorial is believed to be a newly developing and extremely popular branch of tourism, known as thanatourism or dark tourism. This type of tourism defines one's desire to travel to places where death and suffering has occurred and has been memorialized, but as for 9/11, reverence and commemoration are equally important. Dark tourism provides a means in which the death of others can be exploited to attract tourists, who can experience the fate of others at a distance in a safe environment. Even though the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum are prominent dark tourism sites in the US, there was also a fear that the items on display in the Museum would traumatize or re-traumatize its visitors (Stone 73-76). Philip Stone elaborates on this by stating that the role of absence is increasing in the architectural models for many dark tourism sites. The initial emptiness of Ground Zero reflects this. The sudden disappearance of two 110-story buildings represented physical destruction, in what were once two of the world's most recognizable and highest skyscrapers (Stone 78-81). 9/11 left global traces and there is a strong desire among domestic and foreign tourists to visit the site where these events took place, driven by a fascination with death and mortality (Hetter 2012).

In this Bachelor's thesis, the focus will thus be on the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum website, since it appears to be an underestimated but equally important part in exploring and experiencing the events of 9/11. This thesis will highlight three prominent aspects of the website, namely education, commemoration and commercialization.

The core of the first chapter will be education. It will discuss what visitors can learn about the events that took place on 9/11 and its aftermath, the interactive tools that are applied to create a website that engages visitors. This will be done through an in-depth analysis of audio transcripts and pictures that are included in the Interactive September 11 Timeline.

Chapter two addresses commemoration, an aspect of 9/11 that is actively present at its site, as well as on its website. The chapter will focus on various case studies representing commemoration: the Remembrance Flag, the 'Tribute in Light', and also the website section devoted to "Our City, Our Story," which offers narratives of how ordinary New Yorkers as well as 9/11 survivors remember and commemorate 9/11.

The final chapter of this thesis researches the commercialization of 9/11 that is present on its website. The website has a merchandize store, in which all sorts of items can be bought. This store will be examined on the basis of research done by Marita Sturken. Furthermore, what will be taken into account is how the website 'sells' 9/11, thus, how it attracts potential visitors to book a tour through text, color and images.



## CHAPTER ONE: EDUCATION

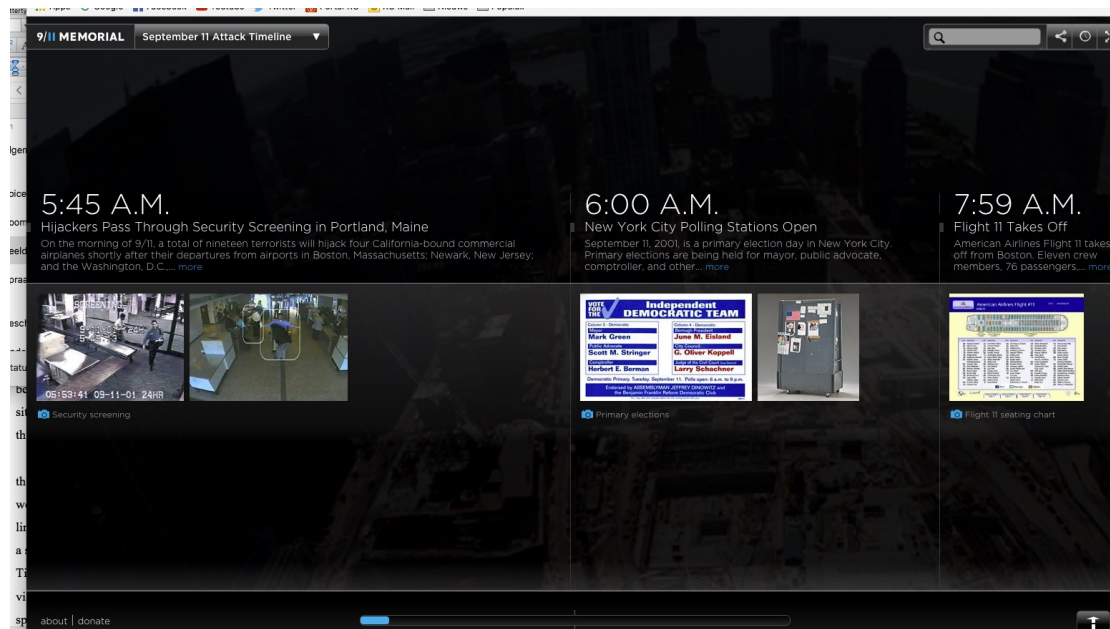
Despite the fact that one of the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum website's main priority is to sell 9/11, it also educates visitors on the actual events of September 11, 2001. When entering the homepage of the website, visitors immediately notice a section called 'Teach + Learn.' This section allows teachers and other educators to educate students about 9/11, by offering public programs, lesson plans and naturally a way for schools to schedule a field trip to the actual Memorial and Museum. The section of "Teach and Learn" will be central throughout this first chapter of the thesis, in which the following sub question will be the focus of attention: how does the website of the 9/11 Memorial and Museum represent 9/11 in terms of education? To draw a coherent conclusion, the chapter is divided in two subsections. The first section will look at various audio fragments that have been selected from the 'Interactive Timeline', interpreted on the basis of semiotics, whereas the second sub section will discuss images that are present on the Interactive Timeline as well. These images will be examined on the basis of "iconography" (Rose 145).

The story of 9/11 can be approached in two different manners. On the one hand it obviously sheds a light on the worst and darkest sides of human nature and one's capacity to turn hateful ideologies into disproportionate acts of violence and terrorism, while on the other hand one's capacity of generosity, spontaneity and taking care of one another, regardless of differences in race, religion or nationality. The 9/11 website has set up a few goals and standards to reflect on both these sides of human nature. The reasoning behind these goals is to adjudge the nature of the events and the "continuing ambiguities surrounding a full understanding of the significance of these relatively recent, historic events" (National 9/11 website). The goals include:

- Broaden the context for understanding the 9/11 attacks.
- Provide opportunities for the public to make meaningful and purposeful connections between the history of 9/11 and their own lives.
- Establish and maintain an authentic, respected forum for ongoing reflection, discussion and debate about evolving perceptions, attitudes, and questions arising from the events and aftermath of 9/11.
- Suggest ways to honor the memory of those killed and extend involvement with the legacy of 9/11 through acts of civic/community involvement and volunteerism.

(National 9/11 Memorial and Museum Website)

Although these are just a few of the numerous goals that the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum strives to achieve, either implicitly or explicitly, the overarching goal is evident: constructing an understandable narrative of the attacks on 9/11. A primary source that the website provides to resurrect the precise events on September 11 and the World Trade Center bombing in 1993 is the ‘Interactive Timeline.’ These timelines are included in a subsection under the ‘Learn + Teach’ section and additionally includes a timeline on the recovery of Ground Zero. Since the focus of this thesis is on the representation of 9/11 on the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum website, the 9/11 attacks timeline will be the primary source in the education analysis. This timeline comprises images, cell phone recorded videos and audio fragments that outline the events on an hour-to-hour basis.



**Figure 1:** A screenshot of the ‘Interactive Timeline’ as it has been positioned on the website. In the upper left corner is the 9/11 Memorial and Museum website logo, and in the bottom a blue button is seen that can be used to move through the images and fragments.

### 1.1 Audio Fragments

In order to be able to give a clear insight into how the website represents the precise events of 9/11, a few audio fragments from the Interactive Timeline have been selected. My own opinion was central in this; I picked the fragments of which I thought that they highlighted different viewpoints with regards to the attacks. These fragments display a variety of angles from which the attacks can be perceived, namely former WTC employees, a cabin attendant, people who live close to the site of the attacks, and the deceased. The website provides

transcripts with these fragments, thus the transcripts will be used for interpretation on the basis of semiotics.

Despite the fact that these fragments have been analyzed separately from one another, they can be depicted in a larger context, i.e. the timeline they derive from. When entering the website's home page, the visitor can click on the section 'Teach + Learn' and sees a small link called 'Interactive Timeline.' When clicking on this link, the visitor sees a webpage with a small informative paragraph on the timeline, followed by a link to the actual Interactive Timeline. The Interactive Timeline constitutes a sequence of images, audio fragments and videos that have been positioned in a chronological order. The estimated time to which a specific image or fragment relates has been indicated in a larger font size as well, with a small caption underneath that states what exactly happened. Furthermore, the timeline contains a vertical bar that can be moved from left to right to move through the different aspects of the timeline. The 9/11 logo is still present in the upper left corner, but in a much smaller size that it does on the website's home page (see Chapter Three for an analysis on this logo). However, the logo does not state 'National 9/11 Memorial and Museum,' but simply '9/11 Memorial.' The time frame in which the audio fragments have been picked ranges from 8:50 AM until 9:59 AM, and are discussed in a chronological order in this chapter as well. The website uses a black background and white letters for the timeline, which contrasts with other sections of the website, where a white background and black or blue letters are used., This may be done because it is more relaxing for the eye and indicates a more structured overview. Nevertheless, while moving through the timeline, a see-through image can be seen in the background, but the contrast is incredibly low so it is hardly possible to describe what one sees.

