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# "We Will Keep Looking"

Digital Representations of 9/11

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*Abstract: This paper will focus on one aspect of the American public's response to the national trauma of 9/11; namely the collection and display of photographs in countless amateur memorial websites, in which 'galleries' of images are posted as tributes to the dead. Locating this practice in the wider context of the national press' representation of the events and government-endorsed photographic projects, I suggest that it offers insight into notions of digital community, the changes of meaning involved in a image's shifting contexts, and the 'therapeutic' function of owning, manipulating and looking at photographs in this way. What is the role of photographic images in a national 'healing process'? What does it mean to 'bear witness' in a digital community? What is the significance of the ways in which these images are edited and manipulated by individuals? These questions will all be open for discussion.*

Keywords: 9/11, Image, Photography, Internet, America, USA, Trauma, Memorial

Photography thereby compelled me to perform a painful labour; straining towards the essence of her identity, I was struggling among images partially true, and therefore totally false.<sup>1</sup>

**T**HIS PAPER FORMS part of an ongoing research project concerning the circulation, display and appropriation of photographic images in the aftermath of and response to September 11<sup>th</sup>. It focuses in particular on one aspect of American public response to the events; namely the collection and display of photographs on amateur memorial websites, in which 'galleries' of photographs are posted as tributes to the dead. Locating this practice in the wider context of the representation of the events by the national press and in government-endorsed photographic projects, I suggest that it offers insight into notions of digital community, the changes of meaning involved in an image's shifting contexts, and the 'therapeutic' function of owning, manipulating and looking at photographs in this way.

The particular question on which I focus in this paper concerns the use photographs as tools or vehicles in the process of recovery from trauma,

either for the individual, or, in this case, for a traumatized community<sup>2</sup>.

The work is based on a conviction that the events of September 11 and their aftermath demand a critical, reflective response by the humanities as well as by scholars of social and political sciences, and that their visual dimensions represent a fascinating opportunity to investigate the significance of 'the visual' as it is situated in a particular cultural and political climate<sup>3</sup>. This subject matter raises consequential and socially relevant questions about the ways in which people relate to one another and experience the reality of the world, as manifest through visual phenomena.

The research for this project has taken the form of a broad survey of approximately thirty websites (though there are many more in existence), defined by the criteria set out below, with particularly close analysis of three of these,<sup>4</sup> paying particular attention to their selection and use of photographs, as well as other factors such as written text and the graphic content which forms the backdrop to the photographs.<sup>5</sup> The aim of my secondary research has been to bring together the ideas of both psychologists and theorists of photography (identified below) whose work concerns trauma, and to apply this theoretical knowledge to an analysis of the websites, with hope

<sup>1</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*. London: Vintage. 1993 p.76

<sup>2</sup> For a fascinating account of traumatic memory and its parallels to photography from a Freudian starting point, see Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma*. London: The MIT Press. 2002.

<sup>3</sup> The term 'the visual' in this context denotes the whole range of representational practices involved in the recording of or response to 9/11, be they amateur, commercial, press or artistic, while the particular focus here is still photography.

<sup>4</sup> These are 'Crowley Online' at [www.crowleyonline.com/911/default.htm](http://www.crowleyonline.com/911/default.htm), 'Stangbangers' at [www.stangbangers.com/September\\_11\\_2001.htm](http://www.stangbangers.com/September_11_2001.htm), and 'w5www' at [www.qsl.net/w5www/091101photos.html](http://www.qsl.net/w5www/091101photos.html). These will be commented on in more detail later in the text.

<sup>5</sup> Because a vital feature of these sites is the sheer volume of images they contain, rather than including illustrations in this text, I suggest visiting the sites themselves via the links above to gain a fuller impression of the material.



of drawing conclusions concerning the effectiveness of using images in this particular way as part of a process of recovery.

From among the many variations on the format of 9/11 memorial web pages, I have identified several criteria distinguishing those that are particularly worthy of analysis as a body of material in this instance.

Firstly, they are amateur. They are not produced or sponsored by any professional, commercial or state body. This also rules out several websites belonging to large-scale institutional or collaborative memorial projects, though these are of course of interest in addition. Rather, these sites belong to the increasingly-indistinct category of personal blogs or hobby pages designed and maintained by private members of the public, usually from a platform of free internet software widely available to individual members of the public and easy to use<sup>6</sup>. 9/11 memorial pages are often featured amongst family histories, profiles or newsletters, hobby pages, religious (usually conservative Evangelical Christian) proclamations and patriotic statements.

