Catalyst in a Revelatory Exposure: The Significance of the Space at Ground Zero

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Abstract –

Although the attacks on the World Trade Center undoubtedly instigated the production of innumerable photographic images of the towers, from images of their destruction and collapse to the image of the ultimate vacancy left by their destruction, these images on their own are not enough to explain the staggering effect of the attacks. The significance of these images is that they ultimately exist as necessary objects in a perpetual system of reproduction – the postmodern reality of reproductive exposures which dominates perception through an endless cycle of reproduced images. This reality of reproduction is the ultimate object in the revelatory exposure which took place with the destruction of the towers: an exposure propagated by the emptiness of the space left by the towers themselves. The space functions not as another constituent of the reality of reproduction, but it rather intrudes as an existent other, marking a limit to the system of knowledge within the image-dominated reality. In other words, the emptiness of the space at Ground Zero calls to attention the very reality of reproductive exposures wherein images utterly dominate all perception and understanding. It is this exposure which ultimately explains the staggering effect of the attacks, a massive outpouring of unrest, anxiety and debate.
The attacks on the World Trade Center in September of 2001 were an *exposure*. The weaknesses of the nation’s system of security were undoubtedly revealed, and the panic and fears of a somewhat conceited country which believed itself to be rather invincible were most certainly laid bare. ‘Exposure’ in these contexts connotes a sense of unveiling or uncovering of a hidden truth, but the term also infers a connection to the production of art and image as well. In the realm of aesthetics, the notion of exposure cues a reference to the art of photography – the mechanical reproduction of images, a phrase first introduced by Walter Benjamin. Photography at its base entails the ingestion of light on an impressionable medium for a predetermined amount of time in order to produce an image. Considering the overwhelming flood of reproduced images in the wake of September 11, 2001, the attacks on the World Trade Center ultimately resulted in innumerable ‘exposures’ in terms of reproduction. This profusion of images constitutes a system of exposures which no doubt had a staggering effect on the masses of people in the wake of the towers’ destruction. Considering the images collectively, the event precipitated an ultimate revelatory *exposure* of this reality of reproduced images – the reality of reproductive exposures. Specifically, the attacks resulted in the production of images of the towers’ deletion: images of the towers’ destruction as fire and smoke ensued from the highest floors; images of collapse as debris and ash erupted simultaneously with the buckling of the structures; images of ultimate emptiness as the towers no longer occupied the space as presence, but exist only as vacancy, a lack. The object of the reproduced images – the World Trade Center – was itself completely deleted and destroyed whence the ultimate revelatory exposure occurred. The attacks on the World Trade Center actuated an ultimate revelatory *exposure* of the endless production and reproduction of images that characterizes postmodern reality.
It is this ultimate exposure – the revelatory exposure of the postmodern reality of reproduced images – which explains the great turmoil that surrounds the site at Ground Zero. The image of the form of the buildings having already existed, the attacks brought about the reproduction of innumerable images of the destruction of the towers. In other words, the image of the buildings was deleted which gave rise to the image of their deletion. However, the image of deletion is not all that persists. The emptiness of the site – the space – is called to attention as the remainder of the reproduced image of deletion. The conspicuity of the space is a revelation that does not exist within the normal functioning of our conceptions of reality, and it thereby enters into close proximity.

The space thus reveals itself in consciousness as something outside of the accepted system of knowledge whereby it can only assume a position in our understanding as something ‘other.’ The space is other insofar as it is not of the reality of reproduced images and serves as the catalyst in the exposure of reproduction – the catalyst in the revelatory exposure of the reality of reproductive exposures. Though it only exists as a vacancy – nothingness, the space is still something; it is the other which has propagated the staggering effect of the attacks – a massive outpouring of unrest, anxiety, and debate. The very proximity of the space has made the question of what to do in the wake of this ultimate revelatory exposure an impossible one. The space – the nothingness – is the intrusion of something other into consciousness. It is the marker of the reality of reproductive exposures from the outside, which forces one into an interminable position of unsatisfiable desire in terms of how to react when faced with the other, in the presence of nothingness, the proximity of the space.

The catalytic effect of the proximity of the space at the site at Ground Zero, however, is separate from the presence of the towers – and even the deletion of the towers – themselves. The
architecture must not be mistaken for existing in the same position of otherness as the space; it is actually quite the opposite. The towers are rather part of the reality of reproductive exposures. Even in their deletion, the towers are not part of the outside, wherefrom the emptiness – the space – intrudes as the other. However, this does not mean that the two are not related. The architecture allows for the very possibility of the revelatory exposure propagated by the nothingness of the space. And ultimately, the presence (and even the non-presence) of the towers within the reality of reproductive exposures is necessary for the space to function as other. If there was no architecture – no object of exposure – in experienced reality, then there would be no way for the space to propagate a revelatory exposure of reality from the outside – the emergence of space utterly devoid of an object. This is not to say, however, that the towers equal the presence of the space or the revelatory exposure, but they are the object of the exposure propagated by the space. This system of reproductive exposures is the reality in which we all live that dominates our perceptions and knowledge; it is the age of technical reproduction governed by the possibility of an infinite number of reproduced images. The proximity of the emptiness of the space at Ground Zero – the conspicuity of ‘something other’ than the accepted system of knowledge – forces us to confront the very function and limit to reality: the reality of reproductive exposures.

Although Baudrillard’s theory nullifies the possibility of something other – the proximity of the space, his notion of ‘the virtual’ or what he also terms ‘the hyperreal’ offers up a system from which a discussion of how architecture functions within our reality can commence. In Mass. Identity. Architecture, Baudrillard asserts that all things, architecture included, have already entered into the realm of the hyperreal wherein the “virtual aestheticisation of the whole society” has taken place (134). For Baudrillard, the notion of ‘virtual aestheticisation’ is what
characterizes the hyperreal, and it also fittingly describes the reality of reproductive exposures. Hyperreality according to Baudrillard is the reality we all experience but which is not real. It is constituted of an unending precession of reproduced images or simulacra. Baudrillard’s theory reveals the notion that all things, all aspects of society, already are and always will be simulacra, which are born of and which will perpetually give rise to other simulacra. Likewise, the reality of reproductive exposures is an endless system of reproduced images which characterize reality as the singular means by which one encounters and understands the world, although this system of meaning is itself outside of consciousness.