Betty Ann Ong: "Number three in the back. The cockpit's not answering. Somebody's stabbed in business class. And I think there's mace — that we can't breathe. I don't know. I think we're getting hijacked"

**Transcript 1** (National 9/11 Memorial and Museum Website – Interactive 9/11 Timeline)

This transcript refers to flight attendant Betty Orr who contacts American Airlines ground staff from Flight 11 to report the hijacking. The signifier that stands out here is the word 'hijacked,' which signified a plan that the plane is being hijacked by terrorists for the purpose of destruction and distraught. Moreover, this transcript can be examined on the levels of

denotation and connotation. This text denotes that this woman is warning someone of the worsening situation on board, that someone is stabbed, the cockpit is not answering and that she is afraid that her plane is being hijacked. When looking at the connotation (the cultural meaning) of the text, one can implicitly read the anger, fear and terror that cross the mind of this woman. This becomes evident when one listens to the audio fragment. It is hard to understand flight attendant Ong, because she is on board the plane and she sounds frightened to death and is uncertain on how to cope with the current situation and the her fate and that of her colleagues and passengers on board (Orr 819).

Brian Sweeney: "Jules, this is Brian—listen, I'm on an airplane that's been hijacked. If things don't go well, and it's not looking good, I just want you to know I absolutely love you, I want you to do good, go have good times, same to my parents and everybody, and I just totally love you, and I'll see you when you get there. Bye, babe. I hope I call you"

**Transcript 2** (National 9/11 Memorial and Museum Website – Interactive 9/11 Timeline)

This message came in from Brian Sweeney on United Airlines flight 175 in an attempt to call his wife, Julie, after he knew that his plane was being hijacked as well. What strikes one is the signifier "it's not looking good." The signified of this sign indicates that Brian is sure that he will not see his wife or loved ones again because his plane is hijacked, although he is not certain what exactly is going to happen. The text resembles a symbolic sign, which refers to meanings that are culturally specific. The literal meaning of the text is the displayed love of a man for his wife, family and friends in the final minutes of his life. The connotation, or the cultural and deeper meaning, that these sentences portray Brian's fear for what he is about to experience (Orr 819). When one listens to his audio fragment, one hears the sadness and sorrow through his voice: his understanding that he will soon die and that he attempts to make one final call to express his unconditional love for his wife, whom he greets with her nickname, Jules rather than Julie. This simple sign signifies that she is the last and only person he yearns to call before the plane will hit the World Trade Center. Likewise, what can be read in between these lines is desperation: Brian is without any hope that this situation will have a happy ending, that is why he finally says "I will see you when you get there," in which 'there' might point at life after death.

“When I arrived at the sky lobby level, there were masses of people waiting to the elevators. And for some reason I decided to go back into the stairwell. The heat was quite intense. There were some people who had taken their shirts off. The intensity of the warning signs, like the sound of the alarms—it was really pounding you. On the floors we had vending machines. They had been sliced and opened, and security personnel was giving out the water. Anyway, so we went down. People were very calm. There were three flows of people: the regular people like me, going down; the people who were coming down from the other floors and who were very badly burned. No skin. No hair. Just burnt. And so they were coming down, and they were walking or carried down by people, held by people. Screams were coming down from the stairwell: ‘Emergency, emergency.’ And people were coming down. And then the third flow of people was, of course, the security personnel and Fire Department people. Now, those people were exhausted—in some of those eyes, and you could see that they knew something. It was dangerous. They knew something. While there was no panic whatsoever in the stairwell, those people were concentrated, focused on doing their job. And while I was walking down, they were going up to their death. And I was walking down to live.”

**Transcript 3** (National 9/11 Memorial and Museum Website – Interactive 9/11 Timeline)

This transcript states the evacuation experience of Bruno Dellinger, founder of the Quint Amasis Company, which was located on the 47<sup>th</sup> floor of the North Tower. This transcript is the signifier, and what it signifies are several things. For instance, Dellinger seems to be traumatized by what he has experienced during his evacuation, the sights of people, the boiling heat and the screams that surrounded him everywhere he went. He appears to be grateful for the fact that he survived the collapse of the North Tower, even though he is highly aware of the fact that there are also incredible numbers of security personnel that were not going to survive the attack when they chose to walk upstairs rather than downstairs. On the one hand, denotation of this text suggests gratitude for surviving and his decision to go down the staircase rather than taking the elevator, while on the other hand he still sounds distraught by the thought of the large number of people who got heavily injured or died. As for connotation, Dellinger implies that a life choice had to be made, the choice of choosing for one’s own fate and running towards life, or the choice to help and potentially rescue others at the risk of one’s own life. He perfectly summarizes his experiences in the final sentence of the

transcript, a sentence that resembles the concept of denotation and connotation of his experiences. What stands out too is his description of the three flows of people: the calm, the injured, and the ones with a mission who feared what their destiny would be. The denotation of the danger remains unclear, because ‘something’ does not refer to a precise concept, as for connotation in this context, it relates to the attack on the North Tower (Orr 814-822).

“So I stood up, and I just turned my body towards the window, and I could see the big airline coming straight towards us. It looked like it was coming towards us. Didn’t look like the plane was in any kind of duress. It was going straight towards what I thought was our building when, in actuality, Tower One was right in front of us. I just stood frozen. I didn’t move. I couldn’t move. I just stood at the window. I could see it coming closer and closer. I could see the AA on its tail. I could see the cockpit. I could see inside the cockpit, the tinted windows of the cockpit. That’s how close I was. I could see on the side some of the windows of the passengers were pulled down. And then it just bellowed into Tower One. And for a moment, just for that moment, I was almost [sighing] of relief, until I realized all those people that had just [been] killed in that tower”

**Transcript 4** (National 9/11 Memorial and Museum Website – Interactive 9/11 Timeline)

In this transcript, Constance Labetti, an Aon Corporation employee on the 99<sup>th</sup> floor of the South Tower, remembers how she saw Flight 11 heading toward the North Tower. This transcript signifies the concept of terrorism, shock and anxiety. As she says in the transcript “she stood frozen and she couldn’t move.” Another possible concept is that of one believing that a plane will hit her tower, but then realizing that there is another building right in front of her that appears to be the target of the first attack. This can be associated with a malfunction of the mind, first resulting in shock, then a sudden feeling of relief and ultimately a feeling of grief for the ones that had just been killed in the other tower. The denotation of this statement refers to a woman’s eventual gratitude for the fact that this plane was not heading directly towards her, unaware, however, of the events that would follow. What instantly attract attention are the details of her description: the tinted windows of the cockpit, the closed passenger windows and the AA marking on the tail. The earlier mentioned statement coincides with the concepts of denotation and connotation. Denotation is strongly highlighted through the words ‘frozen,’ and ‘relief,’ since these words represent Constance’s emotions

that arose when witnessing what was happening right in front of her (Orr 819). The associated connotations that come with this memory are likewise a range of mixed emotions, but moreover a deed of human terrorism that had overwhelming consequences for the ones working in Tower One and the witnesses in Tower Two and its surrounding areas. It symbolizes hate and the desire to destroy (Orr 822).

“It broke our windows, and the whole cloud came in—the cloud of debris and dust came in our apartment, and it was so thick that we literally couldn’t breathe. We thought that we were going to—we didn’t think that we were going to get out of the building. It felt like it was choking us. I remember thinking, ‘Well, if I don’t breathe, I’m going to die. If I do breathe, I’m going to die.’ It just felt like death”

**Transcript 5** (National 9/11 Memorial and Museum Website – Interactive 9/11 Timeline)

Janette MacKinley, a Lower Manhattan resident, reminisces on the damage that had been done to her apartment as the Twin Towers collapsed. What makes her story interesting is that it sheds a completely different light on the impact that the Twin Towers’ collapse had. The transcripts mentioned before were from passengers, flight attendants and survivors that were directly involved. The reasoning behind the choice of this transcript are the underestimated effects that the attacks on the World Trade Center had on its neighboring areas. Janette’s transcript signified the concept of fear as caused by one’s inability to breathe and the uncertainty of how one is going to survive the cloud of dust and debris. It furthermore signified the concept of initial body responses to the current situation: what to do in order to survive, because Janette knew that she had to breathe anyway, but the fear of dying refrained her. This aligns perfectly with the concept of denotation, or the literal meaning of a text. When reading it or listening to it on the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum’s website, one can easily imagine being there, that is how vividly Janette describes it. Additionally, for the concept of connotation it brings up associations with the collapse of the World Trade Center yet again. Janette survived, her human instinct overtook her inability to breathe. She tried everything within her ability to enable herself to escape the building and the thickening cloud of debris. This points to survival, willingness and the human instinct in conditions of terrorism, chaos and disorder (Orr 819-822).



## 1.2 An analysis of images

As has already been noted in the introduction, Gillian Rose discusses Panofsky, who established three levels at which an image can be analyzed: a primary, secondary and intrinsic level. The September 11 Interactive Timeline contains extensive numbers of images and video fragments that have been recorded by 9/11 witnesses, all included to ensure that visitors learn about the events that took place on 9/11 from a variety of angles. A few images have been selected that are key to understanding the attacks and their impact on Lower Manhattan. The selected images attempt to represent 9/11 from several angles, to establish that the visitor gets acquainted with September 11 and its immediate aftermath. The images therefore represent the attacks on both towers, how the people in Lower Manhattan responded to this by trying to leave the area as soon as possible, and what the surrounding area of the Twin Towers looked like after the attacks.