The image galleries are usually introduced with very personal and subjective comments, typically including memories of 'where I was' on the day itself, feelings and reactions, and the suggestion that these pictures, 'saying more than words ever could', are a fitting tribute to those killed.

Thus these sites form part of very personal and subjective autobiographical accounts. The personal, amateur nature of these accounts and responses make them a very valuable source of insight into the 'grassroots' reality of many Americans' reactions to the events of 9/11. Most significantly, they enable us to analyse particular aspects of the reception of photographic images of the events, as we can note the selection, presentation, interpretation, captioning, repetition and general re-contextualisation of images from a variety of sources, predominantly the national press.

Secondly, they are strictly memorials. This is a fairly distinct category among the many politically- or otherwise-motivated websites commenting on 9/11 and its representation. The sites are designed to be tributes to those who died in the attacks, this is the primary function of their compilation and display.

Thirdly, this research is restricted to sites which take the form of galleries of collected photographic images. Text plays an important part in most of these,

and is of particular interest only insofar as it gives insight into the writer's use of images themselves (introductory paragraphs, captioning, and so on). This rules out mainly-textual diary-style pages which have little or no link to visual material.

Repetition is a key feature of these sites, with the same iconic images appearing on different sites again and again. It seems that most of these images come from mainstream American news websites (such as CNN.com or NewYorkTimes.com), while some are first- or second-hand eyewitness photography of the site at the time of the attacks, mixed with images taken much later. Some sources are attributed (as in the example cited in note 4), while many are not. There is also a fairly arbitrary mix between 'straight' photographs and those that have been 'creatively' manipulated, superimposed with text or special effects. It is clear that the intent is usually not factual journalism or documentation, but performing a very different function.

The resulting impression is that the creators of these websites see it as a priority to preserve a proper sense of the chaos and pain involved in witnessing the events, evident in the many unsettling photographs collected. The accompanying text often includes pseudo-philosophical, religious, and especially patriotic assertions concerning the meaning of and appropriate response to the events. However, the dominant message tends to be a compulsion to reflect on the human cost of this tragedy and join together in mourning, rather than entering into political debate<sup>7</sup>.

However, another key set of intentions can be observed, as individuals appropriate the images they collect and 'make meaning' out of them in different ways, 'doctoring' original photographs to heighten their poignancy or aesthetic appearance, adding captions which lend religious, patriotic, or even militant meanings, and of course the original selection process of editing and deciding which images to include in their particular collection, according to their own view of events.

Thus a tension exists between an impulse to preserve a sense of 'chaos' and even pain, and a natural human tendency to exercise a sense of normalizing control over what has happened in any way possible; in this case through the electronic selection and manipulation of photographs.

A recurring theme which has become apparent in the course of this research is that images are associated with chaos and trauma, while the transition into

<sup>6</sup> Two good examples are [www.Stangbangers.com/September\\_11,\\_2001.htm](http://www.Stangbangers.com/September_11,_2001.htm), a memorial page attached to a Mustang-themed hobby page (introduced with very personal comments about where the author and his wife were at the time, what they felt and so on. Typically, there is a sense that the images stand for so much that could not be said. They 'speak for themselves' or at least for these particular people. "There was nothing to say. We would never be the same..."), and [www.qsl.net/w5www/091101.html](http://www.qsl.net/w5www/091101.html), the memorial page of 'Ron', a ham radio enthusiast.

<sup>7</sup> These sentiments are expressed clearly at [www.lilac\\_springs.tripod.com/911/welcome.html](http://www.lilac_springs.tripod.com/911/welcome.html) and [www.angelfire.com/ky2/4myfriends/911.html](http://www.angelfire.com/ky2/4myfriends/911.html).

words represents order and recovery. This is implied, with varying degrees of directness, by several theorists and commentators on the subject<sup>8</sup>. However, this implied formula does not lead to straightforward conclusions about the therapeutic use of photographs. This is because so-called 'chaos'; ill-defined volumes of information, repetition of disturbing imagery, determination to see and accept horror, is precisely what many people seemed to crave and gravitate towards in the aftermath of 9/11.

