



Interview article

Ground Zero – the socio-political minefield of symbolic architecture

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Title: Ground Zero – the socio-political minefield of symbolic architecture

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Abstract:

Daniel Libeskind is today one of the architecture profession's media elite. He took up his position in the list of 'super star architects' twenty ago and has remained in the spotlight of the press ever since. He has projects across the globe and has been awarded prizes by *Time Magazine*, *The Goethe Institute*, the *American Institute of Architects* and the *RIBA*. He was also appointed the first Cultural Ambassador for Architecture by the State Department of the United States in 2004. He has been both critically lauded and sardonically ridiculed. Tom Dyckhoff of the London Times refers to him as a 'global brand'.

His most high profile project to date has been *The Jewish Museum of Berlin* which, after various years of partial completion, was finally opened in full on September 11 2001. The opening day of Libeskind's commemoration of the twentieth century's act of horror par excellence then, was also the day of the twenty-first century's most iconic terrorist act. The macabre irony was not lost on Libeskind himself but the competition that led to him being appointed master planner and architect of the Ground Zero project, turned out to be a dirty, personalised and publically aired media circus. It was a story of political infighting, tawdry economic deals and architectural brinkmanship. It culminated ten years ago this month with Libeskind's 'victory.' In this interview Daniel Libeskind looks back over a decade of working on this project and muses on one of the most high profile, emotive and polemic architectural projects of recent times.

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Daniel Libeskind

Interviewer / author – Graham Cairns
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Studio Daniel Libeskind.

Michael Klinkhamer Photography.

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century's most iconic terrorist act. The macabre irony was not lost on Libeskind himself³ but the competition that led to him being appointed master planner and architect of the Ground Zero project, turned out to be a dirty, personalised and publically aired media circus.⁴ It was a story of political infighting, tawdry economic deals and architectural brinkmanship. It culminated ten years ago this month with Libeskind's 'victory.' In this interview Daniel Libeskind looks back over a decade of working on this project and muses on one of the most high profile, emotive and polemic architectural projects of recent times.

In *The Spirit of Terrorism* Jean Baudrillard describes the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York through the prism of the "absolute event."⁵ In Baudrillard's terms the events of September 11, 2002, were pure spectacle; pure image. Considered in these terms, the Ground Zero development project was one born from a visual act of terror; an act of terror that was beamed across the world through the media; principally through television images.⁶ Given that we live in such a media saturated world, and that the origins of this project were such strong visual images, a dichotomy emerges when one considers an architectural response; a purely physical response to an act of 'image terrorism.' Daniel Libeskind suggests that this disparity between the image and the physical, the ephemeral and the permanent, was central to his response:

The visibility of the images of the towers made it possible for people to understand the location as well as something about the scale of the event. However, there is a huge discrepancy between the images one sees on television, the reality of the event and its implications on the ground. It is hard to visualise from such images that these buildings occupied an entire zone of New York City, indeed, they were an entire zone.

Images do not allow an international viewer to understand that there were hundreds of thousands of people in the buildings and the area around. We get no sense of this density of human physicality. In this regard, the media gives an image of the events, but the reality is much more overwhelming than the pictures one sees on the screen. That dichotomy really became apparent in the aftermath to people who knew the site or visited the area on foot. That is when people began to experience the fullness of this catastrophe and when they began to really understand what happened. That is when the shallowness of the image and the profundity of the tragedy really became visible.

My own reaction to the site was very visceral. It was a reaction that came in the months afterwards when, on a site visit, I was taken down the crater left by the then removed buildings. My reaction was a reaction to this; to descending to the bedrock of New York and seeing what the depth of this space meant in physical terms, but also realising what it meant in terms of the death of thousands of people. Tied into that was a response to the revealing of something that should never have been seen; those foundations and the slurry wall that were visible in all the media images, but whose physical impact could not be experienced

through the image.

In his memoirs Daniel Libeskind describes the experience of visiting the site for the first time and experiencing the scale of the void left by the removal of the towers.⁷ The visit took place in the weeks after the second design competition had been launched – and after the first was abandoned due to a universally negative reaction from critics and the public.⁸ Here, Libeskind expands on the comments in his memoirs and outlines a shift in register in his design approach; one that led him to develop the final scheme and draw more heavily on symbolism and metaphor as design strategies.