Although his theory cannot offer up anything about the impact of the space, Baudrillard’s hyperreal fittingly mirrors the notion that architecture – specifically the World Trade Center – exists within our reality, within the system of reproductive exposures which follows a pattern of virtual aestheticisation through the unbounded production of virtual (photographic) images. Yet Baudrillard seems to lament the existence of architecture in a reproduction-centered reality as he writes, “I would like architecture, the architectural object, to remain something exceptional and not to sink into that state which threatens us today on all sides: the virtual reality of architecture. But we are in that state” (Mass. Identity. Architecture, 134). At a very superficial level, Baudrillard’s hyperreal is quite parallel to the unending system of reproductive exposures which we all experience as reality, although his theory as a whole is undoubtedly divergent.

Baudrillard’s lament for the virtual aestheticisation of architecture coalesces with Paul Virilio’s comments on the effects of our reality of reproductive exposures. Virilio writes that “We are faced with the reconstruction of phenomenology of perception according to the machines. The vision machine [...] is a machine that’s reconstructing sensations pixel by pixel and bits by bits. Not just visual or auditory sensations, the audio-visible, but also olfactory
sensations, tactile sensations. We are faced with a reconstruction of the sensas” (The Accident of Art 65). Virilio asserts that human perception is dominated by the system of reproduction or ‘the vision machine.’ Ultimately in our reality of reproductive exposures, knowledge and understanding is dominated by the system of reproduction. Virilio sees this as greatly problematic, asserting that machines reconstruct everything in terms of aesthetic image. He furthermore notes, “I don’t even think the phrase ‘go back’ is valid” (67). The reality of reproductive exposures is inescapable according to Virilio; the mere possibility of a movement back to a reality without reproduction is not even feasible. As an extension of Virilio’s thinking, it follows that architecture, specifically in terms of the World Trade Center, is interminably bound to the reality of reproductive exposures, even in its destruction. The deletion of the image of the form and presence of the buildings was merely a singular part of the inveterate system. At the point of their collapse, the image of the World Trade Center persists as demonstrated by the overwhelming inundation of images of the deletion of the towers. In other words, architecture is bounded by the limit of an interminable reproduction-based reality. The limit is the utterly dominating system of reproduction which is inescapable, and it is ultimately at the boundary of the system where the emptiness – the space as other – enters into consciousness.

Because of this indefinite yet bounded system of image production, the towers remain in the reality of reproductive exposures even in their destruction. Following this logic, the persistence of the image as an image of deletion more exhaustively demonstrates the impossibility that architecture could exist on the outside of conscious reality as a constituent of space. According to Fredric Jameson, the “appetite for photography” among the masses is the means by which architecture enters the reality of reproductive exposures in the first place, and it is because of this same appetite that architecture, even in its destruction, will eternally remain a
part of conscious reality, never slipping outside of the boundaries of the system (Postmodernism, Or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism 99). According to Jameson, the ‘appetite for photography’ places great and disproportionate focus on architecture as image, rather than on architecture as form. This fascination with architecture through photographic reproduction marks an important separation between form and image. The separation precipitates the notion that architecture in the reality of reproduced exposures is expressly dominated by a fascination with the image of the building itself, not its form. “What we want to consume today are not the buildings themselves, which you scarcely even recognize as you round the freeway” (99). In the postmodern reality, Jameson argues, architecture is created and exists not as a function of form but as a function of reproduced image. Thus the form of a building is not of primary concern, but rather, architecture is valuable and satisfies the appetite when viewed as a reproduced image – as an image produced in the reality of reproductive exposures.

The dominance of image over form in architecture explains how the towers persist in the reality of reproductive exposures: the image of the towers themselves is of greater consequence when compared to their form in the context of the appetite for photography, and because the attacks on the World Trade Center resulted in the production of even more images of the towers, the deletion of their form is not of primary focus. Ultimately, the reason for the creation of architecture in the first place is, according to Jameson, an effort to satisfy the appetite for image over form in reality. Similar to Virilio’s contention, Jameson argues that buildings are born of their reproductive aesthetic – designed and constructed for their reproduced image, not their formal presence. Jameson writes, “many are the postmodern buildings that seem to have been designed for photography, where alone they flash into existence and actuality [...]” (99). Jameson’s argument – that postmodern architecture is dominated by the practice of designing
buildings for photography – for photographic image, brings to attention the notion of the dominance of image in the reality of reproductive exposures. In an extension of Jameson’s logic, the image having propagated its very construction and existence, architecture is and can only be a product of the reality of reproductive exposures. And along with Jameson’s theory on photography and postmodern architecture, the image of architecture dominates as the result of an appetite for the reproduced image. However, Jameson’s theory falls short of the notion of an image of deletion of architecture, which is necessary for the cognizance of the proximity of the space – the space as other.

Nonetheless, by describing how the photographic image of architecture ‘flashes into existence and actuality,’ Jameson postulates that it is in fact the reproduced image which gives rise to the building itself. He simply neglects to consider that it is the image of the destruction of architecture which ultimately precedes. Without the acknowledgement of the image of deletion, Jameson’s theory can only bring an analysis of image and space so far – one can only discuss the image of the form of architecture. The significance of this discussion is more aptly concentrated in the idea of the destruction of architecture and the intrusion of the emptiness of the space from outside of the reality of reproductive exposures, which necessitates an acknowledgement of the image of destruction. A consideration of the logic of a precession of image over form, or as Baudrillard simply states, “a precession of reproduction over production,” in the context of the wake of the towers’ destruction raises a number of questions (Simulacra and Simulation 100). Following the theory of the persistence of image in the reality of reproduction, the notion of ‘reproduction over production’ specifically raises the question as to how a building can be propagated for its reproduced image when in the very midst of its destruction and thereafter, its image can no longer exist as an image of the building itself – an image of its form. In the context
of the World Trade Center attacks, innumerable images of the destruction of the architecture are what persist, saturating our singular field of perception (perception of image over form) from within the reality of reproductive exposures which characterizes the persistence of the image of deletion.

