

## **Britney Pease**

### **Select three visuals (still or moving) from 9/11 and analyze their impact.**



The purpose of this essay is to analyze the impact of 9/11, selecting a series of photographs to create a conversation about. This essay addresses three iconic photos; the falling man, the double check businessman and the photo of new Yorkers chatting on the day of the September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 attacks. According to Gilles Peress (1946), a French photographer and a member of Magnum photos, '9/11 is viewed as being the most traumatic, historical event that has happened in the country since the civil war'.

This first photograph I looked is of the falling man. This creates an impact because it's such an iconic photo, 17 years later. This photograph gives the impression that the man is falling straight down, however, the reality is that he is tumbling down. The photo was taken by photographer, Richard Drew, who created an everlasting photograph that touched the nation's hearts. The falling man symbolizes individuality, while plummeting past the washed-out skyscrapers that seem to have a reflection either side. To quote Richard Drew 'I never looked at it as an iconic picture... I had looked at it as an 'unknown soldier' that I hope represents everyone who had that same fate that day'. The falling man images show his arms by his side, slightly out of place. His left leg is casually bent at the knee. The white jacket he is wearing is untucked out of his black pants, and his black shoes are still on his feet. This man appears motionless, dropping and dropping until he fades. The falling man's posture is somewhat rebellious, though he is faced with the certainty of death, he decides just to get on with it. The man in the photograph is perfectly vertical and lined up to the lines of the building that are behind.

The falling man photographs summarize the desperation and the awfulness that people had to go through to get out of the World Trade Centre. His pose is composed, even though the photographer captures the most upsetting moment, there is also a calmness to the image because it captures the last moments of the individual's life but in a peaceful manner. This image has had an impact on America as they wanted it to be forgotten from their minds due to the upset it was causing them; it also has an impact on the missing people's families because they had to go through the pain of identifying the falling man. However, the identity of the falling man was said to be a man named Jonathan Briley, who worked at the windows on the world restaurant in the north tower. This man became a person that everyone who lost a relative or colleague on 9/11 could relate to, furthermore, the falling man photo left an impact on the hearts of the nation as 17 years later, and went on to become the most memorable, iconic and haunting image from 9/11.

According to Henry Singer, 'I think of the image as a kind of mirror; you can learn so much about yourself and the culture... it is clearly open to different interpretations – some see beauty, some see horror, some see both, some see suicide, and some see freedom'.

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Darnton, K (2001) 60 minutes. The Magnum photos. New York, NY: Columbia Broadcasting System.

The second photograph I looked at is the double check businessman. This is another iconic photo which represents the aftermath of the September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 attacks. An example of this is the lone male sat on the bench surrounded by the reminders of the event that took place that day, with fragments of the World Trade Centre Towers around him. The facial expression on the man's face is unclear as it appears to be a gritty photograph, however, at a closer glance, he looks distressed given the tragedy of what he has witnessed. He appears to be looking inside a briefcase and is wearing what appears to be a suit, which suggests to me that he is a working-class businessman who happened to be there when the attacks happened and got caught up in it all; but this photo shows that he survived the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks after being covered in debris. I found out that at a second glance, that the man in the photograph is a statue that was sculptured by a man named John Seward Johnson II, who in 1982, created 'Double Check', which is a sculpture of the man 'double checking' his possessions in his briefcase before going into the trade Centre for work before 9/11. It is a poignant reminder of hope and to those who did not survive the terror attacks. The statue has become a trademark for everyone to remember the attacks in a positive way instead of a negative way. This photograph shows him sitting on the bench covered in debris from the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks clutching his briefcase with his contents inside. It is covered in grey dust from head to toe, not showing the bronze colour that it was originally was before the events happened. The papers, which look like business papers and newspapers are scattered on the ground surrounding him; the tree branches on either side have fallen from the smoke and debris that has risen from the world trade Centre. The buildings behind him are of a grey colour because of the debris that has flown over from the top of the world trade Centre from the 9/11 attacks. Overall, the whole photograph, the greyness, cluttered papers and the lone man is a reminder of the tragic events that happened over the course of the morning in New York on the 11<sup>th</sup> of September 2001. According to Steve McCurry, an American photographer, freelancer and photojournalist, the photo shows the ground covered 'Ankle deep in office papers in a refined and talcum like powder' from the debris that came out of the top of the towers when they collapsed quickly.

'It's easy sometimes to forget the simple things that give us pleasure. If we open our eyes, life is marvelous...The human spirit triumphs, if only for moments in a day. I try to have my work call attention to those moments.' (Johnson: 1982)

'I want my work to disappear into the landscape and then take a viewer by surprise. After he gets over the shock of being fooled, it becomes an emotional discovery...Then he owns the sculpture. People often revisit their favorites. They become like friends.' (Johnson: 1982)

The photograph was taken by a photojournalist called Susan Orocki. It was taken a few feet away from ground zero, and it represents not only the impact of the global crisis, but a symbolization of what happened that day for the 9/11 victims, it represented the stereotypical and the common businessmen going to work to

make a living for his loved ones, only for that to be taken away from him in a matter of hours by a terrible and sadistic catastrophe. It had a huge impact on New Yorkers because it meant that they can visit that statue and view it as a positive thing rather than a negative thing, a symbolization of all those that lost their lives and died in the 9/11 attacks doing what they love and do their best at to provide for their families. According to David Levithan, 'What separates us from the animals, what separates us from the chaos, is our ability to mourn people we've never met'. This is an accurate statement to represent the mentality of the what the victims were going through post 9/11 because that quote says that even though what the hijackers did to destroy the world and rob people of their loved ones for pettiness, it won't let it get the better of them, and by looking at the statue every now and then gives them a peace of mind and reminds them that they are not alone in this world, representing a community coming together to mourn their loved ones and ones who they never knew.

