

# Recovering 9/11 in New York



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Edited by

Robert Fanuzzi and Michael Wolfe

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**P U B L I S H I N G**

Recovering 9/11 in New York,  
Edited by Robert Fanuzzi and Michael Wolfe

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## INTRODUCTION

ROBERT FANUZZI AND MICHAEL WOLFE

The impulse to turn fields of battle and wartime violence into hallowed ground is deeply ingrained in American culture. From this impulse has sprung stirring national memorials and commemorative sites like Gettysburg National Park and Pearl Harbor National Memorial. The Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum offers eloquent testimony to the fact that even as Americans find themselves threatened by stateless terrorist groups and paramilitary organizations that attack without declarations of war, the tradition of transforming sites and moments of violence into markers of national purpose continues to this day.

In 2012, a portion of the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum opened, turning a section of Lower Manhattan previously known colloquially as “Ground Zero” into a national memorial. And yet despite this formal designation, the mission statement of the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum includes language that suggests a shift in the way we remember and memorialize national tragedies. Committed to “demonstrating the consequences of terrorism on individual lives and its impact on communities at the local, national, and international levels”, this mission statement reserves a special place for reflection on local impacts of terrorist violence in metropolitan New York rather than simply folding them into larger, more sweeping invocations of national identity and national resolve.

While not polemical in rhetoric or purpose, the Mission Statement of the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum acknowledges a reality that nearly every witness, participant, and commentator on the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks have reiterated from nearly the first 9/11 moments: that the attack that occurred in Lower Manhattan cannot easily be incorporated into a nationalist narrative of war and patriotic resolve. To be sure, a U.S. President did venture to that very spot and effectively launch a “global war on terror” that altered the course of military policy in the United States, transformed the national security state, and authorized intelligence-gathering capabilities that have forever changed the relationship between the federal government and its citizens. But none of

these national and international repercussions seems to have determined the forms that the remembrance of 9/11 and its victims have taken in and around the New York area. A tension remains—a creative tension, we maintain—between the national traditions and languages for commemorating the dead and local responses to 9/11. What do Americans living in New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut know and remember about 9/11 that cannot be nationalized or adopted for nationalist ends? Even while they recover their lives and their memories in the wake of the terrorist attacks, they seem determined to recover 9/11 for New York.

Perhaps the residents and commuters of the New York metropolitan area, like many Americans, express their discontent with the foreign, domestic, military, and intelligence policies that emerged from 9/11 by implanting a local character in their commemorations and anniversaries. More intriguing is the possibility that the language and rituals of national remembrance and purpose cannot overcome the methods and strategies that New Yorkers use to deal with tragedy. So perhaps the reason is New York itself. Here we are, more than a decade removed from a national calamity that turned New York and the World Trade Center into patriotic symbols, and the gulf between New York and America might well be just as it was depicted on that famous 1976 *New Yorker* magazine cover by Saul Steinberg. New Yorkers, we all know, do things differently and want different things; they may live in the United States but they live and breathe New York. Did 9/11 change any of that?

This collection of essays offers documentary, clinical, critical and academic evidence about the distinctive way that citizens of the New York metropolitan region recovered from and memorialized the 9/11 World Trade Center attacks. The verdict is in and, as you would expect, they did it their way. Indeed, the essays and photos that we collect in this volume suggest that the 9/11 attacks put in motion a local counter-impulse to the national tradition of battlefield memorials and memorialization. In place of national rituals and languages for remembering the attacks is a distinctly experiential, quotidian pattern of ritualization and recovery that captures more than anything the ebb and flow of modern life in metropolitan New York, now amplified by the scale and gravity of the event to heroize and record for posterity. The convergence of these two aims—to hallow and to live on from moment-to-moment—has created a distinctive archive that we present in this volume, and at the same time, critique.

The language and rituals of post-9/11 recovery we assemble here are indeed unique and rich with meaning and contradiction. They may gesture toward national conventions of memorialization and invoke national traditions of heroism but they just as quickly ground that gesture in a

setting or cultural practice that announces its local character—its New York or Jersey accent, if you will. Abiding throughout the gestures, rituals, and idioms that we document in this volume is the will to honor metropolitan New York, a homeland that cannot be replaced or subsumed.