If most Americans were never directly exposed to the trauma of 9/11 (especially given the invisibility of bodies), can we really say they were traumatised at all, or merely shaken and scared? What is the definition and remit of trauma for my purposes, and what is it based on? Judith Lewis Herman, a prominent psychologist, offers a useful definition of the problematic term 'trauma', and also recovery. She says:

Unlike commonplace misfortunes, traumatic events generally involve threats to life or bodily integrity, or a close personal encounter with violence and death. They confront human beings with the extremities of helplessness and terror, and evoke the responses of catastrophe. According to the Comprehensive Textbook of Psychiatry, the common denominator of psychological trauma is a feeling of "intense fear, helplessness, loss of control, and threat of annihilation".<sup>9</sup>

There is obvious difference between the trauma of victims and that of witnesses. In the case of 9/11, trauma comes as the result of *witnessing*. It results from what has been *seen*, and is quite different from the grief of bereaved families and friends, and even from the 'close personal encounter' Herman describes above.

Furthermore, in this case, trauma was not prolonged, and for the vast majority of people there was *no* direct exposure to or witnessing of death. The task then became one of bearing witness to the fact that the event happened, and the second-hand knowledge that many people died. This is a very different kind of trauma than that of an individual or a direct witness of horrific death itself, but is trauma nonetheless.

In the afterword to her study of trauma, Herman focuses on community, stating that "like traumatized individuals, traumatized countries need to remember, grieve, and atone for their wrongs in order to avoid reliving them."<sup>10</sup> It follows that we can call 9/11 a national trauma, from which the people of the United States have genuinely suffered, and must recover<sup>11</sup>.

Stuart Allan, in a useful analysis of the journalistic coverage of the attacks, suggests that the huge amount of personal email communication and news exchange going on online in the immediate aftermath provided firstly a form of healing catharsis, and secondly a form of ownership, or "a greater sense of connection to the crisis than that afforded by 'official' news reports."<sup>12</sup> (As one blogger put it, "posting videos and sharing these experiences was the best therapy."<sup>13</sup>)

This kind of practice continued long after the month of September, changing form from news site to memorial site as time passed, but the same therapeutic function seemed to remain. Allan also gives an account of the emergence of online collections of photographs, appearing first on official news sites such as the LATimes.com. He cites Joe Russin, the assistant managing editor:

At first I thought photo galleries on the Web might be superfluous, given the wall-to wall television ... but millions of page views can't be wrong. It appears people really wanted to look at these images in their own time, contemplating and absorbing the tragedy in ways that the rush of television could not accommodate".<sup>14</sup>

Thus still photographs, collected in such galleries by individuals, became a common feature on the web. Thomas W. Kraft says of his 9/11 online gallery: "...I will never be able to describe September 11<sup>th</sup> as fully as these pictures. And yet, for as powerful and moving as these pictures are, they will never be able to describe the experience nor tell the complete story of those who were there."<sup>15</sup> This sentiment is typical of that expressed in many of these websites: the tension between the feeling that images are inadequate to tell the story of what happened, but that they are more adequate than words. So images, usually photographs, are the medium used in countless different attempts to come to terms with the attacks

<sup>8</sup> Specifically Herman and Zelizer, cited elsewhere in this text.

<sup>9</sup> Judith Lewis Herman, *Trauma and Recovery: From Domestic Abuse to Political Terror*; New York: Basic Books, p.33

<sup>10</sup> *ibid* p.242

<sup>11</sup> While I recognise the problems attached to using a term like 'the people of the United States' or 'the American public' in a generalising way, I believe that the phenomena I discuss are widespread enough to apply to a carefully observed national response evidenced in my sampling of internet sources, without denying or ignoring minority points of view.

<sup>12</sup> Stuart Allan in Barbie Zelizer & Stuart Allan (eds), *Journalism After September 11*. London: Routledge. 2004 p.128

<sup>13</sup> *ibid* 128

<sup>14</sup> *ibid* p.129

<sup>15</sup> [www.crowleyonline.com/911/default.htm](http://www.crowleyonline.com/911/default.htm)

and express the memory of what it was like to watch them unfold on television, hear the reports, and to “be there” in time, if not in space.