The context in which the images have been positioned and structured corresponds with that of the audio fragments, since they appear on the same Interactive Timeline. A visitor is therefore able to recall the images in the same way as the audio fragments can be recalled, via a link to the Interactive Timeline that is present in the ‘Teach + Learn’ section. However, the time frame in which the selected images appear is different than for the audio fragments: the first shot was taken at approximately 9AM, while the latter two were shot during the early afternoon when responders searched for victims and survivors. The contextualization of the images is the same as for the audio fragments, they are positioned in a chronological order (in this analysis too) in a timeline that can be moved through from left to right, surrounded by recorded videos and audio fragments. After clicking on a certain image, it is shown at a larger size, together with a small section that states some background information and describes the setting in which the image has been taken. These sections have been used as captions for the images that are used in this thesis. The Interactive Timeline in which the images have been positioned, combined with the appearance of audio fragments and video records, therefore contributes to a general contextualization of the events that took place on September 11, 2001.



**Figure 2:** 8:48 EST, American Airlines flight 11 hits its target, WTC 1. The flight ascended from Logan International Airport with destination LA. This crash caused an explosion, immediately followed by a fire that rapidly expanded itself.



**Figure 3:** It is 9:03 AM and United Airlines flight 175 hits the Southern Twin Tower, likewise causing an enormous explosion and multiple fires. This flight was also destined for Los Angeles, but never got there.

What is interesting about these two screenshots, taken from the Interactive September 11 Timeline, is that one is a close-up shot of the North Tower, whereas the second shot depicts the South Tower. Unless one knows this, the shape of the markings of both buildings where the aircrafts actually hit is hard to distinguish. These two shots are dominated by flames and smoke, which is obvious when taking into account the impact that these airplanes had on those two towers. The theory of “iconography” as founded by Erwin Panofsky, discussed by Gillian Rose, can therefore be applied to these two photos, in particular on the primary and the intrinsic level (Rose 144-145). For the primary level, as mentioned before, one would not immediately recognize which skyscraper has been hit. What one sees are a clear blue sky, a tower, and smoke and flames. The primary level is the most descriptive and therefore easiest to understand: it provides a simplistic description of what can be seen on photos without any analytical interpretation. In addition, the blue sky might be considered significant in the analysis of these photos (and those that will follow), because the sky will soon be filled with thick clouds of dust and debris. Looking at this bright blue sky, no one could have ever expected what would happen next to New York City without warning. Moving on to the third, intrinsic level of iconography, which embodies a general cultural significance in which the relevance of a certain period, nation, or person is revealed. When examining these shots in their cultural context, one immediately acknowledges that these are stills from the attacks that took place on 9/11, even when one does not recognize the Twin Towers. One would additionally understand the effects that these two planes had on the Twin Towers, Lower Manhattan, New York City, and so forth. It brings into discussion the conflicting principles of America and the Middle East. The underlying thought of these conflicting ideologies can be found in religious motives. What Osama Bin Laden and his allies aimed for was to restore fundamental Islam and move away from the order that was established by the enemies of Islam. These attacks were thus seen as an act of redemption, aiming to slaughter those who defied the hegemony of God (Benjamin and Simon 40). 9/11 was the biggest act of terrorism in human history, causing approximately 3000 deaths and is main scope of the current war against terrorism. The intrinsic level analysis of these pictures therefore conveys a meaning that can be stretched back as far as the starting point in history when the US got involved in the Middle East and is still continuing at the moment of this writing (Rose 144-145).





**Figure 4:** Lower Manhattan evacuation procedures

Figure 4 displays an enormous crowd of people who were evacuated from Lower Manhattan. In the immediate wake of the attacks, thousands of people walked onto streets, highways and bridges in northern directions or in the direction of Brooklyn, trying to get away from the collapsing Twin Towers as soon as possible. What can be seen on this screenshot is the cloud of dust and debris that shows the attacks on the Twin Towers, but one does not see actual flames or the gashes that the planes created in both buildings. What stands out is that these people do not seem to be terrified or frightened, they rather look sad and distraught because of the events that had just taken place. It thus seems as if they show a sense of resignation while at the same time appear to be traumatized. It can definitely be said that they have witnessed something unforeseen. The hair of the majority is covered with dust, which brings on shades of gray to their original hair color. One person is even wearing a mask that prevents her from inhaling dust, which signifies that the amount of dust that was present was significant and dangerous for the vital conditions of the human body. On a primary level, the conclusion can be drawn that these people are walking away from an extensive cloud of smoke and dust that is predominantly present in the background. They are not running, but walking at a regular

pace. When including people's facial expressions and the dust that covers their hair, one could argue that for a secondary level of iconography, defined by the existence of specific symbolic resonance, is also present here (Rose 144-145). The resonance lies in the fact that it can be implied that these people are walking away from an event that just occurred. They are crossing a bridge, which indicates the symbolic resonance that they are escaping from the source of the attacks and are looking for shelter in Brooklyn in this case. The underlying thought behind their facial expressions is that these people are acting in an unconscious fashion, attempting to satisfy their primary needs (shelter and protection) without being able to process what they witnessed. What can be indicated as well here is that they are behaving in a way that they are forced to behave rather than driven by their own consciousness. Nevertheless, they do not seem to be wounded or injured, which might convey that the damage for them of September 11 is more psychological than physical damage.



**Figure 5:** The North Tower collapses, which is visible to pedestrians on the street

What one can see on figure 5 is the collapse of the North Tower, which developed extensively large and thick clouds of smoke. Pedestrians who were walking on the streets of Lower

Manhattan witnessed this. What is noticeable is that people are walking in various directions; they rather seem to be in a hurry escaping the collapse of the North Tower, because the effects were unexpected and almost inconceivable. In general, even with the smoke, this shot depicts a common view of New York City: skyscrapers with advertisements and billboards on their facades, traffic lights and pedestrians walking and crossing the street. At the same time, this picture is distorted, because it evokes chaotic emotions. This general description of the picture defines the primary level of image analysis as Gillian Rose described it, but it is also suitable for the intrinsic level of iconography (Rose 144-145). Since one can assume that this picture has been taken in New York City, one could directly think of the attacks of September 11, although it is not visible from which building the smoke originates. Witnessing all these pedestrians, who are walking on both the street and the sidewalk, might evoke the response that something terrible must have happened and that these witnesses are attempting to escape. Even though this picture reveals the basic attitude of pedestrians with regards to the collapse of the Twin Towers, it can be concluded that every human would instinctively react with a mode of fight-or-flight in which flight may be the only option. Regardless of class, ethnicity, religion or gender, a human instinct prioritizes surviving dangerous situations. In contrast, one might also argue that a minority of the witnesses in this screenshot is walking towards the collapsing towers possibly to provide aid. What it ultimately boils down to is that the intrinsic level of iconography as interpreted from this picture can be applied to a single situation around the globe in which a large number of people perceive themselves to be in danger (Rose 144-145).

Overall, the purpose of this first chapter was to analyze the ways in which the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum website attempts to educate its visitors on the exact events of September 11. The amount of information that the website provides is overwhelming. However, a selection had to be made when taking into account the scope of this thesis. I decided to focus primarily on the Interactive September 11 Timeline, since this provides a in-depth overview of what happened on September 11: from the moment the planes took off until 8:30 p.m., when President Bush addressed the nation from the White House. Several images and transcripts have been chosen to demonstrate how exactly the September 11 timeline educates its visitors. The transcripts derived from a variety of angles to ensure to shed a light on experiences of all of those who had been affected by the attacks. The images conveyed the consequences of the attacks on the area of Lower Manhattan, ranging from the attacks themselves to hours later. The methods of semiotics and a visual analysis contributed

to an in-depth analysis of these shots and transcripts, in which broader conclusions regarding the United States, the human body and mind, and important values could be drawn.



## CHAPTER TWO: COMMEMORATION

Education has proven to be one of the three main pillars in how the 9/11 Memorial and Museum website represents 9/11, as could be read in Chapter One. Nonetheless, ever since the Twin Towers were attacked on September 11, 2001, annual commemoration services have taken place across the United States to commemorate and honor the victims of 9/11. These commemorative ceremonies are considered to be immensely valuable to family, friends and other survivors, because this day allows them to express their ongoing grief and mourning and to reflect on the changes that this horrible day brought to their lives on both the individual and communal level. The annual commemoration service at the National 9/11 Memorial might be perceived as the most extensive commemoration service. At this memorial, family members read aloud the names of victims of the attacks, as well as the victims of the 1993 World Trade Center bombing. Elected officials and other dignitaries also attend this commemoration, however, they have not given speeches since 2012 (National September 11 Memorial and Museum website). Moreover, the ‘Tribute in Light’, originated in 2001, proved to be extremely impressive and successful, and has therefore been repeated every year since 2001. Even though it is not directly visible on the National 9/11 Memorial Website, commemoration tends to play an important role on the website as well, which will be the primary focus of this chapter. The existence of the Remembrance Flag, and the two case studies representing “Our City, Our Story” and ‘Tribute in Light’ will be used to answer the sub question: how does the 9/11 Memorial and Museum website represent commemoration?

### **2.1 The Memorial Flag and Remembrance Flag**

An item that contributes to the impact of the commemoration of 9/11 is the Memorial Flag. This flag is made of the remains of an American flag that was found at a construction site near Ground Zero on September 11, 2001. Due to safety reasons, the flag could not be retrieved until October 2001. The flag had to be entirely restored and was placed in storage for over seven years. The flag started a national tour on Flag Day, which was held in June 2009. Military service heroes and veterans across the country were asked to add materials from other ‘retired’ American flags in order to restore the original 13 stripes to the flag. The flag will eventually have a permanent spot in the National September 11 Memorial and Museum (National September 11 Memorial & Museum Website). A similar flag that reflects on September 11, 2001 is the Remembrance Flag (see figure 6). The underlying idea that this flag conveys is to not remain in mourning, but to learn from the circumstances and to try

everything that is within one's reach to prevent similar future events (Wyatt 2015). The relevance of this flag can be found in the fact that it is a flag that was designed specifically to commemorate all the attacks that took place across the country on September 11. The background stands for the colors of the state flags and signifies the sorrow for the innocent people that lost their lives. The four stars represent the four planes that were involved, whereas the colors of the stars represent the colors of the American flag (red, white and blue). Similarly, the four stars are touching one another and the blue column on each side that symbolizes the unity of America's inhabitants (Wyatt 2015).