In that moment I did not think abstractly about the site or about the planning of the area. I saw it in a very personal way. I thought of the arrival of immigrants on ships and that moment when they see the Statue of Liberty. I saw it as a constellation of reality. I saw that this site is not just a physical site, but a spiritual one. Not only because it is now a memorial site but, because of where it is located in New York, that it was a symbol of a better life and freedom for those people coming to New York. That experience was more than thinking in terms of planning, infrastructure, buildings or foundations; it was a thinking based on the philosophical and cultural roots of New York.⁹

The question then became how to take all the requirements of the infrastructure, and the need to reintroduce the millions of square feet of development space, and still create something that had a soul to it; something that would not be just more real estate development or more technical rebuilding? That is what struck me as I descended to the depths of that chasm; as I stood there on that cold, damp day. In that moment I understood something that I do not think anybody could understand from looking at drawings or images. I understood the spirit of the site; the *genus loci*.¹⁰

The specific nature of this site really came into focus for me at that point. I abandoned all my previous thinking on the project and, in a sort of vision, I saw what it could be. I actually called the studio in Berlin from the site and said forget everything you're working on, all those studies about planning and buildings, forget all of it. I knew the project had to go in a different direction. Our initial ideas were general strategic studies of the site; a consideration of the path of the trains and an accommodation of the foundations, etc. We were looking at the structural implications of the project and its urban implications; its relationship with China Town, Tribeca, Wall Street and all the neighbourhoods nearby. We were considering how to connect them, but it was thinking premised on questions of structures and zoning.

However, when I was in that pit, all that disappeared and I realised that the challenge at Ground Zero was to address history; both the irreversible history of what had happened there, but also the future. The question was how to assert life, how to assert something about liberty and freedom, and about how to reinforce that which New York represents to its

inhabitants and to the world at large. That is when there was a break in my thinking. I am describing it in terms of a kind of revelation but that is what it was - a kind of revelation. It was actually being there of course that instigated this; being there on that rainy day, on that sad day, and yet feeling the potential of resilience.

In many ways, the only comparable monument in the United States to the proposals for Ground Zero is Mia Lin's Vietnam War Memorial in Washington DC.¹¹ It is a memorial to what is considered another US tragedy, it is historically recent and is 'modern' in terms of style. However, the Vietnam War Memorial is located in a relatively open space and, as a result, occupies a terrain that invites contemplation. The Ground Zero site will be intensely occupied by buildings and by people. It is a location that seems far from conducive to contemplative recollection and homage. The problem of producing an emotive, sombre memorial on a site that is so densely concentrated is one that Libeskind suggests was also central to his thinking.

Developing the site in a way that was appropriate for public contemplation was a central idea and was dealt with in the initial proposals by devoting almost half the site to public space. Almost all the projects in the initial competition suggested building right on the memorial site; right where the towers had been. I thought you could not construct a building where people had perished; that it was no longer just ground to be built upon. The fact that it was now something special, that it would have to be part of some sort of public and cultural space, was foremost in my mind when I considered how to balance the requirements of a live and lively city with the act of remembrance.¹²

However, there is always a danger that with a project that focuses exclusively on the remembrance and contemplation of a tragic past that we create a pessimistic space; a space that contradicts the virtue of New York. New York is a lively, dynamic and bustling city; a city of many different kinds of people, activities, events and cultures. It was important not to try to shift New York into a negative register with this project. It was important that there was a sense of connection with the tragic past but also a connection with the dynamic, present and future. So a question of balance was essential; how to combine office buildings and retail with the notion of public space and a memorial site.

We came up with the idea of waterfalls in the initial project proposal. It was very heavily criticised by the newspapers. Some described it as bringing Niagara Falls to New York.¹³ My argument was that it was important to have a 'screen of sound' that would protect the memorial from the sounds of the street on the one hand, and introduce the sounds of nature, on the other. It was important to introduce a sound that would give a sense of something different to the busy streets of Manhattan.