Michael Shulan, curator of *Here Is New York: A Democracy of Photographs*, an exhibition organized in the week after 9/11 in a building at 166 Prince Street in SoHo, Manhattan, draws interesting conclusions about the role of photography in America’s response to and recovery from 9/11:

Photography was the perfect medium to express what happened on 9/11, since it is democratic by its very nature and infinitely reproducible. The tragedy at Ground Zero struck all New Yorkers equally, leaving none of us immune to shock or grief. ... In order to come to grips with all of the imagery that was haunting us, it was essential, we thought, to reclaim it from the media and stare at it without flinching. ... Whereas after other events of this magnitude one striking picture has sometimes come to stand for, or to symbolize, what happened, the one picture which will probably come to stand for the World Trade Centre tragedy will be all of these pictures.<sup>16</sup>

To what extent does ‘reclaiming’ and ‘staring at photographs without flinching’ help us to come to terms with illogical tragedy? Barbie Zelizer, an American cultural critic who has discussed the media responses to both 9/11 and the Holocaust, notes how photography is used as a vehicle for moving beyond trauma and towards recovery, through the act of *bearing witness*. Her work supports my suggestion that the use of these photographic images represents a way of *holding onto* chaos rather than attempting to counteract or normalize it. In the aftermath of 9/11, photography, she says, “rose to fill the space of chaos and confusion that journalism was expected to render orderly.”<sup>17</sup> Here again we see the repeated association between images and disorder, words and order. And, further complicating matters, the view that this disorder is desirable: a valuable aspect of the events, without which no account would be completely truthful. While news reports neatly package, prioritise and summarise information, photographs, it seems, obey no such rules of order, and allow viewers to come to conclusions at their own pace, taking

in the represented events for themselves, without being told what to conclude.

Furthermore, this process could be much slower than that offered by moving images. Zelizer points out that constant repetition helps people to see and continue to see, as the recovery process is worked through. “Just as a child reaches mastery over difficult tasks by repetition,” she says, “so too does the repeated display of images work its way into acceptance or acquiescence.”<sup>18</sup> The same, or very similar, images of 9/11 are repeated again and again in memorial websites, just as they were in photographic supplements in the national press at the time of the attacks and later, in anniversary publications and feature articles. Repetition enables a public iconography to develop, and as these concepts and horrible facts gradually become representable, they can, as Zelizer puts it, ‘work their way into acceptance’.

Bearing witness is recognised to be an important part of recovery from trauma. Furthermore, photography, Zelizer argues, is particularly suited to this process. She claims that frozen images mobilize the public, dislodging them from initial shock, as a vehicle by which to work through towards a “post-traumatic space”<sup>19</sup>. They are still, so we can hold onto them, continuing to look for as long as we need to.

Susan Sontag’s most recent work revisits her continuing concern with the problem of photography, pain and subjective identification<sup>20</sup>. In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, she re-engages with her earlier assertion that “to photograph is to appropriate the thing photographed. It means putting oneself into a certain relation to the world that feels like knowledge – and, therefore, like power”.<sup>21</sup> She has also described the act of photography as “mainly a social rite, a defence against anxiety, and a tool of power ... a way of certifying experience.”<sup>22</sup> As well as being a space for self-expression, and allowing images to be viewed in privacy and stillness at the viewer’s own pace, memorial websites provide the additional function of allowing ownership, giving individuals the means to appropriate and ‘own the events’ in pictorial form, as it were. This ownership and empowerment, the logic goes, contributes to the healing process.

Another feature and function of these web sites is that of public display. All of the other functions noted

<sup>16</sup> Michael Shulan in A.R. George, G. Peress, Michael Shulan and C. Traub, (eds), *Here Is New York: a Democracy of Photographs*. Zurich: Scalo. 2002 p.7  
HereIsNewYork p.7

<sup>17</sup> Zelizer, *Journalism After September 11*. p.48

<sup>18</sup> *ibid* P.66

<sup>19</sup> *ibid* p.49

<sup>20</sup> See Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others*. London: Penguin 2004

<sup>21</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography*. London: Penguin 1979 p.4

<sup>22</sup> *ibid* p.8-9

above could arguably be performed equally well if the memorial gallery was a private exercise, not posted on the internet for general viewing. Holocaust historian Eric L. Santer has commented that public mourning needs a public space or forum, and, interestingly, that it must be *witnessed*.<sup>23</sup> As we have seen, the many memorial expressions on the web are often personal and very subjective, but they do remember a shared and national tragedy. Bearing witness together, Herman says, leads to collective recovery. When the trauma has been public and deliberately violent, recovery involves a shared movement towards a reconfiguration of reality and reviewing of beliefs about society. In a sense, the national press performed this function, but the necessary sense of personal and shared subjective ownership came, in large part, from memorial websites and other individual memorial gestures such as the many impromptu shrines which grew up around Ground Zero in the weeks following the attacks. In these spaces, individuals spoke with their own voices, publicly declaring, “we will remember”. The centrality of images to this exercise meant that the declaration seemed to become “we will keep looking”. And as numbers of viewers visit a memorial website and leave their comments, the creator’s own mourning is validated and ‘integrated’ as it is publicly witnessed.