Just as powerful in this impulse is a claim of propriety that can be ascribed to this locality—that the World Trade Center attacks will always be a special tragedy for those who live and work in New York, a municipal calamity that temporarily or permanently separated commuters from family members, blew a gaping hole in our beloved skyline, and yes, totally screwed up commuter patterns and work lives in Lower Manhattan for years to come. To recreate and document this perspective is to return to that fleeting instant before the words “America Under Attack” appeared on every television screen, and the World Trade Center attacks became a national tragedy; when they still were just felt and lived by people who lived or came daily to work in New York. To be sure, the outpouring of sympathy and support from communities around the United States in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks did make 9/11 a national event in the best possible way, but the ties of nationalism can be difficult to maintain and harder to quantify. The ties of New Yorkers and of commuters to their communities in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, however, are remarkably easy to document and observe, even though they have rarely been acknowledged in a book form.

The book that has become *Recovering 9/11* dates to a conference called “Making Meaning of 9/11: Ten Years After,” held at the St. John’s University Lower Manhattan campus on the tenth anniversary of the 9/11 attacks. Located exactly one block from the site still known as “Ground Zero,” the St. John’s University campus had served as an emergency services center for first responders and victims in the weeks directly after the attacks. A more fitting site for a New York-focused 9/11 conference could not be found, as the university was literally part of that old ten-year history. Charged with that history and its proximity to the emerging World Trade Center, the conference “Making Meaning of 9/11” let in a fresh air of inquiry and invention during a week that saw a virtual tidal wave of commemorative events, anniversaries, media specials and publications. Collectively, those efforts had produced a virtual incantation of the words, “remember,” “rebuild,” and “recover” that informed and inspired few. In an atmosphere charged with familiar expectations and clichés, we were delighted to find that all the efforts of national leaders and commentators to capture the meaning of the 9/11 attacks were easily matched and in some cases surpassed by the eloquence of everyday acts and the strength of civic spirit. These acts and spirit were found in classrooms, in

restaurants, in ambulances, on street corners. They were embodied by municipal memorial committees, illegal immigrant workers, and yes, first responders. As our conference participants recorded and presented these negotiations with a ten year-old catastrophe, we came to the realization that they represented a set of cultural practices that had charged and changed New York City and its surrounding area with the spirit of post-9/11 recovery. To the extent that they continue to this day, these cultural practices constitute both an important chapter in New York's metropolitan history and a reminder to us all of the value of public history—that is, the potential of witnesses and participants to make their own meanings of a climactic event in recent United States history from their resources and first-hand experience.

The ambition to present the evidence of New Yorkers' post-9/11 recovery in this book goes hand-in-hand with the impulse to critique the nationalization of this tragedy that, particularly in the direct aftermath of 9/11, stifled creative and truthful ways to think about the impact of the World Center attacks on New York. As readers will discover, they also have only passing relevance to the professional, scholarly, and colloquial languages that the contributors to this volume used to document the post-9/11 recovery and commemorations in greater New York. In order to accentuate and articulate the distinct value of these languages, we also embrace for this volume the critical languages of literary history and cultural studies, which are represented in several essays on the representation of 9/11 near the end of the book. Though hardly blunt instruments, these literary and cultural critiques of 9/11 representation do the important work in this volume of hacking away at the nationalist mythos and ideologies that inhibit our responses to the World Trade Center Attacks. In doing so, they allow reflection on the preceding discoveries and documentation produced by the volume's other contributors—social workers, clinicians, cultural anthropologists, educators, and architectural critics, writers, and those who simply bore witness.