This need for balance is also reflected by the fact that the buildings being constructed are on the periphery of the memorial; they circle the memorial site in a spiral.¹⁴ This means that the

memorial site gets light; that it is not in the shadow of towers. In addition of course, we did not propose one large building, or even two large buildings, there are six. We tried to distribute the density of the development so that the buildings could be lower and not totally dominate the memorial site. So there was a cluster of thoughts that came together with the aim of creating something that would really work, both in terms of memory, but also in terms of asserting the vitality and vigour of Lower Manhattan.

In an interview with Paul Goldberger published in *Counterpoint*,¹⁵ Libeskind described the process of building as 'democratic' and references Winston Churchill's suggestion that, whilst democracy is not perfect, it is the best system available.¹⁶ The design competition and the subsequent negotiations between the conflicting parties with interest in this project were intense, at times highly personal - and seemingly unresolvable. The toing and froing between the conflicting players, and the arguments they instigated, gave rise to a level of public conflict that was never far from the surface between 2002 and 2004.¹⁷ Despite this, Libeskind argues that his belief in design as a 'democratic' process, that needs to take into account multiple voices, remains firm.

The process involved in the early stages of the Ground Zero project was genuinely difficult. I cannot say that there were not nights that I did not think about it, and question whether I had to put up with the incessant conflicts, criticism and personal attacks in the press.¹⁸ However, I was always determined and firm in the belief that it was necessary to work towards garnering consensus; to finding agreement between the various stake holders, who were initially very divided. There were the families and the survivor groups, who I started with. I identified with them, with their grief, with their sorrow and with what it really meant for them; something that would be important for the rest of their lives.

However, there was also the Port Authority; the organisation that leases the land to private developers and their architects. Consequently, we also had to take into account the lease holders, the Governor of New York and the Governor of New Jersey (who together control the Port Authority) and the Mayor of New York City, who controls the streets. Then there were residents groups and local community groups, and the Police and Fire Departments. All of these people and groups had an interest, had valuable things to contribute, and had claims to make.¹⁹

Despite the sometimes bitter complexity all this involved, I never gave up on the idea that a design process that involved negotiating between each of these parties was right. I never saw it as about some architect deciding what to do; about someone standing up on the rock with Moses saying: we're going to do things this way. We had to go through some sort of negotiating process and it was very complicated, very difficult emotionally, and very intricate politically. Yet at no point did I ever say I would prefer some strong hand to take over the project. I do not have admiration for monarchs and dictators and, in reality, this

drawing of consensus is what makes an architectural project ‘real’; a genuine reflection of life.²⁰ Of course, it is necessary to find compromises, and one has to find the means of navigating between the various parties, but that is the reality of any project – only here it was extremely difficult and much of it was played out in public.

Looking back, I think it is amazing how such violent differences did eventually reach a consensus. For example, originally the developers wanted to build high and there was a huge difference of opinion about what the height of the buildings should be. There were also debates about how much open space there should be and we had to battle to convince people about the ‘wedge of light’ idea; the introduction of a much needed additional public space in the city.²¹ That is another huge space that was not in the competition proposal initially, but which was introduced to facilitate people entering from two sides; from Broadway and from the business side of Lower Manhattan. It was intended to give people access to the Hudson River and to the site more generally.

To make a long story short, I never doubted the importance of the democratic process, despite it being as difficult and as tough as it was. I think it is what really makes a good city. Good cities are not made by one person; they are not determined by one stake holder. In this case, if the idea of the master plan had not been strong it would never have got people behind it. It would not have succeeded. People finally agreed, at the end of the day, despite what the press reported. They agreed, and the final project is very close to what I originally drew. Indeed, it is almost identical.