As architecture presents the possibility of the intrusion of the space from beyond, it is necessary to consider how the image of architecture operates when its form is wholly destroyed—an area into which Jameson’s theory cannot venture. As briefly mentioned above, the persistence of the image of the towers, even in their very destruction, is an indicator that the image dominates over form in the reality of reproductive exposures. With the persistence of image even in destruction, the architecture is ultimately outside any possibility of deletion. In fact, the destruction of the towers calls to attention the overpowering and indestructible nature of the image of the buildings; the image of the towers’ presence quite literally collapses with the towers themselves, yet the profusion of infinite images of the towers—images of their very disappearance in this case—reveals the unending system of reproductive exposures.

The disappearance of the towers is the destruction of their image as form, but this is not an end to image, because as the image of the towers is ultimately the image of their destruction. It is important to note that with the profusion of images of the destruction of the towers as the result of the collapse of the World Trade Center, the images of deletion ultimately precede the images of the buildings as form, which again, is what Jameson’s theory falls short of considering. The moment that the destruction of the buildings produces images of destruction is the moment the image of deletion precedes the image of form. This is the case in the reality of reproductive exposures, for everything is a product of reproduction and image, and at the moment the reproduced image can successfully assert its own presence and meaning within the
system, it effectually precedes any ‘original’ form or image of which it was seemingly born.
And in the instance of the World Trade Center attacks, the image of deletion ultimately precedes any image or form. Baudrillard’s theory of the precession of the simulacra allows for this crucial step towards a consideration of the significance of the image of deletion. Through a discussion of the Borges fable, Baudrillard astutely carves out the process of the unending precession of images. The allegory involves an instance in which a map of an empire is made so precisely that it perfectly covers the entire territory. The fabled map (which stands for Baudrillard’s simulacrum or the reproduced image) is so exactly representative of the territory it reproduces that the two are ultimately indistinguishable from one another. “It is nevertheless the map that precedes the territory – the precession of simulacra – that engenders the territory” (1). In the instance that the map is completely and utterly indecipherable from its original (the territory), the map according to Baudrillard is “more real than the real,” and it effectually precedes the territory. Baudrillard’s theory not only underscores the logic of an image preceding form as Jameson’s theory does, but it also correctly lends itself to the possibility that the image of deletion precedes an image of form. In other words, with respect to the World Trade Center, the image of deletion of the towers effectually precedes their image of form in the reality of reproductive exposures.

To define the image of deletion once more considering the destruction of the towers alone, the image in the reality of reproductive exposures is no longer that of a reproduction of the image of the buildings, but a reproduction of the image of their deletion. According to Baudrillard’s theory, we are “sheltered from the imaginary and from any distinction between the real and the imaginary, leaving room only for the orbital recurrence of models and for the simulated generation of differences” (Simulacra and Simulation 3). Baudrillard’s ‘orbital
recurrence of models' seemingly reflects the endless system of reproduced images which characterizes the reality of reproductive exposures, yet his system is limited in that it can only function on the basis of his orbital chain and nothing more. Though he does incorporate the image of deletion, there is no possibility of an intrusion of anything 'other' into Baudrillard's system, because difference is only generated as a simulation from within his chain of reproduction. Baudrillard's logic does, nonetheless, sharply demonstrate how the image persists as a part of the cyclical system of reproduced images. Furthermore, this system is precisely described by Baudrillard through a discussion of disappearance:

It's true there are a thousand ways to disappear, but we can at least compare the kind of disappearance that results in extermination – which is one of the ideas underlying Paul Virilio's work – and the way things disappear in a 'network,' which affects all of us and could be considered a kind of sublimation. The disappearance I'm talking about, which results in the concept of worthlessness and nothingness I mentioned earlier, means that one form disappears into another. It's a kind of metamorphosis: appearance disappearance. The mechanism is completely different. It's not the same as disappearing within a network, where everyone becomes the clone or metastasis of something else; it's a chain of interlinked forms, into which we disappear, where everything implies its own disappearance. It's all about the art of disappearance. (Mass. Identity. Architecture, 36)

Baudrillard correctly acknowledges that disappearance is an occurrence from within the chain in which one form disappears into another, and where everything already implies its own disappearance. This chain is the system of reproduction: his hyperreal which follows the same
movement as the reality of reproduced images. In this sense, the disappearance of the towers is a movement from an ‘appearance appearance,’ to an ‘appearance disappearance;’ or in terms of the reality of exposures, it is the movement from the image of form to the image of deletion. This serves as a marker of the perpetuation and utter dominance of the reproduced image from within a system of preceding images which constitutes the reality of reproductive exposures wherein architecture can only exist.

Though the perpetual cyclical motion in the system of reproduced images is quite apparent, Baudrillard’s model says very little about the possibility of the revelatory exposure or how it may transpire – namely because of his insistence on a singular all-encompassing chain of reproduction, from which there is never a possibility of the intrusion of something other – the proximity of the space. Nonetheless, along with the argument that the image of deletion ultimately precedes the image of the form of architecture with respect to the towers, Walter Benjamin fittingly asserts; “one of the foremost tasks of art has always been the creation of a demand which could be fully satisfied only later” (“Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction” 237). According to Benjamin, art (or architecture in this case) only achieves its true task and purpose in the fulfillment of a latent demand. Though other theorists – namely Baudrillard – may not agree, this latent demand which Benjamin describes is ultimately the desire for the proximity of the space. Baudrillard’s theory can only postulate that this latent demand is the demand for the image of deletion, because image is all that can ever exist in Baudrillard’s reality. But as demonstrated in the attacks on the World Trade Center, the image is not all there is: the emptiness of the space intrudes, inciting an exposure of the system of reality. Thus contrary to Baudrillard, the fulfillment of the latent demand is ultimately the revelatory exposure propagated
by proximity of the space. This desire for the revelatory exposure is simply not possible terms of Baudrillard.