Taken together, the multi-disciplinary perspectives included in "Recovering 9/11" attest at once to the complexity of this topic and the challenge of presenting the evidence of a city post-crisis. Indeed, this collection differs in a number of important respects from the otherwise prodigious list of publications on 9/11 and its aftermath. The vast majority of titles on this subject, regardless of approach, appeared in the two to three years immediately following the attacks; many are compilations of journalistic pieces, eye-witness memoirs, or essays with a focus on international affairs or Homeland Security. These include, for example, anthologies and collections such as Phil Scranton's *Beyond September 11*:

*An Anthology of Dissent* (London: Pluto Press, 2002), Eric Hershberg's *Critical Views of September 11: Analyses from around the World* (New York: New Press, 2002) and Fletcher Haulley's *Critical Perspectives on 9/11: Critical Anthologies of Nonfiction*, (New York: Rosen Publishing Group, 2005). Especially notable are two works from Routledge: Ken Booth's and Tim Dunne's *Terror in Our Time*, dealing with international security issues, and Ann Kenniston's and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn's *Literature after 9/11*, which mobilizes a wide variety of theories and discourses to describe the impact of the World Trade Center attacks on literature. *Recovering 9/11* assembles an equally broad and variegated set of approaches—literary, social science, historical, pedagogical, and aesthetic—but focus this knowledge on descriptions and experiences of local impacts that are as broad and variegated as the approaches themselves. It takes a longer, more rounded perspective on the events surrounding 9/11 in the interest of documenting a project of ongoing recovery rooted in the communities and lives of people in the New York metropolitan area.

For these reasons, we are confident these essays will bring renewed interest and critical reflection to the problem of measuring recovery and resilience in the metropolitan area even while memories, gestures of commemoration, and even everyday lives remain unsettled. In this ambition, the book follows a trail brazed by the best critics of 9/11 representation and contemporary memorialization, which include Marita Sturken, Erika Doss, Kristin Haas, and David Simpson, all of whom investigate the conflicted relationship of U.S. citizens to vernacular and monumental structures of commemoration. What they investigate at the national level we document at the local.<sup>1</sup>

Together, the contributors to *Recovering 9/11* all share a commitment—much discussed at the ten-year anniversary conference—to use our distrust of nationalist representation and manipulative uses of commemoration to generate an interdisciplinary, socially-engaged form of scholarship capable of connecting commentators and scholars more sensitively and intimately with the experiences of people who lived or came to work in New York. In this respect, the contributors were guided not merely by an

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<sup>1</sup> See Martina Sturken, *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007); Erika Doss, *Memorial Mania: Public Feeling in America* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2010); Kristin Anne Haas, *Carried to the Wall: American Memory and the Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998); David Simpson, *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

intellectual mission to record a local impact but by a methodology shared by the writers, clinicians, educators, and professionals assembled here: to know their subjects as they really live, and to bring back first-hand knowledge. Indeed, the sensitive and reflective approach of contributors to *Recovering 9/11* brings an immediacy not often found in academic writing precisely because its essays take up directly the lives and efforts of people who have long labored to make meaning of the World Trade Center attacks: the quilt makers, social workers and psychologists, the first-responders, teachers, clinical psychologists, displaced workers, and all the compassionate, anonymous New Yorkers who document the tragedy in countless creative ways. In doing so, these essays give academics and clinical professionals an opportunity to model a publicly-engaged scholarship that regards the people of a community—in this case, metropolitan New York—as partners and even protagonists in creating paradigms and structures for commemoration.

But while the essays in this collection resist the “nationalization” of the World Trade Center attacks in Lower Manhattan and recover the uniqueness of local responses, they also resist the temptation to totalize those responses into a romanticized concept of “New Yorkers’ spirit.” On the contrary, they help us to elaborate upon the disparate factors of class, race and ethnicity, profession, and educational attainment that shape life in the complex communities that radiate in, around and beyond the New York metropolitan area. These disparities are on display within the New York classroom that attempts to discuss 9/11, within the New Jersey communities that locally memorialize it, and even within volunteers and professionals we collectively heroize as “first responders.” They remind us that 9/11 did nothing to tame the fractious spirit of a region and a city that has always juxtaposed creation with destruction, memory with futurity, and modernity with neighborhood tribalisms. In the years after the completion of the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum focalized the commemorative activities of people in New York, we might well look back at the disparate scenes and occasions for 9/11 commemoration that are recorded here as a unique period in which the warring impulses of New York had free reign to generate both discord and consensus in a bid to deal with calamity.