Libeskind has described architecture as an ‘act of communication’ on various occasions.²² It is something he identifies happens inevitably, but is also an aspect of his architecture that he sees as central, and obviously deliberate. Questioned about the communicative intent of ‘office buildings’ on the site of a human tragedy, he is faced with a criticism that, amongst others, the New York architectural critic Michael Sorkin levelled throughout the early stages of the initial design competition. Sorkin lampooned the entire project as “business as usual” for its insistence on reinstating the office space lost in the destruction of the towers.²³ He also referred to its communicative agenda as a form of corporate and political ‘chest beating.’ His criticism of Libeskind’s specific proposal defined it as “big business space with grafted-on literal symbolism.”²⁴ Libeskind is staunch in his rejection of this perspective.

The first thing to bear in mind in the context of criticisms about reinstating office space is that architects do not decide the program. The city and public authorities decide what is going to be built, not the architects. I have not doubt that a kind of academic approach to the project is pretty disconnected from the realism of the market and from the realism of politics.²⁵ If you are an architect and you are serious about addressing important issues, you have to take the program and mould it in a way that makes sense culturally. This is how you ensure it is not just about real estate; this is how you ensure it is not just about ‘business as usual.’

At no point did I doubt that it was good to bring life back to the site and to bring working people back to this site. In addition however, I also advocated for housing and, by the way, a lot of the previous office space in the area has subsequently been renovated into housing; so there are more people now living in Lower Manhattan than before.²⁶ Again, I would argue that it is important to have a positive approach; to bring life back to this area and not to make a ‘black hole’ of low buildings in the middle of New York. Some critics wanted just low buildings and no skyscrapers.²⁷

I did not listen to these ideas because, as a New Yorker, I know that Lower Manhattan and New York depend on ambition and a concentration of people. Changing the nature of New York would have been like giving in to terrorism. I never worried that some academics and some critics talked about corporate symbolism, or the ‘author of the project,’ the person behind the symbolism, because I do not think that is the way the city, buildings, streets and public spaces are read. I think they are read as part of a much deeper human history; as integrated with dwelling, with being and with the future. This is how architecture communicates.

In this context, it was important to create something that is future oriented; something that has the power to both remember and look forward. That is what I was really interested in. That is what I genuinely believe; that you have to connect memory with the psychology of the city. In the case of New York, memory has to be connected with its liberty and with its freedom. In this sense, the project uses memory literally; ideas of liberty and freedom are key to the buildings you see appearing on the streets today. But it is all integrated with the streetscape and the use of the area – and new uses of the area, at street level.

In dealing with the issue of reintroducing commercial space on the Ground Zero site, Libeskind overlays his arguments about the need to provide public and commemorative space alongside an architecture resonant of New York’s ‘vitality,’ with an acceptance of the commercial underbelly of the project. These commercial imperatives countered attempts by some design groups, community activists and a number of architectural critics, to reconfigure Lower Manhattan towards being a place of small businesses and local communities.²⁸ In his subsequent comments Libeskind addresses these issues and argues that they are found in the project, despite criticisms to the contrary.

The need to integrate small businesses and the local community into the new project was a huge part of the thinking behind this project. We worked closely with the community groups, and very closely with many other public institutions to make sure that the project was not only about commercial towers, but was also about streets and public places. We tried to ensure that it offered community and public facilities. It has a visitor centre and, perhaps in the future, it will have a performing arts centre.²⁹ It was the nature of the public

spaces created that was at the core of the project. Connectivity across the site was also essential. We wanted to bring people to the Hudson River, to bring people to the transportation hub, to bring people to east and west and north and south. We wanted the site to direct people to the neighbourhoods around; neighbourhoods that were badly affected.

The gleaming towers were not at the core of our thinking - although we thought they should be beautiful towers. At the heart of our thinking were the spaces between the buildings; what do people do on the street in these open areas, and on the streets. This is a hugely dense area and a site where transportation networks come together. It is not just a hub for the financial sector. It is, or at least should be, a hub for people coming to this area to live and to work. That was part of the strategy from the outset; it underlay the decision to avoid mega-structures and to avoid designing just a large symbolic object on the site.

We wanted to create a place where people could come together; a place from where people can look at New York in a completely new way; a place where they can see the city not only from the dark streets of Wall Street, but also from an open space. That space is powerful emotionally and has depth to it, both literally and figuratively. You can go all the way down to the bedrock; it is public space that continues downwards to the bedrock and to the slurry wall.³⁰ In addition however, it also moves outwards to the outlying neighbourhoods.