It seems, then, that there are valid reasons for using photographs, particularly collected and displayed in this way, as tools to face and work through trauma both on an individual and a community level. But is it healthy to rely on photographs in this process, at the expense of talking and relating to one another?

Sontag, again, has famously claimed that “images anaesthetize,” and that repeated exposure to photographs of an event makes that event *less* real, rather than more. Shock, she says, wears off with familiarity and saturation, and “photographs, which turn the past into a consumable object, are a short cut. Any collection of photographs is an exercise in surrealist montage and the surrealist abbreviation of history.”<sup>24</sup> This contradicts the view that a collection of photographs, such as that on a memorial website, can be a tool in coming to terms with reality. Neither the collection nor the repetition afforded by this practice really bring any healing, but rather, they anaesthetise, which feels like healing but is not.

Roland Barthes brings us back to the problematic question of words, and their opposition to photographs, made more complex still by introducing the concepts of trauma and grief<sup>25</sup>:

*...trauma is a suspension of language, a blocking of meaning. ... the traumatic photograph (fires, shipwrecks, catastrophes, violent deaths, all captured ‘from life as lived’) is the photograph about which there is nothing to say; the shock-photo is by structure insignificant: no value, no knowledge, at the limit; no verbal categorization can have a hold on the process instituting the signification. One could imagine a kind of law: the more direct the trauma, the more difficult is connotation; or again, the ‘mythological’ effect of a photograph is inversely proportional to its traumatic effect.*<sup>26</sup>

If trauma is a suspension of language, it might follow that trauma is visual and recovery is verbal. Put another way, images represent raw grief, while words represent constructive mourning. Photographs are not compatible with words, Barthes stresses, and so cannot offer any helpful transition towards order or recovery.

He also raises very interesting points about our modern, Western conception of death, and further, its symbolic relation to photography:

*Contemporary with the withdrawal of rites, Photography may correspond to the intrusion, in our modern society, of an asymbolic Death, outside of religion, outside of ritual, a kind of abrupt dive into literal Death. Life/Death: the paradigm is reduced to a simple click, the one separating the initial pose from the final photograph.*<sup>27</sup>

Given the fact that, as many have noted, in commonly-circulated photographs of 9/11, we see no bodies, could this be another reason why we cannot rely on them to help us to fully recover? There was a time in Western culture when it was a normal part of life to be brought face to face with death, when wakes and vigils and the rites of death made us familiar with looking, watching and witnessing the bodies of our communities’ dead. Watching, and particularly *prolonged* watching, while painful, has been shown to help ‘integrate’ the truth of the death in a much more complete way than if this truth is quickly and discretely hidden from view (as it is in most modern Western funerals). As Barthes acknowledges, however, death in our culture is now just a sudden ‘click’, and so we struggle to process and come to terms with it. Does the collection and display of photographs of traumas like 9/11 indicate that something in us re-

<sup>23</sup> Eric L. Santer 1990 p.28 in Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, New York: Columbia University Press 2004 p.122

<sup>24</sup> Sontag *On Photography* p.68

<sup>25</sup> For a recent, insightful reading of Barthes’ *Camera Lucida* which engages with his thought on this subject, see Eduardo Cadava and Paola Cortes-Rocca, ‘Notes on Love and Photography’, *October* 116, Spring 2006, pp.3-34

<sup>26</sup> Roland Barthes, *Image Music Text*, London: Fontana, 1977 p.30

<sup>27</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, p.92

members the significance of *looking* to mourn, to bear witness, as a necessary and healthy part of dealing with death, especially when it is shocking or tragic? Barthes would then say that this is a vain exercise, because photography is itself 'flat death', and offers us only a very shallow form of looking. While our looking may be prolonged, it is only at a thin, instantaneous slice of time, which is violent in itself, so cannot then ease the pain of violence. And if we see no bodies, we are not really bearing witness to death at all, only to shock and fear.