The collection is comprised of sixteen essays by experts drawn from across a wide range of scholarly and professional fields. Part One, “Local Expressions of 9/11”, investigates the question of how people across the New York metropolitan region have remembered and commemorated the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. This section documents the outpouring of human and local responses to 9/11 in familiar places like the spontaneous writing



that covered public wall surfaces throughout the city and the spectral image of the Twin Towers memorialized in the signage of local small businesses that operated in the shadow of the city's huge finance district. The need for New Yorkers to come together to affirm their unity and sense of community as well as to begin to mourn their loss, also engaged them more fully with the national pastime, as post-9/11 events turned both Yankee Stadium and the New York Mets' Citi Field into secular cathedrals for the assembled throngs.

Part Two, "Memorializing 9/11", gathers together essays that consider diverse ways of remembering the World Trade Center site after 9/11. In doing so, they intervene in the highly charged, contested efforts of various local and national constituencies to control the making of meaning *in situ* after the attacks. In one essay, the forgotten stories of service workers, many undocumented, who perished in the attacks provide a powerful corrective to the monumental scale of 9/11 memorials. Their place in the story of the famous "Windows on the World" restaurant joins those told about the World Trade Center as a tourist destination, a nexus of competing political and economic interests and contested politics, international in dimension, and, finally, as a site of ruin. The impact of the World Trade Center also became manifest in commuter communities throughout suburban New Jersey, where in the years following 9/11, modest, yet moving memorials took form for loved ones and neighbors who never returned home from work on that fateful day. These layered memories complicate, perhaps even render impossible, the complex negotiations to memorialize September 11<sup>th</sup> in a manner that achieves some fixed form or stable consensus.

The essays in Part Three, "Responding to 9/11", engage directly with the emotional and psychological aftermath of the attacks, approaching the questions of healing and teaching from a variety of institutional, professional, and non-professional perspectives. The spontaneous urge to help began minutes after American Airlines Flight 11 struck the North Tower at 8:46 a.m., and continued in the horrifying hours, days, and weeks that followed. Eventually, the bravery and sacrifice of first responders gave way to the arduous efforts of clinicians, religious ministers, and teachers to help people recover. Is their intervention a story of triumph and enlightenment? Emphasizing the resilience of witnesses, family members of victims, and first responders but also the vulnerability of professionals, this section brings together various professional perspectives to critically assess the effectiveness of recovery efforts, including those that take place in the classroom. Classroom discussion, at times, yields real conflict about the ability of students and teachers to make meaning of the World Trade

Center in the face of media-driven representations of 9/11 and prevailing suspicion or ignorance of the Muslim world.

The volume concludes with a selection of essays that grapples with the challenge of “Representing 9/11.” Contributors to this section evaluate contemporary novels and films that have risked engagement with deep narrative traditions to translate the recent memory of public events into resonant stories and imaginative language. No representation, not even the 2007 documentary recounting Philippe Petit’s dramatic and triumphal tightrope walk in 1974 between the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center, allows us to retreat to the simpler time before these towers were national symbols. We are invited to glimpse instead the making of the tenuous connection between New York City’s landmark skyscrapers and national symbolism before and after the destruction of the towers. The contributors’ incisive critiques of post-9/11 American fiction question whether “representing 9/11” can or should ever become a literary genre or branch of national literature, given the contradictions that exist between the national meaning, public history, and the private and increasingly complex international lives of New Yorkers affected by the World Trade Center attacks. The historical example of nineteenth-century American literature, which, in the aftermath of the United States Civil War, also struggled with the patriotic, national meaning of the war’s human toll, provides a cautionary tale. Can we better understand the burden of expectation that we have placed on literature, on memorials, on media representations and on professionals by thinking more broadly—historically and nationally—about our capacity to remember? We close this book with the invitation to consider this question in light of the attempts of residents of the New York metropolitan area to make their own distinctive, unique contribution to this ongoing national effort.