**Figure 6:** National 9/11 Remembrance Flag

This image has been retrieved from the website CRW Flags, which specializes in providing information about every imaginable flag. A subsection of this website is devoted to September 11 commemorative flags, and lists all the flags that are created in remembrance of 9/11. When interpreting this flag as a sign, in accordance to the principle of semiotics as stated by Leonard Orr, an agreement is to be found between the signifier and the signified. The signifier is the flag in its entirety, whereas the signified (e.g. the concept that the flag refers to) is the commemoration of 9/11 (Orr 819). This flag can furthermore be analyzed on the level of denotation as well as connotation. In regards to the concept of denotation, one could instantly recognize the connection to 9/11 in this flag, simply because it is stated at the bottom of the flag. However, the colors of the flag might imply that this flag was made to signify the events of 9/11, without knowing the actual meaning of the symbols and colors that are present on the flag. When considering the connotative level, one could associate the flag

with deeper emotions of sorrow, grief and mourning through the black background and the notion of 9-11-01. The four stars represent the locations of the 9/11 attacks (e.g. New York City, Washington D.C. and Pennsylvania), the four planes that crashed and the innocent lives lost on these planes and in the buildings, but also the lives of the ones that survived. The blue star connotes the Pentagon and American Airlines Flight 77, while the two white stars represent each of the Twin Towers, American Airlines flight 11 and United Airlines flight 175. The red star signifies United Flight 93 that crashed In Pennsylvania and those who sacrificed their lives to protect the loss of other innocent lives (Wyatt 2015). Additionally, this flag can be associated with the impact that 9/11 has had on America as a country and how it unified Americans to help one another, symbolized by touching stars (Orr 819-822). What is striking about this flag is the acknowledgement and therefore representation of all the attacks that took place on September 11. The flag signifies the connection between the attacks and the lives of the people that were killed through the touching stars. This is significant, because as can be read in Chapter Three, the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum primarily focuses on the attacks that took place in New York City rather than acknowledging the other crashes.

## **2.2 The online portrait of commemoration**

Although commemoration is not explicitly present at the website's home page, one can easily find information on the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of September 11 that was held in 2016 and the section on "Our City, Our Story" which highlights memories and experiences of ordinary New Yorkers around the events of 9/11.

"Our City, Our Story" is representative of the aspect of commemoration, which lies in the fact that it allows ordinary New Yorkers to share their memories of 9/11 on an online platform. The aim of this is that website visitors are given the opportunity to read, hear and see how 9/11 is still actively present and alive among the memories of New Yorkers, whether they were directly involved with 9/11 or not. It has been chosen as a primary case study in this chapter because it signifies the importance of commemorating September 11 among New Yorkers and that even now, almost 16 years after the attacks, 9/11 is vividly present in their memories. "Our City, Our Story" is a collection of podcasts, videos and social media posts that represent the commemoration of 9/11, but also to express what it is to be a New Yorker and how September 11 changed this (National 9/11 Memorial and Museum Website). One example has been chosen that signifies the relevance of "Our City, Our Story." The National 9/11 Memorial and Museum website states the following:

“For those of us who call New York our home, 9/11 and its aftermath left an indelible impact on our lives. Today we’ve grown stronger, together with the city that we are proud to call our home. OUR CITY. OUR STORY is a collection of video, audio, and social stories of resilience and hope surrounding 9/11, as told today by New Yorkers. These stories are relevant to everyone – no matter where you are from or where you live. We want to hear your story. We invite you to add your voice to our “Reflecting on 9/11” exhibition at the recording booth inside the museum.”  
(National 9/11 Memorial and Museum website – Our City, Our Story)

This text signifies the existence of a participatory culture on the 9/11 Memorial and Museum website, because the website’s developers aim for New Yorkers to create content for commemoration purposes (Jenkins et al. 2009).



**Figure 7:** Screenshot from a social media post that the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum used on its website

This image has been retrieved from the 9/11 Memorial and Museum website’s section devoted to “Our City, Our Story,” to which a link to the section can be found on the homepage of the website. The image is positioned on the right-hand side of the webpage, in a

vertical column. This column contains social media posts that are related to the actual 9/11 Memorial. The image of the rose is the first one to be seen, with a caption that shows similarity to the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum logo with regards to its colors. On the left-hand side of this same webpage is a map of New York City, with small dots representing the location of the stories that are collected in “Our City, Our Story” The National 9/11 Memorial and Museum logo can still be seen in the upper left corner of the webpage.

What is particularly striking about this screenshot are the bright colors of the rose contrasting with the dark shades that appear to be the background colors. The photo seemed to be taken from an angle, since the rose stands up straight but the buildings in the background do not. The day on which this photo was taken was a rainy day: one can clearly see that the immediate surroundings of the rose are wet. This rose has been taken to the actual memorial site by a friend or relative of the victim, placed at the perimeter of the memorial where the victims’ names are engraved. When looking at this image on a primary level as defined by Gillian Rose (144-145), excluding the caption, one can say that the vivid and powerful appearance of the color red signifies energy and strength and motivates one to continue action (in this case maybe having hope for no further attacks in the future and mourning and grieving the loss of loved ones) (Scoble and Field 2014). It is significant that the rose has been chosen to take to the actual 9/11 Memorial site, since roses play an important role in the culture of commemoration. According to Scoble and Field, flowers are used in commemorations for a variety of reasons. First and foremost, flowers are a manner of expression. It is often hard for those who mourn to put their feelings into words, and flowers are therefore a visual symbol of respect, love and sympathy. Secondly, flowers create a feeling of warmth and beauty that adds to dignity and consolidation in a period of grief, mourn and commemoration (Scoble and Field 2014). Americans have traditionally expressed their respect for the deceased and sympathy for the dead person’s relatives by bringing flowers to a memorial (Scoble and Field 2014). Roses are definitely one of the most common and appropriate flowers in the culture of commemoration, although every color signifies its own meaning. A (crimson) red rose evokes feelings of love and respect but also sorrow and grief. This is perfectly exemplified on a connotative level by the rose that is depicted in the image above. It is taken to the 9/11 Memorial site and photographed, indicating that the person who took the picture and wrote the caption aims to show his or her respect for the dead while mourning at the same time (Scoble and Field 2014).

When applying the concept of denotation to this image and its caption, it can be stated that the image of the rose denotes a flower that is positioned in a relative dull and gloomy

background. The caption denotes that the person who created this post believes that one should strive to memorialize and arouse memories rather than attempting to forget and forgive the attacks of 9/11. At the connotative level, this image and its caption combined may evoke emotions of mourning, grief and hope. This image suggests that the witnesses, survivors and relatives of the deceased of 9/11 should continue memorializing the attacks and the ones lost as a result of the attacks, because the long-term grieving process will be beneficial and will eventually lead to redemption. According to Erika Doss in her article “Remembering 9/11: Memorials and Cultural Memory” this statement is accurate for memorials in general that memorialize tragic events and the deceased (Doss 27-30. Orr 819-822).

The interaction that originates between “Our City, Our Story” participants and visitors can be defined as part of an online participatory culture. Participatory culture is a culture in which individuals do not only act as consumers, but also as contributors of producers of content. It generally involves content that is created or produced for published media, although developments regarding the Internet have enabled individuals to participate extensively. This new participatory culture that is primarily focused on the Internet is also known as Web 2.0, in which participants find meanings and identities that were never meant to be there and decreasing the passivity of consumerism (O’Dowd 7-10; Tindall and Hutchins 2016). “Our City, Our Story” enables individuals to express and share memories and to connect with people who have similar experiences, goals and interests. According to Jenkins et al, a participatory culture is described as a culture with a relatively low barrier for public engagement, a strong support for creating and sharing one’s ideas, thoughts or creations with others, where members believe that their contributions matter and one where members feel a social connection with one another (2009). It is also an explicit form of participatory culture, described as an “explicit participation is the conscious and active engagement of users in online communities” whereas implicit participation often occurs without the users knowledge (Latabie 2011). The opportunity to engage with “Our City, Our Story” corresponds with the characteristics of a participatory culture, because the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum encourages participants to share their memories of 9/11 in a way that is accessible to visitors and that allows for a more personal reflection on September 11 through podcasts and videos, taking into account how the interviewees dealt with the influences that 9/11 had on their personal lives. The website also invites other survivors, witnesses or victims’ relatives to share their memories in “Our City, Our Story.” The participatory culture that the 9/11 Memorial and Museum website offers is also visible in a way that the content that participants deliver and create is meaningful and it matters, not only to them but also to each individual

who visits the website and becomes acquainted with the existence of “Our City, Our Story.” This results in a connection between participants and visitors; participants who share their experiences regarding a particular event in history and visitors who become more engaged with the attacks that took place on September 11 through hearing and watching all those different stories (Jenkins et al 2009).