In this respect, by defining his concept of the 'accident,' Virilio's theory is a step closer than Baudrillard as he smartly suggests that Benjamin's latent demand is the revelatory exposure. In *City of Panic*, Virilio explains that, in the context of major events:

> We were talking about creating an event...But isn’t an accident an indirect kind of *oeuvre*, a consequence of substance? [...] The ship or ocean liner invents its shipwreck at the same time as its launch. Since this is nothing short of obvious, why the feigned surprise in 1912 when the Titanic, the ocean liner that was unsinkable according to the advertising spiel of the White Star line, sank? An accident is in fact an assault on the propriety of substance, an unveiling of its nakedness, of the poverty of *whatever, whoever* is confronted by what *happens* unexpectedly – to people as much as to their creations. (28)

Virilio's 'accident' is not an accident in the sense that it is something completely unpredictable or unprecedented at the time that it occurs; he argues quite the opposite. Virilio's theory postulates that the 'accident' is in fact the materialization of Benjamin's 'latent demand' which exists at the very conception of the reproduced image, once the reproduction asserts its own individual presence. The accident is part of the revelatory exposure – an 'unveiling of the nakedness of substance' – of an already known yet unrealized knowledge, a knowledge of the reality of reproductive exposures. Virilio questions the great surprise – and ultimately the great anxiety – that occurred with the sinking of the Titanic when it was simply the fulfillment of a latent desire which took place. According to Virilio, it seems illogical to be surprised when one's desires are fulfilled, and so it follows that Virilio would be similarly shocked by the
massive outpouring of anxiety and fear which occurred in response to the World Trade Center attacks.

Nonetheless, the shipwreck (the accident) is actuated at the moment the ship makes its launch. As an extension of Virilio's logic, the 'accident' of the towers did not commence on the morning of September 11, 2001, but it was rather created and even carried out the moment the towers were added to the skyline of Manhattan – the moment they became images of form in the realm of reproductive exposures. Based on contention that the reproduced image is the purpose for which the towers were built (according to both Jameson and Baudrillard's theories of the dominance of image), it follows that the towers were actually built for the image of their own destruction. This destruction, according to Virilio had already preceded the very conception of the towers as architectural forms, and the image of their deletion was the latent fulfillment of this demand for destruction – a move which Jameson's theory can never accommodate. Echoing this notion, Baudrillard writes, "Undoubtedly, the task of architecture – of good architecture – is to efface itself, to disappear as such" (The Spirit of Terrorism 47). Thus it is not an 'appetite for photography' which characterizes the production of architecture in the reality of reproductive exposures, but it is an appetite for deletion.

Although the appetite for deletion is ultimately an appetite for a different kind of deletion in the reality of reproductive exposures (when compared to Baudrillard's hyperreal), the basics of this concept resonate in Baudrillard's discussion of the development of architecture in a reality dominated by reproduced images. He writes, "Hasn't something occurred in architecture which means that all that has happened since has taken place against a background of the disappearance of architecture as such?" (Mass. Identity. Art. 134). The 'something' that has occurred is the appetite for deletion within the system of reproduction, wherein an infinite number of reproduced
images are possible. In this system, architecture as form has completely disappeared; there is no form, only images. To come back to the Borges fable, the moment the reproduction is indecipherable from the original, the original is of no significance. There is no longer a possibility of a return to an original because the original is abolished the moment it is reproduced. In terms of the World Trade Center in the reality of reproductive exposures, the ‘original’ or form of the towers is abolished the moment their image asserts a presence in the field of perception. Because the realm of reproduction is characterized by the movement of preceding images, the form (as an original) is ultimately always already abolished. Baudrillard’s theory acknowledges this movement as well, arguing that “It’s possible that in this universe of the virtual, which we talk about today, architecture wouldn’t exist at all, that this form, which plays with weight, the gravity of things and their absence, their total transparency, would be abolished” (27).

Both Jameson and Virilio’s theories fall short when it comes to this notion of the insignificance of form in the reality dominated by reproduced images. Though both Jameson and Virilio claim that image dominates over form in terms of architecture, the mere domination of image is simply not enough. Ultimately, the abolition of form is necessary. As opposed to Virilio and Jameson, Baudrillard’s theory suitably incorporates the necessary notion of the absence of form (the real) from conscious reality. “More real than the real, that is how the real is abolished” (Simulacra and Simulation 1). The image is ultimately more real than form, because once one enters into a world of reproduction, as one does in the reality of reproductive exposures, the reproductions are no longer decipherable from the original, and the original (the real) is abolished. Thus an attempt to apply this logic to both Jameson and Virilio’s notions of
architecture is impossible, because both cling to the notion of the tangibility of form, and their theories are thereby inherently contradictory.

With the abolition of the original – the negation of the real – it is no longer that architecture exists in the reality of reproductive exposures as both form and image, but it exists only as image. In the context of the World Trade Center attacks, the image of the towers (both in form and deletion) is how the signification of their destruction is defined. However, the significance of the destruction is not simply defined by the precession of the image of the deletion of the towers as Baudrillard argues, but rather because the image of the deletion allows for the intrusion of the space as other which catalyzes the ultimate revelatory exposure of the system of images. Nonetheless, Baudrillard correctly asserts “Virtual architecture is an architecture which no longer has any secret, which has become a mere operator in the field of visibility, a screen-architecture. It has become, as it were, in every sense of these terms, not the natural, but the artificial intelligence of the city and space” (Mass. Identity. Architecture, 131-32). The presence of the form of architecture according to Baudrillard is only perceived as form, but it is really just the presence of a reproduction without an original; it is only an image of form, a product of reproductive exposure. Architecture is thus ‘screen architecture’ insofar as it only exists to the point that it could appear on a screen, as a visual presence but nothing more. To relate this logic to the context of the World Trade Center, the form of architecture is of no significance in the reality of reproductive exposures.