Of course, we used the program that was given, but attempted to create a space that is for people. As a New Yorker, I often thought about my parents who worked in this city; they worked on the stone streets and my mother in terrible sweatshop conditions. My parents would never have entered those gleaming buildings; they were always in the pathways or in the streets. What this project may mean and represent for those people..... that's what I thought about. I thought that it was the cultural aspect of space that should really dominate. That never excluded the presence of these precious office buildings however.

This project has taken up ten years of Daniel Libeskind's career. During that period he has worked on other schemes across the world including the Military History Museum, Dresden, Germany; high-rise and low-rise villa apartment blocks at Keppel Bay, Singapore and the Sony Centre for the Performing Arts in Toronto, Canada, to name but a few.³¹ However, his studio has been based in New York since 2003 and has been focused on managing this master plan. In the light that the Ground Zero project remains one of the studio's few master planning schemes, he looks back upon its influence on his work and offers the following comments.

In the last ten years I have learnt so much that would have been impossible to learn from a book, or from scholarly study. I have learnt about infrastructure, about the variety of political and economic forces influencing a project, and about how questions of engineering can be handled. It is not something you ever acquire in an academic atmosphere. They are the real, practical issues that dominate a city and its development. Also, as I look back at those ten years, I see the virtue of having stuck with it; of having persisted through this incredibly difficult process, and I see the plan vindicated. Despite the complexity of the

project, the problems that arose, and the high profile conflicts that accompanied it every step of the way, I see what was initially proposed being built.

All of this happened in the shadows of political critique; a critique coming from various sources and which was at times very painful. However, there is no doubt that I have had a belief, that I have always held, reinforced; that you have to be a believer; that you really have to have faith and that the faith you have will drive you to succeed, even when things are not easy. I have also seen that you have to be participating; that you cannot just be calculating a plus or a minus on a ledger; that you must get your hands dirty. It was a question of sink or swim.

I have always been an optimist but, in retrospect, I am more of an optimist now than before.³² When you are in the middle of it, and people are telling you that nothing will come of it, that this will never be built, that nothing will happen, etc. it can be difficult. However, looking back, I can see that I am an even greater optimist after working through these complex problems in a democratic and open arena where there were so many contesting views. I really believe there is no substitute for this, that the toing and froing of the design process is essential for the construction of a lively, democratic and exciting city.

Furthermore, I have been very lucky because subsequently, and as a result of being involved in the Ground Zero project, and in the limelight as it were, I have been able to work on other projects in fascinating places like Milan, Belgrade, Singapore and Yong Han in South Korea and elsewhere. These are large scale projects with major implications for the way people live. I am able to address them because I have learnt so much over these ten years. I have not just learnt about what a nice drawing looks like, or how to produce a nice model that might be photographed and placed in a book. I have not just been developing theories that might be read to students or published in a magazine. I have learnt how you can build something against great odds.

I have also learnt how you succeed in an open society; how in a liberal economic context, you can still create something that is more than real estate and more than just commerce. I have seen how you can still build projects with spiritual content and rise to the high values that I really believe drive architecture.³³ I believe that it is possible to combine the poetry of life and the tragedy of life, and that architecture is more than art; that it is more than the result of computing; that is more than politics and economics, although sometimes it is virtually Shakespearean in its scope and complexity.

In these comments Libeskind again refers to the complex web of socio-economic-political factors that mould the shape of architecture and urbanism in contemporary culture, but he also leaves space for the creative individual; the architect as the creator of interesting space and unusual forms. Indeed, alongside his use of theory as a driver in his design process, this is the trait for which his work is largely known.³⁴ He reserves his final comments for this characteristic and an argument in favour of architecture as formal experimentation; albeit one

contained within an economic and political framework that often seems to be ‘all controlling.’