**PART ONE:**  
**LOCAL EXPRESSIONS OF 9/11**

## CHAPTER ONE

### REVISITING THE HEARTBEAT OF NEW YORK

JOANNE ROBERTSON-ELETTA

In this essay, I revisit a piece written more than a decade ago, entitled “Listening to the Heartbeat of New York: Writings on the Wall” (2003), to discuss the lens and interpretive stance I used to view the literacy events that followed the attack on the Twin Towers on 9/11. I explore the layers of meaning accumulated over the past ten years as I again experience and become entangled with the images of life interrupted, buried, and frozen in time. The reflexive and transactional nature of constructing and negotiating meaning become revealed as new themes emerge, such as the role of spontaneous writing, the resiliency of purpose, and the permanency of the written word, as well as the new literacy events that continue to take place in the “footprints of the Twin Towers.”



Fig. 1.1 The World Trade Center after the Attack  
(Photo courtesy of a New York City firefighter)

## Introduction

### “Strong spirits never break”

It is over a decade later, and once again I am asked to tell the story. As before, I strive for accuracy of representation when describing the literacy events that occurred in Lower Manhattan during the weeks following 9/11. I am mindful that reader and text are never separate entities, and for the second time I find myself entangled with the visual images and writings as I process them anew.<sup>1</sup> I realize that while documenting and interpreting the artifacts in 2001, I was concurrently experiencing history. The discovery of their story was, and continues to be, a discovery of my own.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, as I re-visit “Listening to the Heartbeat of New York,” I acknowledge the personal nature of my interpretations of the photographs, images, and messages left on the walls. A “born and bred” New Yorker, I make no claims to objectivity. I believe that writing plays a powerful role in the mediation of human experience. My goals for this piece are heuristic. That is, I strive to enable readers to appreciate the ways writing was purposefully used in response to the terrorist attacks of 9/11, and woven into the very fabric of daily life. As before, collected writings are interspersed throughout the narrative to give them voice. Here is an example of the message inscribed on a flag honoring police officers who died on September 11<sup>th</sup>.

To all the boys. Heaven has one hell of a team.

God Bless America

We didn't ask for this fight but we will finish it now.

I am not surprised to find new dimensions to the original “heartbeat.” For the way I view the world has been transformed. Consequently, new themes emerge from the original artifacts. I now appreciate the role of spontaneous writing as a system of communication to maintain personal and cultural identity in a time of uncertainty. They wrote to honor, grieve,

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<sup>1</sup> John Dewey and Arthur Bentley, *Knowing and the Known* (Boston, Mass.: Beacon, 1949) and Louise Rosenblatt, *The Reader, the Text, and the Poem* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press, 1978).

<sup>2</sup> Norman K. Denzin, “The Art and Politics of Interpretation” in *Collecting and Interpreting Qualitative Materials*, edited by Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, Cal. : Sage, 1998), pp. 313-44; and Susan Krieger, *Social Science and the Self: Personal Essay as Art Form* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1991).

and remember. They wrote to give purpose to their lives. They wrote to sustain themselves. They wrote to express feelings that might otherwise go unexpressed. They, and I, wrote to know who we were.

We will not be intimidated. We will be strong in love.

Senseless, BUT NOT IN VAIN. We love you all. God Bless.

## Ten Years Ago

The air was still toxic and smoke-filled when the university called us back. I was teaching “Literacy and Research,” a graduate methods course, and most of my students were novice teachers. We had just completed our first class the weekend before 9/11. Now, just three weeks later, I was driving through Lower Manhattan on my way to the Varick Street campus. It was in close proximity to the smoldering ruins of Ground Zero. Immediately I was struck by the signage posted everywhere. There appeared to be no free standing wall space devoid of a written plea, prayer, or message. Makeshift banners hung from fire escapes, notes clung to fences, pictures and messages were affixed to walls, fences, and lamp posts. Just like the mythological Phoenix, writing had been reborn from the ashes.



Fig. 1.2 Typical Sidewalk Memorial Constructed Near Ground Zero

Hate the enemy—the enemy is hate.

The spirit of the World Trade Center is giving us the energy to rebuild this great city. Thank you!

We will not be defeated! Our thoughts and prayers are with you.