This negation of the significance of form succinctly explains Virilio’s questioning of the reaction to the sinking of the Titanic. Because he clings to the existence of form, his theory assumes that the masses are conscious of something tangible – a real form – when really all that exists is an unrealized potential for knowledge of the real – the potential for the revelatory
exposure. All that is known is image in the reality of reproductive exposures, which constitutes the only possibility of meaning within the system of reproduction. One does not know or realize one's own ultimate desire for destruction (the revelatory exposure), and so this fulfillment of unrealized desire propagated by the proximity of the space results in a great outpouring of surprise and fear – as is the case with the attacks on the World Trade Center. Thus, the real cannot be a part of experienced reality in which all knowledge and understanding is bound to the perception of images. It is the coming of the 'accident,' – the otherness of the space – which necessitates and propagates the very revelatory exposure.

In other words, the task of architecture is fulfilled through Virilio’s ‘accident,’ but not in terms of a destruction of forms as Virilio would claim, and not even in terms of an image of destruction as Baudrillard asserts. Rather, the task of architecture is ultimately fulfilled in terms the revelatory exposure of the system of images itself, brought about by the proximity of the space as something other. Baudrillard’s theory is not completely amiss, however, because the image of destruction is nonetheless imperative for the movement toward the fulfillment of the latent demand, though it is not the ultimate fulfillment itself as Baudrillard mistakenly insists. Baudrillard’s theory suffices insofar as he does incorporate the necessary image of destruction; he defines “a basic issue for architecture: one should build only those things which, by their excellence, are worthy of being destroyed” (The Spirit of Terrorism 46-7). While it seems a paradox to build an object in order to fulfill a desire for its very destruction, this explanation connects with Virilio’s theory of the ‘accident,’ wherefrom the revelatory exposure of the reality of reproductive exposures can commence. Though his theory does not support the notion of an ultimate revelatory exposure, Baudrillard is right to point out that architecture should be (and ultimately is) built to fulfill the latent demand for its own destruction. To reiterate, however, this
is the very point at which Baudrillard’s theory is no longer sufficient, because his system comprised of only a chain of reproduction leaves no room to even consider the staggering effect of the proximity of the space – the intrusion of something other.

Only comprised of a system of reproduced images, Baudrillard’s theory at its basest revolves around a loss of difference – and ultimately a loss of meaning in the system of reproduction – because any distinction between reproduced images is impossible in his reality of the hyperreal. He writes:

Perhaps only in the mirror can the question be posed: which, the real or the image, is the reflection of the other? In this sense one can speak of the remainder as a mirror, or of the mirror of the remainder. It is that in both cases the line of structural demarcation, the line of the sharing of meaning, has become a wavering one, it is that meaning no longer exists. There is no longer a respective position – the real disappearing to make room for an image, more real than the real.

(Simulacra and Simulation 143-44)

The indecipherability between real and image relates back to Baudrillard’s analogy with the Borges fable. At the moment it is impossible to tell the difference between the territory and the map, the real is abolished and everything enters into the hyperreal. Meaning is abolished as well, according to Baudrillard, because the meaning of the one in relation to the other (which is necessarily linear) is not discernible within a cyclical system. Baudrillard argues that due to the circular nature of the system of the hyperreal, it is impossible to determine which is ‘the remainder of the other’ (or which image comes first). The difference between the real and image thereby loses its meaning according to Baudrillard, because the point at which any distinction
between the two is unidentifiable is the moment where there is no difference, and meaning is lost.

Thus, with the orbital movement of images disappearing into one another, Baudrillard’s theory posits that all images are remainders indiscernible from one another, at which point any difference, and ultimately any meaning, cannot exist within his system. In this sense, to come back to the shortcomings of Baudrillard’s argument once again, this lack of meaning within his system is where his theory ends, falling short of any possibility of a discussion of the impact of the space. In addition, the problem with Baudrillard’s theory exists at an even deeper level, because although he extensively defends his position of a lack of difference and meaning in his system, he ultimately clings to the very notion of difference and meaning in portions of his discussion. He writes, “immense energies are deployed to hold this simulacrum at bay, to avoid the brutal desimulation that would confront us in the face of the obvious reality of a radical loss of meaning” (Simulacra and Simulation 80). The reality of the simulacrum and the reproduction of images are to be consistently kept outside of consciousness, for the realization of the ‘radical loss of meaning’ would be incredibly terrifying according to Baudrillard. Ironically, the very consciousness of ‘desimulation’ resonates with the fear and panic that ensued with the attacks on the World Trade Center; it reflects the very situation which Baudrillard explains is kept at bay. Setting the parallel aside and considering his theory as a whole, however, the ‘brutal desimulation’ as Baudrillard describes is ultimately impossible within his theory: the nature of his hyperreality postulates that there is nothing outside of the reality of the hyperreal wherefrom the system might be exposed. This marks a substantial contradiction in Baudrillard’s reasoning. By stating that energies need be spent in order to keep the reality of the simulacra at bay, he implies that there in fact the possibility of an exposure of the cyclical system of images, which
necessarily insinuates that there is the possibility that something other than the hyperreal may become apparent in human consciousness – the revelatory exposure. To reiterate, on one hand Baudrillard points to the necessary efforts employed to prevent an exposure of the system of reproduction, while this very system is founded on the notion nothing exists outside of it, so that difference or otherness to image is always already impossible in his cyclical chain of reproduced images.