The stories also contribute to the aspect of commemoration, because every single one of these interviewees remembers the day of September 11 as if it was only yesterday. Their stories are a mixture of hope, grief and memories, reminiscing about that day and the loved ones lost as a result of the attacks; but they also provide hope for a better and brighter future for themselves, their fellow New Yorkers and for America in general (“Our City, Our Story” – National 9/11 Memorial and Museum Website).

What stands out as well is the positive effect the Memorial has on the people contributing their stories to “Our City, Our Story.” Even though the Memorial has provoked copious amounts of negative feelings among relatives and witnesses (see ‘Introduction’ for further elaborations on this), the Memorial proved to be beneficial for coping with the traces that 9/11 left. What stands out, though, is the emotion that comes through the voices of the people who are telling their stories. One can hear the persistent emotions of shock, anxiety and fear when listening to the available podcasts. This indicates that 9/11 is still present in their lives. A statement that seems ominously present among all participants in “Our City, Our Story” is the fact that they feel they had to cross an imaginary boundary to be able to visit the Memorial. Therefore, it took them several years before they were actually able to go there and allow themselves to reminiscence 9/11 (National September 11 Memorial and Museum Website). However, visiting the Memorial appeared not to have been as moving and traumatizing as participants of “Our City, Our Story” had expected it to be (“Our City, Our Story” Guest Reflections – National 9/11 Memorial and Museum website). This proves that the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum did an excellent job in representing and commemorating the tragedy of 9/11 at the actual site as well as at its online website. The statements posted on the website might therefore be regarded as an effective move in providing the necessary push for those potential visitors, who were initially unsure of what to expect, to actually go and visit the Memorial site.

Possibly the most impressive way of commemorating the victims of 9/11 is the exhibition of the ‘Tribute in Light.’ This tribute is set up every year and consists of 88 searchlights that are placed next to the site of the World Trade Center to create two vertical light columns in remembrance of the Twin Towers and the deceased. The ‘Tribute in Light’

was originally founded as a temporary memorial in 2002, but was launched again in 2003 to mark the second anniversary of the attacks and has since been repeated every year. The idea of the project arose in the week immediately following the attacks. John Englehart came up with this idea as a symbol that showed his support for the community, but it was first perceived as “the Project of the Immediate Reconstruction of the Manhattan Skyline.” The reasoning behind this was that the searchlights should be placed near the site of the disaster, projecting their light straight up into the sky. Similarly, the corporations in charge were initially planning to name it the ‘Towers of Light,’ but victims’ relatives felt as if the name emphasized the buildings that were destroyed rather than the people that were killed (National September 11 Memorial and Museum website).



**Figure 8:** A View on the Tribute in Light overlooking the 9/11 Memorial and Museum





**Figure 9:** Tribute left at the 9/11 Memorial with the Tribute in Light in the background

These two photographs are to be found in the section related to the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of September 11 and the ceremony that took place at the actual Memorial and Museum to commemorate the victims. It can be found through the search option that the website offers: if a visitor types in '15<sup>th</sup> anniversary' he or she is directed to a webpage with search results, and it is the first result that is shown. A page is opened that provides information related to the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary, but the link to 'Tribute in Light' is on the left-hand side of the webpage. There are more pictures to be found on the 'Tribute in Light' but I found these two remarkable in the sense that they provide an excellent view of what the Tribute looks like and

are taken from an angle in which parts of the National 9/11 Memorial are visible. The pictures are positioned in the middle of the webpage and are cut in the shape of parallelograms in a horizontal line. One can move through the images by using the arrow keys on a computer keyboard. When clicking on a particular image, the entire image is shown and it has its natural shape again, i.e. a square. By doing so, however, the other images and content of this specific webpage vanish and only the image that was clicked on is portrayed.

These images can best be analyzed from a primary or pre-iconographic perspective as defined by Gillian Rose (145). This is the basic level of visual analysis and therefore easiest to understand. What one clearly sees are the two beams of light that are shining straight up in the air, commemorating the victims of 9/11. Nevertheless, since these searchlights are positioned to shine straight into the sky, they could also refer to the former World Trade Center buildings, depicting two straight columns (Marin 2012). On a third, or intrinsic level, these searchlights may represent the attitudes of a nation, community or group of people towards a specific period in time. This is exemplified through the bouquets of roses that are in the forefront. The white roses signify a gesture of remembrance and a way of saying “I think of you,” whereas red roses are a way of saying “I love you” (Scoble and Field 2014). As for these particular photographs, placed under the ‘Tribute in Light’ section of the website and representing the beams of light, that would be 9/11 and the people that were killed in the attacks (Rose 144-145). Since this art installation is set up every year, it symbolizes the nation’s willingness to continue to commemorate 9/11 and keep the traumatizing effects of that day alive. In the second picture, the engraved names of the deceased are to be seen in the foreground. This refers to an almost literal inscription of the names onto the towers and the establishment of a connection between the names of the people that were killed, the original Twin Towers, the National 9/11 Memorial and the ‘Tribute in Light.’ This relationship is visible through the engraved names at the sides of the gaping holes of the Memorial Pools at the location where the Twin Towers used to be, but what is now known as the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum. The visibility of the ‘Tribute in Light’ in the background contributes displays the closeness of this particular tribute to the National 9/11 Memorial and thus the people that were killed. Relatives of the deceased have been upset about how the edges of the Memorial Pools, in which the names of their loved ones were inscribed, have been treated (see Introduction for further elaboration on this), however, the inscription of the names signifies the sacredness of the 9/11 Memorial as a particular space. According to the website of the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum, the design of the Memorial Pools with the engraved names “provides a direct relationship between the visitor, the water, and the names,

allowing for a feeling of quiet reverence between the visitor and the Memorial. Names are stencil-cut into the parapets, allowing visitors to look through the names at the water. At night, light shines up through the voids created by each letter of a name.” (National 9/11 Memorial and Museum website). The way in which the names are engraved around the gaping holes of the Memorial Pools signifies the loss of the lives of the nearly 3000 people that were killed at these particular spots in Lower Manhattans. Nevertheless, although the National 9/11 Memorial site tends to be a sacred place and the names themselves are even more sacred and are almost like a tombstone, the significance of the names is less visible in the virtual space of National 9/11 Memorial and Museum website. The website provides an alphabetized list of the names of the deceased, but this is not directly visible when one enters the homepage of the website. When clicking on the sub section “Memorial” at the top of the homepage, one is directed to another subsection called “explore.” This section provides the opportunity for visitors to virtually find an engraved name. Although the names are not displayed as how they actually appear on the edges of the Memorial pools, this opportunity signifies the importance of the engraved names in reality as well as virtually.

Leonard Orr’s concepts of connotation and denotation can be applied to the ‘Tribute in Light’ as well. The signifier in these images is the two beams of light, while the signified is the commemoration of 9/11 in New York City. With regards to denotation, the literal meaning of these columns of light would be the resemblance of the Twin Towers. Likewise, one could argue that it brightens up the Manhattan skyline and is a perfect way to replace the current vacancy that used to be the Twin Towers. The concept of connotation can be associated with the intrinsic level of iconography in that the columns of light may represent the people killed rather than the destruction of the Twin Towers (Marin 2012). Due to the fact that this Tribute is only held once every year, it is a very special occasion and therefore may be symbolic of the process of redemption (Orr 819-822).

An overall conclusion can be drawn that commemoration is indeed a significant pillar of the website of the 9/11 Memorial and Museum. Several aspects of the Memorial website’s attempts to commemorate 9/11 have been highlighted throughout this chapter. For instance the existence of the Remembrance Flag signifying all the attacks on 9/11, but also the contribution of the stories of ordinary New Yorkers in “Our City, Our Story.” The most compelling way of commemorating 9/11 may be found in the annual ‘Tribute in Light,’ in which search lights, representing two vertical columns of light to remember the people that were killed in the attacks on 9/11. This specific manner of commemoration can be perceived

to be particularly American. Erika Doss argues however that Americans tend to create memorials in the immediate aftermath of a certain traumatizing event, memorializing and commemorating the dead with clothes, shoes and other personal belongings (Doss 2002). As for 9/11's 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary, the website devotes a section to the commemoration ceremony that was held on September 11, 2016, including the 'Tribute in Light.' For website visitors unable to join the actual commemoration ceremony, the website provides pictures of the commemoration ceremony and allows visitors to search for particular engraved names at the actual memorial site. It can be concluded that commemoration can be illustrated from various perspectives; all contributing to a process of grief and mourning that originated from the immediate aftermath of 9/11 and will continue for a long time to come.

## CHAPTER THREE: COMMERCIALIZATION

The first two chapters of this thesis were centralized on the concepts of education and commemoration that the 9/11 Memorial and Museum website uses in order to represent 9/11 in multiple ways; the Interactive Timeline has been used to interpret several audio fragments and images in terms of education. As for commemoration, the Remembrance Flag, the ‘Tribute in Light’ and “Our City, Our Story” were used as objects for analysis. The third major goal of the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum website is commercialization, i.e. selling 9/11 to its visitors. With one’s first encounter with the homepage, one already sees the buttons that scream ‘Book a Tour’ or ‘Plan your visit!’ A headline of a subsection instantly appears as well, named ‘Visit,’ where visitors can learn various things about what to prepare for when visiting the actual 9/11 Memorial and Museum site. Likewise, this section states information on all practical aspects of visiting the Memorial and Museum, for instance, accessibility, directions as in how to get there, reservations and operation hours. The aim is to prepare visitors well so that they will not encounter unforeseen problems when they arrive at the tourist attraction.