As a direct result of the complexity of the structural, economic and political complications inherent in the Ground Zero project, I have come to believe even more ardently that formal architectural invention is essential. I have seen that ultimately, the divide that has existed between planning and architecture in the past is a false one. At the end of the day planning and architecture are actually inseparable; you cannot say, for example, that this one thing is a planner’s war and that another is an architect’s war. Planning without architecture is totally useless, and architecture without planning misses the whole range of contextual factors that can enrich building design.

The process of managing this project has reinforced my belief in the need to formally innovate and to dramatically innovate with architecture; to ‘create’ new meanings and look for new approaches; to develop radically new ideas. These new ideas are not just about sustainability, because although that is fundamental, it is only one new component in architecture. Despite the fact that for this project we wrote sustainability guidelines that surpass all the guidelines of the city of New York, I believe that new innovations in architecture have to be more than technical; design ambitions have to be raised in formal terms as well.

This is the case at Ground Zero; you only have to look at the architects who are involved.³⁵ There is a raised ambition there. The aim has been to go beyond more anonymous tall New York buildings. There is almost an elite ambition.³⁶ Certainly, in my own work I think it is important to bring uniqueness to architecture; to get it out of this generic idea of modernism; an idea and approach that reduced everything to slogans and resulted in homogenous buildings. It is important to produce architecture that uniquely addresses its specific site.³⁷

In the global world I believe we need more uniqueness because everything tends to get homogenised. Cities can end up looking the same. It is a common criticism. At Ground Zero we deliberately responded to the site in a detailed way, both physically and emotionally. In these terms, I try to ensure that my own work as an architect continues to evolve formally, but also in terms of program; whether it is a commercial project, a housing plan or any of the other exciting schemes I have the good fortune to be working on at the moment. We work in a complex social, political and economic context, but that should not control architecture.

Architecture_MPS has developed a new genre of academic writing; the ‘interview-article’. It is a variation on the interview genre in which theoretical background is added for the reader through extensive and discursive notation that expands on the arguments and references made by the interviewer or the interviewee. It is an explanatory / descriptive adaptation of the standard interview format that makes it a hybrid academic literary form.

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¹ Tom Dyckhoff, “Daniel Libeskind in the Dragons’ Den,” *Times Newspaper*, March 24, 2010.

² The project has been the subject of numerous texts. Typical in this regard is: Bernhard Schneider, *Daniel Libeskind: Jewish Museum Berlin: Between the Lines* (New York: Prestel, 1999).

³ Daniel Libeskind discusses this irony in an interview with Daniel Greene. “Daniel Libeskind: Architect,” Interview with Daniel Greene. Voices on Antisemitism-A Podcast Series. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Washington, DC. September, 13, 2007

<http://www.ushmm.org/museum/exhibit/focus/antisemitism/voices/transcript/index.php?content=20070913>

⁴ For a description of this process, see: Paul Goldberger, *Up From Zero: Politics, Architecture, and the Rebuilding of New York* (New York: Random House, 2004), 158-166.

⁵ Jean Baudrillard, “The Spirit of Terrorism,” in *The Spirit of Terrorism and Other Essays*, trans. Chris Turner, 1-35 (New York: Verso, 2002).

⁶ Subsequent to the initial imagery of the September 11th attacks in the world’s media, the events of that day have been the subject of numerous films and documentaries. A limited sample of these include: *World Trade Center*, directed by Oliver Stone (Hollywood: Paramount Pictures, 2006), DVD. *102 Minutes that Changed America* directed by Jon Siskel and Greg Jacobs. (Chicago: Siskel / Jacobs Productions, 2008), DVD; *Stairwell: Trapped in the World Trade Center* directed by Jonathan Parisen (New York: Paravision Entertainment, 2002), DVD.

⁷ Daniel Libeskind, *Breaking Ground: An Immigrant’s Journey from Poland to Ground Zero* (New York: Penguin, 2005).

⁸ For a description of this process, see: Paul Goldberger, *Up from Zero: Politics, Architecture and the Rebuilding of New York*, (New York: Random House, 2004); Michael Sorkin, *Starting From Zero – Reconstructing Downtown New York* (New York: Routledge, 2003).