Furthermore, this contradictory possibility of a revelatory exposure of reality is also reflected in Baudrillard's discussion of the necessary existence of a binary opposite to the notion of the remainder, just as there is a 'right to a left.' Recalling that Baudrillard argues that all images in his system are already remainders, he writes:

> And yet, what is on the other side of the remainder exists, it is even the marked term, the powerful moment, the privileged element in this strangely asymmetrical opposition, in this structure that is not one. But this marked term has no name. It is anonymous, it is unstable and without definition. Positive, but only the negative gives it the force of reality. In a strict sense, it cannot be defined except as the remainder of the remainder. (143)

Baudrillard asserts that the remainder of the remainder exists as a marked term without a name, which fits with his notion of 'symbol.' In the context of the World Trade Center attacks, the image of the towers and the image of their deletion are remainders according to Baudrillard’s theory. Baudrillard comments, "The towers, for their part, have disappeared. But they have left us the symbol of their disappearance, their disappearance as symbol" (The Spirit Of Terrorism 47). What remains of the image of the deletion of the towers – the remainder of the remainder – is thus 'symbol' according to Baudrillard. The towers’ disappearance leaves us with a 'symbol,'
which may be seen as something more powerful than just the reproduced image of deletion, for it
is without a name, unstable, anonymous. Yet this distinction of ‘symbol’ characterizes another
contradiction in Baudrillard’s logic: the possibility of one image accruing more ‘symbolic’
power over another is undermined by the very nature of Baudrillard’s reality of the hyperreal, as
is the notion of any difference in Baudrillard’s system of reproduction.

The most significant problem with Baudrillard’s disappearance as symbol and the
resulting value of the towers is that the symbolic is still of the order of images. Though a symbol
has no name, and is given force in this context by a negation – a deletion (which fits well with
the idea that the symbol is the remainder of the remainder), the symbol still exists within the
hyperreal. It exists as image – a part of Baudrillard’s all-encompassing chain of images. Within
Baudrillard’s theory, the disappearance of the towers as the remainder of the remainder – as
symbol – is ultimately nothing more than the image of their deletion. The symbol is simply
another image in the endless chain of reproduction which characterizes the hyperreal. According
to Baudrillard’s theory, the remainder of the remainder as symbol is ultimately just a remainder;
it is an image, an image of the deletion of the towers. This calls into question, however, why
Baudrillard would comment on the fact that the symbolic value of the towers is significant. If his
theory is founded on the notion of a loss of difference and meaning, then it makes little sense for
him to point out the symbolic value of the destruction when all that remains is ultimately another
image – another image within a system which he characterizes by a ‘radical loss of meaning.’ In
other words, the symbol is still within the realm of Baudrillard’s reality of reproduction, and
therefore there is no possibility of a ‘something other’, yet he is reluctant to acknowledge that
there is no meaning to the architecture in the aftermath of the attacks on the World Trade Center.
Baudrillard’s negation of the notion of something real outside of reality makes it impossible to talk about the space, – the meaning of the emptiness at the site at Ground Zero – because all that exists is image. And because our reality according to Baudrillard is utterly dominated by the mechanical reproduction of images wherein all images are the same, the image (which is not varied or different from any other) cannot explain the meaning of the emptiness – the meaning of the space. For Baudrillard the space does not have meaning, because it does not exist – image is all there is. Baudrillard’s theory negates the real in such a way as to say that it does not exist at all, which eliminates any chance of even discussing the possibility of what the panic and fear in the face of the nothingness of the space means. Whereas Virilio clings to the notion of a conscious knowledge of the real within reality, Baudrillard adamantly adheres to the impossibility of the real all together – there is no real; all is the hyperreal. His theory does not allow for an intrusion of something other than the hyperreal. It operates on the notion that all things are always already simulacra and that there is thus no way for something to be other. Yet he insinuates that there is a reason for the simulacra to be kept at bay. There is a reason for preventing the exposure. This reason, although Baudrillard’s theory neglects to acknowledge it, is the possibility of the revelatory exposure – the exposure by something on the outside, the exposure of a reality utterly devoid of the real. Though it may seem that Baudrillard’s hyperreal and the reality of reproductive exposures are one in the same, the two completely diverge when it comes to the notion of the possibility of an outside to the reality of reproduction which dominates all aspects of knowledge and perception through image.

In the reality of the reproductive exposures, there exists the possibility of something other; it is the exposure of the exposure. It is the space, the void, to which the destruction of the towers gave birth. The revelatory exposure of reproductive exposures is born of the negation,
the deletion. Similar to how Baudrillard argues the negative gives rise to the positive remainder of the remainder — the image of the deletion of the towers gives rise to the exposure of exposures. Yet the exposure of the exposure is outside of reality — outside of the reality of reproductive exposures. The space, though empty, is not a negative; it is a positive. The negative — the destruction in the attacks — gave rise to the space which itself is an emptiness. This does not mean that the space does not exist, but that it is a void. It is space which was once quantified by the existence — the image — of the towers, but in the wake of their destruction and the precession of the image of their deletion, the space enters into consciousness. It serves as both the catalyst in the exposure of the image of towers’ presence, and it is the catalyst in the exposure of their image of deletion: it is ultimately the exposure of the system of images, the exposure of the reality of exposures. The space is a lack, a vacancy; it is a space that is now only a presence devoid of an image of presence which exposes the domination of images in reality from the outside, from the position of an other.