I could see the desperation in the way every resource was summoned into action. The public, private, past, and present intersected in sidewalk memorials. Vibrant faces smiled back at me, forever frozen in time. Transfixed by the photos, I could not gaze away. This could have been my twenty-eight year-old son, who was working near that area. He could see the towers collapse from his office windows. On that day, he walked from Lower to Midtown Manhattan to find his uncle. I remember those agonizing hours when I could not reach him. All cell phone service had been cut off.

Sylvia Grider writes about ways memorials enable people to “come to grips” and feel less hopeless in a numbing situation they cannot change. She writes that “placing a memento at a shrine is an act as sacred and comforting as lighting a candle in a church altar.”<sup>3</sup> And, as long as a loved one’s photo remained in that place, they were not truly lost or missing. Here is an example of a letter found in the subway commenting on the reactions that placing such mementos induced.

My name is Marc, and my friend Joey worked on the 105<sup>th</sup> floor of No 1 WTC. After 9/11 I put his “missing” flyer all over the streets of this changed city, choosing spots as if I were painting graffiti, looking for the best light, the easiest places to see my friend’s face. At 26<sup>th</sup> and Lex, next to the Armory, strangers were nice to me saying, “I hope you find your friend.” I just thanked them and kept looking for more places where Joey’s smile would catch people’s eyes.

Surprisingly, most of the students were there when I arrived for our second class. They were determined to complete the coursework despite it all. We talked for a long time about the ways we could accomplish this, in light of all we had just experienced. Our lives were in crisis, and a “business as usual” mindset was antithetical to everything I believed as a teacher. So, I took a chance. I asked the students to share their impressions about the profusion of written messages posted around the university, and how they might relate to the constructs of literacy, situated practice, and

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<sup>3</sup> Sylvia Grider, “Spontaneous Shrines: A Modern Response to Tragedy and Disaster,” *New Directions in Folklore* 5 (2001): 1-10, p. 2.

ethnography, all listed on their syllabus. Together, we conceived a more mindful approach for our scholarship that semester. We would assume the stance of qualitative researchers, and actually venture outside the following week to record and photograph the self-generating and organic literacy event that was occurring just around the corner. We would face our fears, learn to look more closely, and use our sociocultural theory of literacy to inform our observations about the text generation in Lower Manhattan. Two students who expressed trepidation, but wanted to participate in our ethnographic exploration, began to search cyberspace for additional postings.

Even heroes cry, from the ashes we will become even stronger.

We will fight and win in your honor!

### **Looking Through Smearred Lenses**

I remember how our eyes began to tear during that first day outside. The air quality was poor, but in an effort to normalize routines city officials had not informed the public. I felt protective of my students and very inadequate to support or even protect them should something happen. We were all emotionally fragile. Terror had come into our lives accompanied with a sense of vulnerability. So, naturally I would second-guess my plan. A police officer stationed there, perhaps sensing our mood or curious about the intent of our actions, wanted to know why we were taking photographs and writing notes. Afterwards, he seemed satisfied, and shared that they referred to the area as “The Dead Zone.” However, there was one section of this zone that was teeming with activity, and that place was Nemo’s. Here, only footsteps away from our campus, was the place I would document New Yorkers’ and others’ private and collective expressions of sadness, resiliency, solidarity, and community. These sentiments come through poignantly in this icon and message received from an anonymous sender via America Online on December 4, 2001.

A candle loses nothing by lighting another candle.

( ) This candle was lit on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September, 2001—

Please pass it on to your friends & family, so that it

□ may shine all across America.

□

□

□

□



Nemo's clothing store was transformed into a respite station for the exhausted, yet tireless, firefighters, police officers, and medical personnel in search, recover, and containment efforts at Ground Zero.<sup>4</sup> There, they could get a hot meal, take a needed rest, recharge, and talk with other first responders. Placed in front of Nemo's were plywood panels, pens, and post-it notes, which they encouraged us to use to "tell our story" to the world. As panels became filled to capacity, they were immediately replenished. I wondered what would happen to them, as they were not removed but just stacked behind one another. I tried to quickly copy down as many of the notes as possible, without making judgments. This moment could not be lost. I wanted to preserve the messages to describe the impact of 9/11 upon our cultural sensibilities and affirmation as a people. So, I scrupulously gathered them up, like the petals of a wilting flower. But I was far from detached, and naïve to think I could be. Throughout the entire process of reading, writing, and experiencing the messages, I was emotionally engaged. The messages became living, breathing entities with palpable heartbeats that resonated with my own, as in this one.