## What to Expect on Your Museum Visit

**What to Expect**

- [Before Arrival](#)
- [Getting Here](#)
- [Hours of Operation](#)
- [Accessibility](#)

Visitors are welcome to explore the Museum at their own pace. An average visit can take about two hours.

**Main Exhibitions**

The [historical exhibition](#) has three parts: the Day of 9/11, Before 9/11 and After 9/11. It tells the story of what happened on 9/11, including the events at the World Trade Center and the Pentagon and the story of Flight 93. The exhibition explores the background leading up to the events and examines their aftermath and continuing implications.

The [memorial exhibition](#), which is named In Memoriam, commemorates the lives of those who perished on September 11, 2001 and February 26, 1993 and provides visitors with the opportunity to learn about the men, women and children who died.

[Foundation Hall](#) is a room of massive scale, which houses both the last column and the slurry wall.

**Museum Guides**

To enhance your visitor experience, we recommend downloading our [mobile apps](#), including our [Museum audio guide](#), before you arrive.

Download the [Museum Guide \(PDF\)](#) for a general overview of what you can expect to see on your visit. Check the Information Desk during your visit for audio tours information.

Download the [Museum Guide for Children \(PDF\)](#) to help visitors 8 to 11 years old understand the history of the World Trade Center, what happened on 9/11, and how the site has been rebuilt. *Note: Guide does not include the Museum's historical exhibition, September 11, 2001.*

**Figure 10:** A screenshot of one of the pages of the 9/11 Memorial and Museum website, which exemplifies what visitors can expect when they visit the actual site. On the left are links to other sections that provide necessary visitor information.

Additionally, the website provides an online merchandise store, in which all sorts of items relating to 9/11 can be bought, ranging from apparel, accessories and jewelry to books and other paper goods. This 9/11 merchandise is just as important as the website's attempts to persuade visitors to plan a visit to the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum, because this online store proves that a real visit to the attraction may not even be necessary anymore. If one is interested in getting a 9/11 shirt, book or other item, one can simply visit the website and a purchase is only a few clicks away. Marita Sturken wrote about the controversial gift shop in her book *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero* (2007). However, one cannot analyze these different approaches to sell 9/11 without looking at the general set up of the 9/11 Memorial and Museum website. This chapter will therefore start with an analysis of the main iconography and typography of the website, the colors and the logo of the 9/11 Memorial and Museum. What will follow is indeed a discussion on selling and consuming 9/11 via the 9/11 Memorial and Museum website in order to answer the central sub-question of this chapter: how does the 9/11 Memorial and Museum website represent 9/11 in terms of commercialization?

### 3.1 The National 9/11 Memorial and Museum logo

The logo that the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum website uses is simple but rather effective. It is easy to recognize, because the majority of the coloring is black, whereas the digits that represent '11' are blue and therefore more prominent.

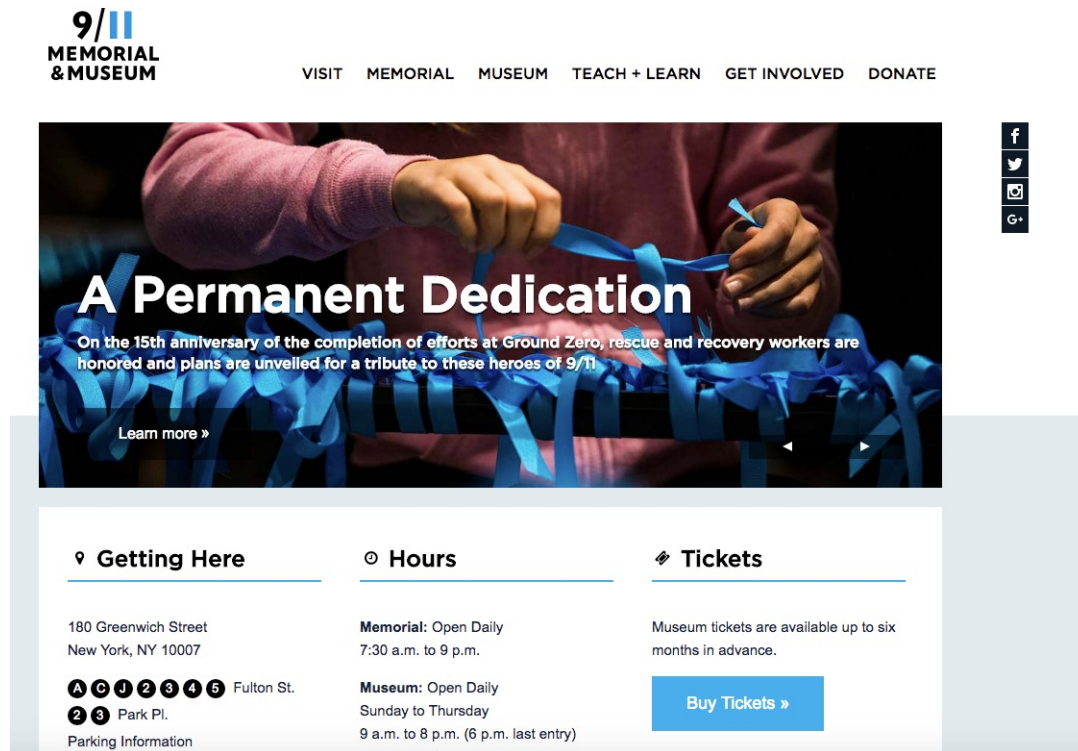


**Figure 11:** The online logo of the 9/11 Memorial and Museum

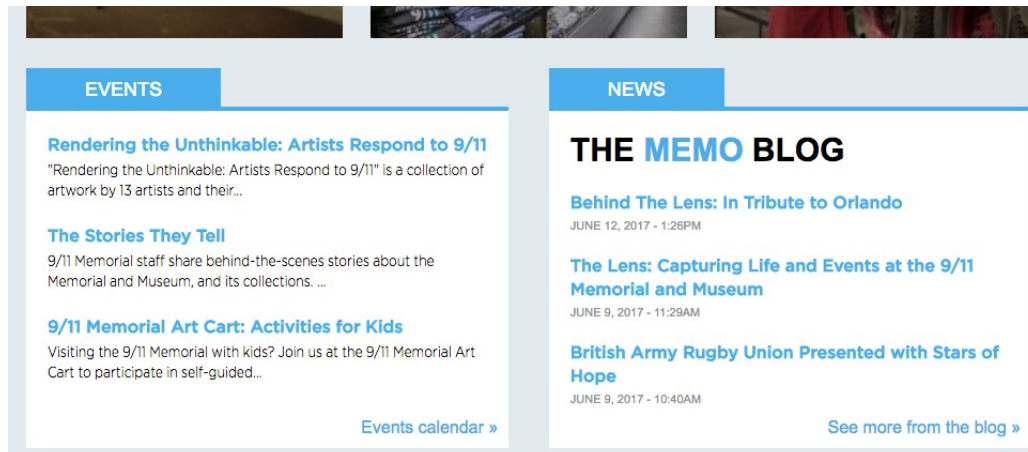
This is an enlarged image of the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum logo. The logo is always positioned in the upper left corner of a webpage that belongs to the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum website, whether it's the homepage or a sub section devoted to a particular topic, the logo is inevitably present. Research has been done into the meaning of the use of different colors on a website and the effect of certain font sizes and styles. Cameron Chapman, for instance, claims in his book *Colour for Web Design: Apply Colour Confidently and Create Successful Websites* that color is one of the most powerful tools at a website designer's disposal. He provides terminology, strategies and possible color palettes (2014). speak for themselves (Dunlap 2011).

When analyzing the iconic logo with regards to semiotics, various interpretations are possible. As for the signifier, the logo is the material thing that signifies. The signified is therefore the concept that the logo refers to, thus a tourist attraction that is easy to understand, e.g. a memorial and museum that commemorate and resurrect the events that took place on 9/11. On the level of denotation, the logo conveys 9/11 as a date. When looking at connotation, it is clear that one would associate the sign immediately with terrorism, airplanes, the World Trade Center and New York City. It can evoke emotions of fear, sadness, distress but also curiosity. Curiosity to the extent that one is eager to learn what had happened on 9/11 and how this affected New York City and the United States (Orr 819-822).





**Figure 12:** A screenshot of the homepage of the 9/11 Memorial and Museum website, in which the color blue is visible in various formats including for the logo



**Figure 13:** The bottom half of the homepage displays the omniscient presence of the color blue as well

The light and bright shade of the color that is predominantly visible and present on the 9/11 Memorial website is the color blue. One sees it in the overarching logo, headlines, and buttons that one can click on to enter a new section of the website. This results in an easy-view website that appears to be well structured.

Blue is generally used to represent responsibility and calmness. To top it all off, blue corresponds to a sense of peace, which the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum website



endeavors to preserve for witnesses, relatives, survivors, tourists and others. Their goal is “to honor 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” (National September 11 Memorial and Museum).

Chapman also provides a deeper insight in the usefulness of the color blue. In general, according to Chapman, blue stands for trustworthiness and honesty. This might be reflected in the sense that the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum website is an official website and not a fake marketing website that tries to trap innocent customers. Blue also reduces feelings of tension and fear, an effect that might be necessary when first entering the National 9/11 Memorial website or seeing the logo for the first time. Finally, blue adds to feelings of unity and strength, feelings that are highly important in the aftermath of 9/11. According to Robin Finn in his *The New York Times* article “Fighting for the Underlying Reason of Ground Zero”, Americans took care of one another on a local, state and national level and yet again, America rose as a unified nation and tried everything within its power to protect itself domestically and internationally (Chapman 27; Finn 2005).