If photographs cannot serve us in the process of coming to terms with death, Barthes goes on to say that neither can they effectively serve as the *monuments* to death that many seek to use them for:

*Earlier societies managed so that memory, the substitute for life, was eternal and that at least the thing which spoke of Death should itself be immortal: this was the monument. But by making the (mortal) photograph into the general and somehow natural witness of 'what has been', modern society has renounced the monument.*<sup>28</sup>

These comments are particularly interesting when viewed alongside what would seem to be the most ephemeral of monuments; digital photographs circulating immaterially in cyberspace. Even large-scale memorial projects such as *Here Is New York* or the official US State Department's travelling photographic exhibition entitled *After September 11: Images from Ground Zero* point to photographs as the most fitting tributes or monuments to 9/11, and in Barthes' terms fall far short of what a monument should be.

No photograph contains anything but 'flat death', but we continue to collect masses of photographs in search of life, or truth, or presence, or essence, which would 'stand for' or make sense of what happened. Barthes testifies to this frustration as he searches through piles of photographs for the essence of his mother. No single image or even stack of images can sum her up. They offer no being, only fragments. They were "images partially true, and therefore totally false."<sup>29</sup>

Herman's prescribed criteria for an individual or community's full recovery from trauma, which she stresses are not to be taken too rigidly or literally, are the establishment of safety, remembrance and mourning, and reconnection with ordinary life.<sup>30</sup> The second stage, and the most relevant to us at this point, is *remembrance and mourning*, or telling the story

of the trauma, in in-depth and detailed reconstruction. Traumatic memories are chaotic and without narrative (they are 'prenarrative'). Telling the story normalises and integrates them. She likens traumatic memory to "a series of still snapshots or a silent movie; the role of therapy is to provide the music and words."<sup>31</sup> Again, the principle of empowerment applies, and this is linked to words, as the 'unspeakable' is conquered. The goal is to create a verbal account "out of the fragmented components of frozen imagery and sensation"<sup>32</sup> She goes on:

*As the narrative closes in on the most unbearable moments, the patient finds it more and more difficult to use words. At times the patient may spontaneously switch to nonverbal methods of communication, such as drawing or painting. Given the 'iconic' visual nature of traumatic memories, creating pictures may represent the most effective initial approach to these 'indelible images' ... The ultimate goal, however, is to put the story, including its imagery, into words.*<sup>33</sup>

In summary, then, it seems that while pictures are an effective "initial approach", recovery from trauma cannot progress as long as a community remains in this 'picture stage', trying to make images do what words alone can do. This is because a crucial part of recovery is the construction of coherent *meaning* so that real decisions can be made about the future and the subject's (or community's) new relationship to the world based on what has happened.

This may indeed be what is now happening. I have not come across any memorial gallery sites dating beyond 2003 or 2004, indicating that these projects served their purpose in the time of shock and confusion, and came to an end as this time passed, giving way to a verbally-coherent tackling of the question 'why?' or 'why us?' (though this has by no means represented satisfactory resolution either, as is all too obvious). However, in 2006, they are still posted on the internet and are still being visited by net users, and the post-9/11 'image-overload' of which they were a product has had further consequences which have not passed; consequences in determining America's understanding and interpretation of that particular time in world history and its significance. It is in the form of images, not words, that the world remembers 9/11, because that is how it first came to us, in an overwhelming mass of photographs and moving pictures in the press and televised media. It

<sup>28</sup> *ibid* p.93

<sup>29</sup> *ibid* p.76

<sup>30</sup> Herman, *Trauma and Recovery* p.155

<sup>31</sup> *ibid* p.174

<sup>32</sup> *ibid* p.177

<sup>33</sup> *ibid* p.177



is thus through images that we have been encouraged to remember it, bear witness to it, and reflect upon it. One of the effects of this endless, emotive image spectacle has been to obscure and bypass adequate critical, meaningful questions and verbal dialogue in the public sphere.<sup>34</sup> I suggest that personal memorial websites can provide evidence of an over-reliance on images, and particularly photographs, in the pro-

cess of coming to terms with this collective trauma, which, if we are to accept the conclusions of Herman and others, leads to an inability to truly mourn and recover in an effective way. Through them, we are given a sense of the incoherent, 'unspeakable' confusion and fear in which many still live, struggling through piles of photographs for a meaning that is not there.

## About the Author

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After training as a visual artist and textile designer, gained an MA in Visual Culture at the University of Nottingham and is currently undertaking a PhD in Art History/Visual Culture, focussing on the role of photography in national trauma, with a particular focus on 9/11. Has also taught 20th photography history and theory at undergraduate level.

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<sup>34</sup> This argument is based on further research into the immediate response to and coverage of the attack by selected US news sources, due for forthcoming publication.



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