⁹ Daniel Libeskind describes himself as a New Yorker. He took American citizenship in 1965 and has described his own experience of seeing the Statue of Liberty upon his arrival as an immigrant on numerous occasions. Daniel Libeskind, *Memory Foundations* (New York: Studio Daniel Libeskind, 2002).

¹⁰ The original idea of leaving the entire footprint of the towers open as voids was subsequently altered as the project progressed and the original route of the city’s rail system was re-imposed. A decision that meant tracks would run under the footprint and thus scupper the proposal of leaving the entirety of the bedrock exposed. It was one of the compromises that the architectural critic Michael Sorkin underlined in his sardonic and critical appraisal of the entire rebuilding process and Libeskind’s role in it. See: Sorkin, *Starting From Zero*, 136.

¹¹ The role of this memorial in American culture is discussed in: Kristen Ann Hass, *Carried to the Wall: American Memory / Vietnam Veterans Memorial* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998).

¹² The percentage of the ground area dedicated to public space has remained relatively unchanged throughout the process. However, it is dwarfed by the total amount of rentable office space the overall project offers through its six towers. The voices calling for the site to be left as a complete memorial site pointed this out at the time. They were highly critical of the immediate reimposition of commercial imperatives at the site. See: Sorkin, *Starting From Zero*, 67-74.

¹³ David Brussat, “Failure of Memory at Ground Zero,” Architecture Here and There (blog),

http://news.beloblog.com/ProJo_Blogs/architecturehereandthere/2011/09/column-failure.html

¹⁴ These ideas are explained in more detail by Studio Daniel Libeskind on its website. “Studio Daniel Libeskind,” *Ground Zero Master Plan*. <http://daniel-libeskind.com/projects/ground-zero-master-plan>. The term spiral here is metaphorical. The layout of the buildings is more of an L shape. They rise in height as they move around the two memorial voids.

¹⁵ Daniel Libeskind and Paul Goldberger, *Counterpoint: Daniel Libeskind in Conversation with Paul Goldberger*, (New York: Monacelli Press, 2008), 11.

¹⁶ The quote comes from a speech made in the House of Commons, London on 11th November, 1947. The Official Report, House of Commons (5th Series), 11 November 1947, vol. 444, cc. 206–07.

http://hansard.millbanksystems.com/commons/1947/nov/11/parliament-bill#column_206

¹⁷ The public conflicts over this project were documented in detail in: Sorkin, *Starting From Zero*; Goldberger, *Up From Zero*.

¹⁸ The personal attacks included a series of articles written by the New York Times architectural critic, Herbert Muschamp, in which he characterized Libeskind as “a control freak” and defined him as “the embodiment of the Orwellian Condition”.

Herbert Muschamp, Quoted in: Paul Goldberger, *Up From Zero*, 180; Herbert Muschamp, “Balancing Reason and Emotion in Twin Towers Void,” *The New York Times*, February 06, 2003. He was also subject to patronizing headlines and articles such as “The Incredible Shrinking Daniel Libeskind”, that ridiculed his loss of control over the project as it developed. Robin Pogrebin, “The Incredible Shrinking Daniel Libeskind,” *The New York Times*, June 20, 2004.

¹⁹ Contradicting this Michael Sorkin has fiercely criticised the lack of involvement local community groups and victims groups had in the whole process. Sorkin, *Starting From Zero*, 58