Both Chapman and Song and Zahedi examined the neutral colors too. They all argue that neutral colors are often used in combination with brighter colors, a statement that is perfectly visible in the 9/11 logo. The majority of the logo coloring is black, as well as the color of the texts on the website. Black can have positive and negative connotations, but for the purpose of the goals of the 9/11 Memorial and Museum website, the positive effects will be taken into account. Black regularly coincides with power and elegance but is nevertheless also associated with mourning in many Western cultures. This might be the explanatory reason behind the color black in the logo, because the number of people that died is extensive while others still remain missing. Black additionally depicts a feeling of protection and comfort, which many Americans yearned for in the aftermath of 9/11 (Chapman 50-55; Song and Zahedi 1219-22).

As for the analysis of the form of the logo, what stands out is the shape of the number ‘11’. What strikes one is how the two 1’s might represent the Twin Towers, as argued by David Dunlap in his *The New York Times* article “Can’t Place the Name, but the Typeface is Familiar” (2011). The number ‘11’ can also be seen as the representation of the time of the

attacks, in which the day of the attacks almost becomes synonymous with the Twin Towers themselves. An interesting connection can be made here between the logo of the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum website and the Remembrance Flag that has been discussed in Chapter Two. The 9/11 Memorial and Museum logo is primarily focused on the attacks that took place in New York City and its space and locality there. The Remembrance Flag, in contrast, acknowledges and represents the other locations too (Pennsylvania and Washington D.C.) and signifies all the victims and memories in one particular symbol, whereas the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum logo focuses on the Memorial and Museum that are built to commemorate and resurrect the tragedy that took place in NYC on 9/11.

A symbol that represents such an important institution deserves an in-depth investigation especially of the typeface and font, because these are prominently present. Dunlap moreover claims that discussions arose over the specific font of the typeface; it could be either Verlag or Gotham, both created by Hoefler & Co. Landor Associates created the final version of the trademark, and they stated that the typeface is indeed a mixture of Gotham and Verlag. A customized version of Verlag was created to stabilize compatibility with Gotham, but also to establish a greater stature (Dunlap 2011). Landor Associates furthermore claims that it was challenging to create a logo that involved a slash, therefore the ‘9’ is slightly rotated counter-clockwise to bring the stem of the ‘9’ closer to the adjacent slash. Jonathan Hoefler, co-owner of Hoefler & Co, finally argues that these typographies are an important, though unconscious part of what one acknowledges as memorial or ceremonial lettering, therefore perfectly fitting the purpose of the 9/11 Memorial and Museum website.

In addition, Landor Associates’ main priority was to create a logo that coincided with the shortened name that was given to the Memorial “9/11 Memorial.” With this new name, a new visual image was also necessary to reinforce the spirit of rebuilding. The two 1’s can be seen as the previous Twin Towers but also as pillars of strength and solidarity. The use of the date 9/11, in which the ‘11’ stands alone in a shade of blue against the black ‘9’ and ‘Memorial’ allows for an interpretation that the events that occurred on 9/11 are authentic and

### **3.2 “Selling” 9/11 through an extensive gift shop**

Although the logo is iconic and also contributes to ‘selling’ 9/11 via the website, commercialization of 9/11 explicitly takes place through the gift store that is located at the actual site of the Memorial and Museum. However, this is not the only place where visitors can look for and buy 9/11 merchandise, because the website offers an online gift shop as well. This shop contains, for instance, 9/11 apparel and accessories, mugs, blankets, and books,

journals and notecards. The link to the gift store is dominantly present at the home page of the website, immediately inviting visitors to take a look at what the gift store sells.

Marita Sturken, a previously mentioned prominent scholar in the field of the rebuilding of Ground Zero and the 9/11 Memorial and Museum, also researched the attractiveness of merchandise in relation to the commercialization of a traumatic event and what the motives are for tourists to actively engage in this commercial behavior. She does this in her book *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero*, which was published in 2007. According to Sturken, the presence of a gift shop within the actual Museum feels irrevocably determined, since a large amount of, although not all, contemporary memorial museums around the world have a gift shop. Although the 9/11 Memorial Museum gift shop is located at a discreet location in the Museum, obviously on the path leading visitors out of the Museum, the so-called “exit through the gift shop,” it nevertheless was a source for negative attention in relation to the museum. For example, media called it “the shop of horror” (Sturken 2007). The highest level of criticism was gained when the museum launched a cheese plate in the shape of the United States, with hearts marking the various locations of the attacks on 9/11. The Museum eventually withdrew this item when the criticism reached a crescendo. Sturken also claims that even though media and 9/11 families have approached the merchandise that is for sale negatively, one should attempt to understand what this merchandise means in relation to 9/11 and what it means for visitors to buy something and take it home with them.

The selling of 9/11 merchandise started immediately in the first weeks after September 11, much of it in unofficial street merchandise of informal economies, but some of it also in more official stores. These official stores sold coffee mugs, stuffed animals and apparel. Moreover, Sturken distinguishes several different categories in the items that are for sale in the 9/11 gift shop. However, this analysis can also be applied to the online gift shop. First and foremost, the pedagogical items that contain books, films and photographic albums. The second category is intended primarily for children, containing comforting items that are mainly associated with stuffed dogs, teddy bears and other animals. Furthermore, the online gift shop sells souvenirs, many of which celebrate the Fire Department (FDNY) and the Police Department (NYPD), although they already existed prior to the loss of the large number of their members on September 11. The fourth category, and possibly most important, is domestic merchandise. This type of merchandise can be found in the majority of museum gift shops, but it is much more dubious for memorial museum gift shops. Sturken argues that while souvenirs are intended to be displayed, domestic merchandise is intended to be used in

one's daily life, This domestic merchandise includes hoodies or T-shirts with the twin towers printed on it, or a coffee mug or water bottle with the 9/11 Memorial Museum logo on it. The underlying meaning of these domestic items might be debated. Is it a way to incorporate the memory of 9/11 into one's life or to reduce the story of 9/11 to simple sentimentality? It is certainly true that those souvenirs that highlight the story of 9/11 with patriotism are diminishing the complexity of 9/11, leaving it a story of unquestionable and unproblematic notions of strength and resilience (Sturken 2007).

What is striking in the overall merchandise of 9/11, at the actual gift shops as well as online, is the influence of architectural style. A fundamental theme in the commercialization of 9/11 is the "gothic" design that had been used in the skin of the original Twin Towers, now transformed into a modernist design for plates, scarves and ties. This is a remarkable decision, though it seems to convey the emotions and feelings of nostalgia that the Twin Towers evoke as a way to mediate the selling of merchandise in general. Sturken concludes that because of their effect and their appeal, the objects that are for sale in the online gift shop, convey an impression of authenticity, because the objects signify the charged aspects of the site of Ground Zero, which empowers them. Nevertheless, these souvenirs can ultimately only preserve the myth of innocence, including a feeling of comfort that denies the complexity of global politics that has arisen after the events of 9/11 (Sturken 2007).

### **3.3 A semiotic analysis of the online gift shop**

Marita Sturken criticizes the commercialization of 9/11, because it portrays America as a victim and diminishes the complexity surrounding the attacks. Her focus is primarily on the actual site of the 9/11 Memorial and Museum and its adjacent gift shop, whereas this thesis focuses on the website. Buying a souvenir is a cultural set in which the meaning of 9/11 is constantly produced, reproduced and modified. Three items have been selected from the online gift shop to be analyzed on the basis of semiotics. These items include a coffee mug, a t-shirt and a keychain. Even though the online gift shop sells a variety of different items, these three categories of items have been selected, because they are useful in a buyer's day-to-day life and contribute to incorporating the memory of 9/11 in one's life (Sturken 2007). The items are additionally significant because they resemble a particular aspect of the attacks of September 11, namely only the attacks that targeted the Twin Towers in New York City, excluding the attack on the Pentagon and the attempt to attack in Pennsylvania. This signifies an attitude that the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum takes towards the attacks, they focus is mainly on the destruction of the Twin Towers and how this affected New York, an

observation that has been made before in section 3.1 with the analysis of the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum logo.