And yet, look at all this LIFE.



Fig. 1.3 Nemo's Respite Station Close to Ground Zero

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<sup>4</sup> As I drafted this essay in May 2012, it was also the tenth anniversary of the day they stopped search and rescue efforts at Ground Zero. In 2013, parts of the plane's fuselage were recovered in Lower Manhattan.

Fear of them! Fear of us!

Looking at my analysis more than a decade later, I only captured as Jacques Derrida would describe “traces and erasures” of the mosaic of thoughts.<sup>5</sup> He points out that no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which might not be observable. For me, that element was discourse. It shaped both the tone of the writings, and the social practices that contributed to their import.<sup>6</sup> A broader conceptual framework of semiotics, a linguistic-based social theory, is therefore the lens through which I focus this analysis. For, literacy practices are always situated within broader social and ideological contexts.<sup>7</sup> Language, and language use, is essential to the development of thinking and of self.<sup>8</sup> It shapes our thought, and our thoughts shape culture. After 9/11, writing was spontaneously used to develop, confirm, situate, and represent to others personal and national feelings of identity.

Look! You only caused us to unite. Our country is now stronger than ever.

It’s no(t)w our war!

Every time I have Irish money, I’ll think of you.

No one takes away the spirit and courage of NY & the USA.

I Pray.

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<sup>5</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Positions*, translated by Alan Bass, (Chicago, Ill.: The University of Chicago Press, 1981).

<sup>6</sup> James Paul Gee, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method* (New York: Routledge, 2005).

<sup>7</sup> David Barton, *Literacy: An Introduction to the Ecology of Written Language* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell Publishing, 1994 [2007])

<sup>8</sup> Mikhail Bahktin, “Discourse in the Novel,” in *The Dialogic Imagination*, edited by Michael Holquist and translated by Caryl Emerson, (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), pp. 259-422; and Lev S. Vygotsky, *Mind in Society: The Development of Higher Psychological Processes*, edited by Michael Cole, Sylvia Scribner, Ellen Soubermann, and Vera John-Steiner, (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978).



Fig. 1.4 One of the Many Plywood Panels Filled with Notes and Messages

As if on a pilgrimage, people came to Nemo's to see what had been written, as seen above in two selections, or to add a note of their own. In doing so, knowledge was constructed, re-constructed, mediated, and expressed. So many collective feelings filled the small space of the post-it notes. I am reminded of Ferdinand de Saussure's writings about "langue et parole," and the arbitrary nature of the written word. The surface structure of the messages was simplistic, but their deep structure was not.<sup>9</sup> The brief jottings only alluded to the massive grief, shock, and terror that lay beneath the surface of our public sensibilities. As Norman Denzin recently stated, "the global is always local."<sup>10</sup> We didn't realize the historical

<sup>9</sup> Ferdinand de Saussure, *Course in General Linguistics*, translated by Roy Harris, (New York: The Philosophical Library Inc., 1959 [1998]).

<sup>10</sup> Norman Denzin's introductory remarks at the Eighth International Congress of Qualitative Inquiry, May 17, 2012, Champaign-Urbana, Illinois.

significance, but the photographs and writings we collected documented the ways a sense of solidarity and brotherhood evolved, despite the disruption, disconnection, and devastation of 9/11. As I look at the past through the lens of the present, I wish I had noticed the placement of the postings. Did one note lead into another? Were contrary thoughts expressed? Instead of fragments, I wish I had seen the whole.



Fig. 1.5 My Students Reading the Notes Posted Outside Nemo's

All Gave Some, Some Gave All. For Engine Company 4.

Flags may change, but we all wear the common flag of humanity, and so we must show our patriotism as humans, as beings, as existing entities.

I was born here. I grew up here. I moved to Chicago but you always remained a part of me and now I know why—this is still the most special place on earth. I am so proud of you taking care of each other and getting through with style. I miss you and love you more than ever.