- ²⁰ In these comments Daniel Libeskind repeats arguments put forward in *Counterpoint* with the regard to negotiate and make compromises with clients and other parties if a successful architectural project is to be realized. Libeskind, *Counterpoint*, 11
- ²¹ In the final project the wedge of light (an area in which no shadows would be cast) does not coincide with open public space, but corresponds to the position of the Transportation Hub designed by Santiago Calatrava.
- ²² Daniel Libeskind, “*Daniel Libeskind in Conversation with Paul Goldberger*,” 11; Daniel Libeskind in “Radio interview with Daniel Greene”.
- ²³ Michael Sorkin, *After the World Trade Center: Rethinking New York City* (New York: Routledge, 2002), viii.
- ²⁴ Sorkin, *Starting from Zero*, 12. See also Michael Sorkin, “Back to Zero: Mourning in America,” in *Indefensible Space: The Architecture of the National Insecurity State*, ed. Michael Sorkin (New York: Routledge, 2008), 224.
- ²⁵ Michael Sorkin is Distinguished Professor of Architecture and Director of the Graduate Program in Urban Design at the Bernard and Anne Spitzer School of Architecture, City College, New York. He is also runs *Michael Sorkin Studio* in New York and has architectural and urban design projects across the world. <http://www.sorkinstudio.com>
- ²⁶ An alternative reading of this is given by Laura Liu who argues that the disaster and the development that followed it has caused considerable displacement of local communities and has been resisted by resident groups. It is also challenged by Michael Sorkin who identifies that the increase in housing in the area is practically all high end real estate and has resulted in increased overall rents and a general gentrification of the zone. Lara Liu, “Blank Slates and Disaster Zones: The State, September 11, and the Displacement of Chinatown,” in *Indefensible Space: The Architecture of the National Insecurity State*, ed. Michael Sorkin (New York: Routledge, 2008), 177-212.; Sorkin, “*Back to Zero*”.
- ²⁷ Two prominent critics, Paul Goldberger and Michael Sorkin, suggested that nothing should happen in the short term. That the site should be left and an architectural response developed once time had been given to reconsidering the re-development agenda of the city in its entirety. Goldberger, *Up From Zero*, 68. This was in stark contrast to the developer’s objective of rebuilding the project as quickly as possible on the one hand, and reinstating all the rentable office space lost on the other. Goldberger, *Up From Zero*, 37.
- ²⁸ Laura Liu, “*Blank Slates and Disaster Zones*”, 177-212.
- ²⁹ Michael Sorkin has highlighted that during the course of the project at least two “community and cultural” projects have been ruled out on the basis that they may, in some hypothetical future, produce exhibits or events that counter the corporate narrative of redevelopment on the site; *The Drawing Center Art Gallery* and the *International Freedom Center*. Sorkin, “*Back to Zero*”, 230.
- ³⁰ The final version was a compromise on the initial proposal which envisaged the two craters left by the buildings as enormous voids that would allow the visitor to ‘feel the sensation’ described by Libeskind in this interview and in his memoirs. Trains run under the site and the direct visitor contact with the bedrock and slurry wall is more limited. Sorkin, *Starting From Zero*, 136
- ³¹ A full list and details of these projects are available at: <http://daniel-libeskind.com>
- ³² Optimism is a repeated theme in Daniel Libeskind’s interviews. His use of the idea here repeats what he has said in an interview with Daniel Greene. It is a trait also mentioned in an interview with Justin Davidson who underlines the architect’s “sheer force of enthusiasm”. Justin Davidson, “The Liberation of Daniel Libeskind,” *New York Magazine*, September 30, 2007.
- ³³ In these comments Libeskind returns to a theoretical terrain he shares with the architectural theorist and historian Alberto Pérez Gomez who has argued for an architecture that reaches beyond the basic requirements of function and restrictions of program. He has identified some of Libeskind’s early work as one of the few examples of modern architecture that manages to achieve these “transcendental values”. Alberto Pérez Gómez, *Built on Love* (Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2006), 106-107.
- ³⁴ Representative of this tendency to prioritise theory and the creative process is his 1997 theory book *Fishing From the Pavement*. Daniel Libeskind, *Fishing From the Pavement* (Rotterdam: NAI Publishers, 1997).
- ³⁵ The list of architects involved in the overall project includes: Norman Foster, SOM, Richard Rogers, Fumuhiko Maki, Frank Gehry and Santiago Calatrava, amongst others.
- ³⁶ This use of super star architects and, the repeated insistence by those overseeing the project to use these architects, was described by Michael Sorkin as “mad cronyism”. Sorkin, *Starting From Zero*, 91.
- ³⁷ Libeskind here makes reference to an idea most famously laid out by Kenneth Frampton; *Critical Regionalism*. Kenneth Frampton, “Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance,” in *Labour, Work and Architecture: Collected Essays on Architectural Design* (London: Phaidon, 2002), 76-89.

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