Baudrillard’s argument, however, which posits that there is a never-ending precession of simulacra due to the dominance of the hyperreal, is not necessarily completely disputed by the notion of the revelatory exposure generated by the space — the exposure of the exposure. In fact, the notion of the hyperreal or a reality other than ‘the other’ is the necessary existent object of exposure (in the revelatory exposure) which allows for the possibility of both the emergence and perception of the vacancy. And it is ultimately here where this discussion of space and architecture began. The architecture, even though it only exists in the form of reproduced images (in both Baudrillard’s hyperreal and the reality of reproductive exposures), is necessary for the intrusion of the space — for the possibility of the revelatory exposure of reality as such. Yet Baudrillard’s theory falls short of the idea that the space — the void left by the towers — is an
exposure of reality. The only way to expose the reality is to mark it with something outside of it, as a boundary, a limit. The void left by the towers and their subsequent image of deletion propagates the revelatory exposure of the reality of reproductive exposures as such, and therefore, the space as the catalyst to the exposure must necessarily be something other. Even if the latent demand for architecture is never achieved (in Baudrillard's sense of the desire for destruction), and the precession of images infinitely persists in the reality utterly dominated by reproduced images (which is what Baudrillard's theory ultimately posits), the exposure of this system of reproduction is still an exposure propagated by an other outside the limits of conscious reality. In the destruction of the towers, their image persists as an image of deletion, but it also serves as the necessary object within the reality of reproductive exposures which allows for the space to intrude, precipitating the exposure of exposures.

Through a discussion of vision, Levinas offers up a language from which an understanding of the proximity of the space as other can emerge. Although Levinas does not explicitly comment on the notion of space as other in the context of the World Trade Center attacks, he does argue that space is the counterpart to image as a function of vision:

The eye does not see the light, but the object in the light. Vision is therefore a relation with a 'something' established within a relation with what is not a 'something.' We are in the light inasmuch as we encounter the thing in nothingness. The light makes the thing appear by driving out the shadows; it empties the space. It makes space arise specifically as a void. Inasmuch as the movement of the hand that touches traverses the 'nothing' of space, touch resembles vision. Nevertheless vision has over touch the privilege of maintaining the object in this void receiving it always from this nothingness as from origin,
whereas in touch nothingness is manifested to the free movement of palpitation.

*(Totality and Infinity 189)*

Image and space are bound to one another insofar as image is the 'something' that is perceived in the 'not something' of space. In differentiating between touch and vision, Levinas calls to attention the ability of vision to perceive both an object and emptiness at the same time. Hence, in the wake of the attacks, the image of deletion of the towers persists, yet the proximity of the space is apparent as well, setting off the revelatory exposure of the system of images.

At the same time, Levinas' theory may also be used to explain why the proximity of the space - in this case the emptiness of the space at the site at Ground Zero - is not always apparent. In other words, Levinas' theory explains why there is not always a state of revelatory exposure, an awareness of the reality of reproduction. According to Levinas, this is precisely a function of the same movement in which the space as void is proximate and apparent in consciousness: it is because the image persists. The dominance of images in the reality of reproductive exposures is what keeps the perception of the proximity of the 'not something' at bay and out of consciousness, because image is all that has meaning in the reality of reproductive exposures. To recall Virilio's comments about the domination of images, 'we are faced with the reconstruction of the sensas,' at which point all things are perceived as images in the reality of mechanical reproduction - the reality of reproductive exposures. Hence, Virilio's claim reveals that while Levinas asserts that in touch nothingness is only manifested through a lack of palpability, touch is ultimately outmoded by the dominance of images and visual perception. All senses of perception are dominated by vision - the image. Thus, it is only when faced with the proximity of the space (which normally remains outside of consciousness in our reality dominated by images) that the void is manifest, but it is apparent only as something other,
something outside of conscious reality. With the attacks on the World Trade Center, the image of deletion persists as image, but a complete elimination of image is not necessary for the staggering effects of the emptiness at Ground Zero. The nothingness of the space is revealed through the profusion of the images of deletion of the towers.

The space, the ‘not something’ is the marker of the reality of reproductive exposures, for it is apparent as something outside – something other, at which point one has the ability to perceive the very dominance of images in one’s reality which until then has kept the proximity of the space outside of one’s knowledge. The dominance of an image of deletion, however, allows for the cognition of the space – the emptiness of the space at Ground Zero. Hence the space, the ‘not something,’ is the catalyst in the revelatory exposure – the exposure of the existence and utter domination of the reality of reproductive exposures. Levinas writes, “The comprehension of an existent consists in precisely going beyond the existent, into the open. To comprehend the particular being is to apprehend it out of an illuminated site it does not fill” (Totality and Infinity 190). The space – the not something – left by the towers is the revelatory exposure of the reality of reproductive exposures. To employ Levinas’ language, reality is the ultimate ‘existent’ which is comprehended (or exposed) precisely by a movement toward something beyond that it does not fill. The image of the deletion of the towers persists, but the image brings about the possibility of the beyond, at which point the space as other is the beyond, allowing for the perception of the existent reality of reproduction – the exposure of the revelatory exposure.

With the proximity of the space, the nothingness is apparent, at which point the image of the deletion of the towers cannot cover the void, and so the emptiness of the space at Ground Zero remains – enters into close proximity (consciousness) as an exposure of the system of images. The exposure of reality is propagated by the emptiness of the space, visible because of
its emptiness – emptiness as the ‘not something.’ It is an exposure of how the reality of reproductive exposures dominates perception. The space is something other than image, something other than ‘the something.’ The space is the marker of the exposure whose object is image, and the object of this revelatory exposure is ultimately the reality of reproductive exposures itself. In other words, the space in the wake of the attacks is something other than the reality of reproductive exposures, at which point it defines the limit of reality, and in marking this boundary, the space necessarily exposes the very nature of the reality outside of which it exists. Whereas the images (the image of form and the image of deletion) are both reproductive exposures, – products of the reality of utter reproduction wherein the image dominates perception – the space is that which is not of the system. It is not merely a reproductive exposure – an image, but it is the counterpart to reproductive exposures, the counterpart to architecture: it is utterly other, the ‘not something.’