**Figure 14:** A 9/11 Memorial Museum Coffee Mug



**Figure 15:** A T-Shirt for sale in the 9/11 Memorial and Museum online gift shop



**Figure 16:** A keychain that is for sale in the 9/11 Memorial and Museum online gift shop

The signifier in the three images above corresponds to the material concepts that can be seen: a coffee mug, a t-shirt and a keychain. The signified, however, signifies three items, or domestic souvenirs as Sturken would name it, that are for sale in the online gift shop of the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum website (Orr 819-822; Sturken 2007). What these three items signify on the level of denotation are a white coffee mug with the New York City skyline that can be used to drink coffee of, a light blue T-Shirt with red, white and dark blue colored words that can be worn, and a red, white and blue colored keychain that can be attached to a key ring. However, these three items can also be analyzed on a connotative level, in which they can be related to the cultural context in which they appear. Firstly, the coffee mug has a skyline in which the Twin Towers are clearly visible, with the dates '1973-2001' underneath it. 1973 refers to the year in which the construction of the original World Trade Center was finished and 2001 obviously refers to 9/11, the day on which the Twin Towers were destroyed. Since the towers are depicted on this mug, it connotes the attacks of September 11, but also tragedy and trauma. Although other buildings are visible on the mug, the Twin Towers are in the center, which connotes the relevance of the mug in relation to 9/11. It moreover connotes that buying a souvenir at either the actual gift shop or online subscribes to well-embedded patterns of consumerism and souvenir culture. Secondly, the T-Shirt with the colored words on it. What this T-Shirt signifies on the level of connotation is also the attacks of 9/11 and the tragedy that relates to it, but from a different angle than the coffee mug. The words and colors are positioned in a particular manner, a way that resembles the American flag with the dark blue and the stars and the red and white words that represent the stripes on the real American flag. This T-Shirt connotes the people that were involved in the attacks in any particular way, whether they saw it (witnessed), helped in the immediate or long-term aftermath of the attacks (volunteered), died scarified) or responded (e.g. the NYPD or FDNY). This is connoted through the word 'They' that is printed in capital letters. It finally connotes the impact that 9/11 had on the personal lives of the four categories of people that are positioned on the T-Shirt. Moreover, the key chain also connotes the attacks of September 11 and the traumatic impact that it had. It refers to the American flag as well, with the dark blue square in the upper left corner and the red and white stripes next to it. Nevertheless, the portrayal of the Twin Towers and '9/11' underneath it immediately connotes the attacks on the Twin Towers. The other buildings are positioned at a lower height than the original Twin

Towers, and the phrase 'Rise Above' might therefore connote the status and position that the Twin Towers used to have in the New York City skyline; two buildings that arose in the air. Commercialization has proven to be a highly profitable aspect of the 9/11 Memorial and Museum website. It is done through multiple implicit and explicit methods, for instance, through the colors and design that are used on the website of the 9/11 Memorial Museum, but also through the existence of the gift shop, which is present at the actual Memorial and Museum but also on the website. Yet, to be able to analyze the general existence of the gift shop, in reality as well as online, the decision has been made to use Marita Sturken's findings to provide some scholarly analysis of its impact on visitors of the 9/11 Memorial and Museum. The gift shop received tremendous amounts of criticism, especially the objects that can be defined as kitsch, but it evidently is an effective method to help buyers to incorporate 9/11 in their daily lives (Sturken 2015). Commercialization, however, is intertwined with the concepts of education and commemoration because the items for sale in the gift shop either educate people about the exact events that occurred on September 11 and their impact, or the items provide comfort in the process of commemoration and is beneficial to the ability to cope with the aftermath of the unexpected attacks. However, buying an item that is related to or associated with 9/11 does not exclude the idea of actually visiting the 9/11 Memorial and Museum site, since the website and actual gift shop work hand in hand. Commercialization might remain important to the future of the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum website, because the website can accommodate one's desire for a coffee mug, book or stuffed animal, all displayed in the overarching presence of the modesty of the blue and black colors that have been used to model the website.



## CONCLUSION

September 11, 2001, was and will always remain a turning point in contemporary American history in terms of politics, society, culture and national security. Although an incredible number of memorials have risen throughout the country to commemorate the events that took place on this day, the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum in New York City has been chosen as a starting point for this thesis. The 9/11 Memorial and Museum was built with the intention to be a place for reflection, commemoration, education and solace, nevertheless, families of the deceased have expressed their critique, stating that the Memorial has been treated as either “a playground” or a “Disneyland attraction” (Allen 2012, Karni 2012). In contrast, one must acknowledge that the 9/11 Memorial and Museum has become a major tourist attraction in New York City that has attracted millions and millions of visitors ever since its opening in 2011 for the Memorial and 2014 for the Museum.

There appears to be an omission in the research that has been done so far on the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum, because the contents of the website of the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum had not been examined yet. The purpose of this Bachelor’s thesis was therefore to discuss certain aspects of the website and more specifically to answer the main research question: how does the website of the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum represent 9/11?

I focused on the manner in which the website has treated the approach of education, commemoration and commercialization in order to answer the research question. A quote that signifies the relevance of the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum is a quote that is displayed at the actual Memorial site. It derives from Virgil’s ‘The Aeneid’ and reads as follows: “No day shall erase you from the memory of time” (National 9/11 Memorial and Museum website). This quote was criticized because of its misuse and was conceived to be out of context, but personally I am convinced that this quote is applicable for the concluding statements of this Bachelor’s thesis. My opinion is that the quote is applicable to every pillar that has been examined and because 9/11 is indeed a memory that can never be erased from global, national and local history.

The underlying theory of discourse analysis based on the work of Michel Foucault but as has been outlined by Gillian Rose in her book *Visual Methodologies* (2001). This methodology was enormously important throughout my research, in providing me the ability to analyze the various parts of the website. Similarly, Leonard Orr’s understanding of

semiotics, and in particular the concepts of denotation and connotation has proven to be influential in the analysis of various audio fragments and images (Orr 818-822).

Although Virgil's quote appears to be self-explanatory, it could also be applied to the three major topics that this thesis has been constructed on. In my first chapter, I reviewed the website's 'Interactive Timeline' and selected images and audio fragments that highlighted the attacks of September 11 from a variety of angles, to which both methodologies of visual analysis and semiotics were applied. The conclusion was drawn that the website, indeed, was successful in achieving its goal of education through the development of the 'Interactive Timeline'. Education seems to align less with Virgil's quote, because many visitors of either the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum site or website do already have a certain knowledge about 9/11. However, the actual site and website allow for further expansion of this knowledge. Although visitors might be reminded of 9/11 on an almost daily basis, this will be more in line with its commemorative and commercial aspects rather than through education.

Building upon that, commemoration has proven to be a major concept at the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum. The website offers the opportunity for ordinary New Yorkers to engage with 9/11 and tell their 9/11 related stories in "Our City, Our Story." Similarly, ever since the attacks on September 11, the 'Tribute in Light' has become an annual phenomenon that commemorates the victims via the use of two vertical columns of light, erected close to the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum. The website provides pictures of this annual event and especially the 15th anniversary of 9/11 for website visitors who were unable to attend in person. When applying Virgil's quote to the aspect of commemoration, it can be argued that indeed "no day will erase one's memory." Especially for relatives of people who were killed, first responders and survivors or other people who were involved with 9/11, this day remains a tragic and traumatic day in their personal lives. They will be reminded of 9/11 in every possible way, every single day of their lives. Nevertheless, the website, and in particular "Our City, Our Story" has proven to be an effective method for helping people to cope with the impact of 9/11.

Thirdly, commercialization is visible on the website as well, both implicitly and explicitly. An analysis has been done of the shape, size and coloring of the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum logo that is ubiquitous at its website. The two 1's are representations of the former Twin Towers, while the color of blue may evoke emotions that are reassuring and decreasing tension. This might happen when a website visitor enters the online gift shop, a concept that received criticism but is profitable at the same time. According to Marita Sturken, the gift shop allows people to incorporate 9/11 in their daily lives, through the use of

for example, a coffee mug or water bottle, through wearing a Twin Tower hoodie or through reading a book about September 11 (Sturken 2007). These are all items that are for sale in the gift shop and line up well with Virgil's quote. If such an item is bought at the online gift shop and used on a daily basis, the user will constantly be reminded of 9/11 when using the item, whether one associates it with positive or negative feelings. The coffee mug, t-shirt and key chain that have been examined can be defined as (domestic) souvenirs: items that reduce the complexity of 9/11 and add notions of strength and resilience (Sturken 2007).

The requirements for this Bachelor's thesis allow for some in-depth analysis and interpretation. Recommendations for further and potential future research will therefore be made, in order to open a gateway for a different analysis of the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum website. I have attempted to analyze three major topics of the website, education, commemoration and commercialization on the basis of images and audio fragments, but the website allows for other options as well. The website provides visitors with the opportunity to take a virtual tour of both the Memorial and Museum, which is additional to investigating what the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum site actually looks like, since the actual site and the website are interrelated.. I would suggest the use of Gillian Rose's visual methodology on a primary level, secondary level and intrinsic level. This is a section of the website that I chose not to discuss in my thesis, because my visual disability did not allow me to. Similarly, another recommendation for further research would be to examine the ways in which visitors can actively engage with the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum through its website. The homepage of the website offers a section called 'Get Involved,' which provides information on how to donate to the Memorial and Museum, how to volunteer and how to become a member of the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum group. From my point of view, an examination of the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum in relation to the community in which it is located might be beneficial for a better, or maybe a different understanding of the events of September 11, 2001. Approximately 3000 people died because of these attacks, but there is also the involvement of survivors, witnesses, relatives of the deceased, first responders, and many more. The possibility to engage actively with the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum may contribute to the process of mourning and commemoration, but might also contribute to bonding and establishing new acquaintances that have the same or a similar experience. I would suggest Leonard Orr's understanding of semiotics to analyze and interpret the texts on the website that are included in the various sections of 'Get Involved.'

I conclude by stating that the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum website will definitely continue to have an influential and important position when it comes to the

representation of 9/11 from an online perspective. The website is up-to-date and provides accessible and understandable images, videos and texts that relate to 9/11 in every conceivable way. The relevance of September 11 in relation to American Studies is unquestionable. September 11 is often referred to as a turning point in American, and possibly even global history. This Bachelor's thesis offered me the opportunity to gain more insight in the representation of 9/11 at both the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum site and its website. Despite the fact that I had to make choices in what I found important for the purpose of my thesis and that I have not been able to analyze the various aspects in accordance with the chosen methodologies. However, I have gained a broader and better understanding of the events that took place on September 11 (education), how this has been commemorated ever since that day (commemoration) and what the website does to "sell" 9/11 to its visitors and customers (commercialization). Even though the actual site of the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum may continue to be one of New York City's most popular tourist attractions, the importance of the official website should not be underestimated.

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