This photograph shows the global crisis before and after 9/11. The papers that are scattered on the ground surrounding him represents a globally financial crisis; one of which are the international airlines that declined massively after the September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 attacks. The attacks saw the most taxing decade in aviation history, with the American airlines losing the most revenue post 9/11. 'According to IATA (1945), the international Air Transport Association, US airline revenues fell from \$130.2 billion in 2000 to \$107.1 billion in 2002. Losses of \$19.6 billion were reported in 2001/2002 while losses for 2001 to 2005 came to \$57.7 billion'.

Elite daily. 8 powerful quotes about 9/11 that will fill you with hope [online]. New York: Elite Daily. Available from <<https://www.elitedaily.com/news/8-powerful-quotes-911-will-fill-hope/1210264>> [accessed 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2018].

The last photograph I looked at is the photograph of the New Yorkers chatting on the day of the September 11<sup>th</sup>, 2001 attacks. This photograph, after it got published in the book of Magnum pictures became a controversial photograph to look at, simply because of the 5 individuals and the way they were expressing themselves in the photo; their body language shows them to be looking very relaxed, filled with laughter and smiling near the river in Brooklyn, New York, where opposite them, a black cloud descending over them, appearing to be smoke from the world trade Centre, opposite them, the 9/11 events took place. It caused a impact on the public afterwards as they saw the photograph in a completely different way; there are two different stories to this photo, for example, they saw the image as 5 individuals ignoring the fact that these horrific events are happening the other side of the city and destroying lives out of boredom, when in fact, the reality of it is that it shows 5 individuals chatting to one another, completely unaware of the events that are happening behind them, a democratic act, a symbol of indifference as well as representing history and a memory. As he quoted 'life does not stop dead because a battle or an act of terror is happening nearby'.

The photograph of the New Yorkers was taken by Thomas Hoepker, a German photographer, a member of Magnum photos and a photojournalist. He wanted this photograph to be embedded in people's minds for years to come, which he was successful in doing so. Hoepker created the effect to make it look like the individuals were looking away from the events that were happening, representing impoliteness from the group of people, however, that was not the case. He managed to capture the perfect coincidental photo which shows the black cloud approaching them, but later caused controversy as he photographed them without permission and therefore misrepresented how they were feeling. According to Walter Sipser, the man identified in the photo quoted that 'in a profound state of shock and disbelief'. Thomas Hoepker managed to capture positivity on a negative day, for instance, the 5 individuals sat near the water are normal people, going about their day, are representing normality, meanwhile on the other side, it shows disbelief that something like this is happening in a city like New York.

I compared Thomas Hoepker's photograph of the New Yorkers chatting on the day of September 11<sup>th</sup> to The Fall of Icarus, where the Renaissance painter Pieter Bruegel interprets 'a peasant ploughing on as a boy falls to his death in the sea beyond and WH Auden's lines on the painting in his poem Musee des Beaux Arts, where he quotes 'In Breughel's Icarus, for instance: how everything turns away/Quite leisurely from the disaster...'. These two literacies are perfect examples of what Hoepker is capturing in this photograph because they both offer similar observations of what the photograph of the new Yorkers chatting on the day of 9/11 are portraying.

An example from both would be that, in Icarus (1555), it quotes that 'Daedalus was struck with horror but there was nothing he could do to save his son', this text relates to the photograph because even though they were getting on with life with events like 9/11 happening in the background, there was nothing that they could do about it, therefore life goes on; the poem Musee des Beaux Arts (1939) quotes that 'this poem is about the nature of human suffering', which relates to this photograph because whilst the 5 individuals are chatting away, the human beings in the twin towers are desperately trying to stay alive. The photograph hugely has an impact on what WH Auden says about the poem to which he quotes 'All humans have painful and traumatic experiences that can change the course of their lives, but meanwhile the rest of the world continues on in a mundane way'. This represents what Thomas Hoepker, when taking this photograph was trying to capture. He is saying that even though something horrible and life threatening is happening, as it is said in the Fall of Icarus, it quotes 'Around him, the rest of the world remains unperturbed, as if unaffected by his demise'. This text portrays the photograph of the New Yorkers perfectly because it reflects what they are representing, for example, the 5 people in the photo look as though they are calm with what is happening and act unsympathetic, but as a matter of fact, are like others and trying to figure it all out.

'It took me a while to understand that this was a very interesting, unusual way to approach such a horror, which was absolutely shocking for New York, for the world...' (Hoepker: 2016)

The three visuals that was looked at still have an impact on the public due to the different representations that it had in 2001 to what they represent now. E.g. they were thought to be more controversial than today. The techniques that Richard Drew, Seward Johnson and Thomas Hoepker use is subtle. They aim to make the photographs more emotional yet fascinating for people to look at.

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