I was moved by the postings, and the journal entries my students wrote in response to 9/11. Their personal reflections, scribed immediately after our walks outside, were a window into their thinking and my own. Writing became a way to revisit our self-identity, to question our belief systems,

and to discover those undercurrents of thinking that might have pushed to the boundaries of our consciousness. Here are some examples.

Losing one of my best friends has changed/shaped my life forever. Talking about HOPE I don't see that right now. I only see SADNESS! I had to make the flyer for Jenn so I see that side of how people let their emotions out. At the time of the flyers I put my heart to the side and let my mind take over. To write MISSING was the hardest part to describe her. But I feel the worst part is seeing her constantly around the neighborhood with MISSING on top. Is this my friend—are these my words—is this real?

...We must look to see what this representation means. Do we know of others' pain in other lands? Do they have these words on the wall? Did we care before it was 'no(t)w our war?'" Yes, there is hope abounding out there on the walls. But for me, it is about what is not being said—or hasn't been reflected upon before.

I found the quotes to be very moving and powerful. They helped me to feel safe, to know that I was not alone with my feelings. Many people share the same fears and concerns. It is what joins us together as a people and as Americans.

Reading the writing from the WTC makes you see the stories. Individuals come to life even though you have never met them. The writing and reading have been a healing process. Listening to the eulogies, the power of storytelling at memorials has given life to lives that have been lost.

...While so many people posted their thoughts and feelings on the wall for all to read, I couldn't find the right words for myself to post. I felt more comfortable reading others' words and connecting to complete strangers who were feeling similar emotions to myself.

As my students and I experienced, processed, and analyzed the 9/11 writings together, we engaged in a self-reflexive, interpretive, and interactive process that enabled us to reflect critically upon our experiences and to be truly present in the moment. We were heartsick and drowning in fear. Writing was the gift we gave ourselves. Sharing our stories, like the writers who posted in Lower Manhattan, was the way we resisted, reinvented, and reclaimed our lives.

Rachel Naomi Remen writes about story: "Often in crisis we stumble on our wholeness and our real power...Trapped though it may be, it can be called upon for guidance, direction, and most fundamentally comfort. It

can be remembered. Eventually, we may come to live by it.”<sup>11</sup> Telling our stories, Remen suggests, helped us to heal and find our bearings in unsettled times.

America—‘Like a Rock’

America = Unity Unity = Life

I feel so SAD. There’s an emptiness in my soul. WE WILL SURVIVE.

THANK YOU ALL FOR HELPING.

## **Art, Emotion, and Critical Literacy Development**

Young children are also meaning makers, who form theories of the world and their place in it based upon their experiences and interactions with the significant others in their lives. David Elkind describes them as our “emotional compatriots,” a fact he claims adults often neglect to acknowledge.<sup>12</sup> 9/11 was difficult for us all, but particularly so for children. As a teacher, I observed how they drew their way to understandings of terrorism. Popular symbols they used to portray their emotions were hearts, stars, flags, angels, planes, and towers. There were so many representations of hearts, some broken in half, others personified with smiling faces and encouraging messages. The Twin Towers were drawn with a broken heart and angel wings. Many children drew angels hovering over or walking near the towers after the explosions. Their symbolic representations show the transformative power of their thinking in response to horror, grief, or sadness. They envisioned a more peaceful reality. Instead of terrorists, children drew a city of angels.

Over and over, students in the elementary grades drew the same image, that is, the plane hitting and shearing the first tower, billowing black smoke, fire plumes, and erupting explosions. The intersection of art and emotion was revealed in their re-enactments of this exact moment. Their color choice, often black, white, and red, expressed both the stark reality of the event and their fear. I believe that as they drew, and processed their thoughts on paper, they refined and broadened their understandings about what 9/11 meant for them and their families. Art was the outlet that allowed them to share their feelings freely, without worrying about the

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<sup>11</sup> Rachel Naomi Remen, *Kitchen Table Wisdom: Stories That Heal* (New York: Riverhead Books, 1996), pp. 105-6.

<sup>12</sup> David Elkind, *Images of the Young Child: Collected Essays on Development and Education* (Washington, D.C.: National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1993).