“But is not this spatial void a ‘something’?” (Levinas 190). To say that the space is ‘not something’ is not to say that it is nothing. On the contrary, the space is the emptiness out of which the reality of reproductive exposures is exposed; it is where Baudrillard’s theory falls short, because he eliminates the possibility of something real, something other than his hyperreal. Certainly the emptiness of the space at Ground Zero equates to something; it provoked a mass outpouring of fear and anxiety which is indicative of a reaction to something. Though it may be a void – a lack – the space is not nothing although it is not of the order of conscious reality either, which is why it is necessarily other. As an exposure of the reality of exposures, it is a ‘something,’ but it is a something that is outside, because all that exists within the reality of reproductive exposures is image. “But if empty space differs from nothingness, [...] its ‘plenitude’ nowise returns it to the status of an object. This ‘plenitude’ is of another order. If the
void that light produces in the space from which it drives out darkness is not equivalent to nothingness, even in the absence of any particular object, there is the void itself” (Levinas 190). When associated with the description of the space, the ‘there is’ according to Levinas is where the space differs from nothingness. The space is a being, but it is not of the reality of reproductive exposures. Thus, the space is other. But in its ‘plentitude’ it is an object, subject to the phrase ‘there is’ which is how, in its proximity, it is perceived as other.

The impact of the ‘there is’ of the space – of the exposure of the exposures – is bewildering, as is the case with the attacks on the World Trade Center. The space has a devastating effect but only because of its proximity: our ability to perceive it as an object that is other. As long as the otherness – the exposure of the reality of reproductive exposures – remains hidden, there is no reason for the chaos, no reason for the overwhelming fears and panic to arise. Maurice Blanchot writes, “As long as the other is distant (the face that comes from the absolutely far away and bears the mark of distantness, the trace of eternity, of the immemorial past), then only the relation to which the other, whose face it is, assigns me, in the wake of absence, is beyond being” (The Writing of the Disaster 23). However, the destruction of the towers (a movement toward the fulfillment for our desire for destruction) eliminates the distance of the other, so that the other is no longer ‘beyond being,’ but it rather enters into being. The other (the space) becomes palpable, a function of Levinas’ ‘there is.’ It is the closeness, the very knowledge and encounter of the space as other as something beyond, which has caused the monumental effect of the attack:

[W]hen the other is no longer remote, but the neighbor whose proximity weighs upon me to the point of opening me up to the radical passivity of the self, then subjectivity – subjectivity as wounded, blamed, and persecuted exposure, as
vulnerability abandoned to difference – falls in its turn outside of being. Then it signifies the beyond of being, in the very gift – in the giving of the sign – which its immeasurable sacrifice delivers to the other. (Blanchot 24)

The proximity of the other – the cognizance of the space at Ground Zero as the exposure of the reality of reproduced images – marks a movement into what Blanchot terms the 'radical passivity of the self.' The proximity of the other exposes the 'beyond being' of the subject. In other words, the emptiness of the space in the wake of the collapse of the towers exists outside of one’s being, because all experience in conscious reality is propagated by the dominance of a precession of reproduced images which is, prior to the exposure, the only reality one knows, experiences, and believes. To be in the presence of such an object outside of one’s reality forces one to fall outside of the self, at which point one finds oneself beyond being, just as the space is other. The proximity of the space instigates a confrontation with something outside of one’s knowledge, and it is thus a confrontation with the notion of something absolutely Other – not an object, but a beyond being outside of knowledge and language whence one loses the self.

Because the space at Ground Zero is ultimately an object, it is only a catalyst in the revelatory exposure, because the confrontation with the absolutely Other is not a confrontation with an object. The ‘there is’ of the space is how it enters into the possibility of perception, forcing one to consider the Other’s relation to the self. Yet because the space is an object, it is not that which is utterly ‘beyond being.’ In other words, the space in the wake of the destruction of the towers is not the absolutely Other, but it is the existent other as the object of our desire for destruction – the fulfillment of Benjamin’s latent demand. The emptiness of the space at Ground Zero where the towers once stood is thus the marker of the revelatory exposure; it is the other of the reproduced image – the other of architecture.
The staggering force of the space at Ground Zero is thus not just in its being, but its profound effect is due to its marking both the existence of the reality of reproductive exposures and the relation of the Other to ‘I’. It is this relation which provokes an overwhelming amount of anxiety in the subject (in all those who witnessed the attacks), for it is the possibility that the ‘I’ is itself beyond being, to the point that the self is lost. “In the relation of the Other to me: everything seems to reverse itself: The distant becomes the close-by, this proximity becomes the obsession that afflicts me, that weighs down upon me, that separates me from myself – as if separation did its work within me, dis-identifying me, abandoning me to passivity, leaving me without any initiative and bereft of present” (Blanchot 19). The horror of the space at Ground Zero is that it serves as the catalyst in the perception of one’s relation to the Other which results in the loss of self. It is the space as other which sets the revelatory exposure in motion, at which point the relation of the Other brings about the loss of self. But this loss of self is also the very possibility of progress. It is a possibility of progress through one’s unavoidable responsibility to the space, the other. Yet the responsibility is impossible, and the one feels unable to move forward: “I am at the same time pressed into a responsibility which not only exceeds me, but which I cannot exercise, since I cannot do anything and no longer exist as myself” (Blanchot 20). The destruction of the towers brought about this loss of subjectivity, wherein the ability to move forward seems impossible, yet there simultaneously exists a feeling of inescapable responsibility toward the space: one is responsible to do something in the presence of the void, responsible to respond to the emptiness which resulted from the collapse of the towers. According to Blanchot, the other – the space – is what the self bereft of self wishes to divest itself of, yet it is what one is obligated to answer for. In the wake of the attacks, confronted with the proximity of the space, a
wall of anxiety and fear ensued among the masses, yet the feeling of responsibility to the space is similarly overwhelming and inescapable.

In other words, one is filled with an urge to eliminate the proximity of the emptiness of the space, yet one is simultaneously responsible for it. Anything and everything seems both right and wrong, and so the next course of action is left resolutely undetermined. This characterizes the rise of the heated debate over what should happen with the site at Ground Zero. Virilio writes, “Today, ambition knows no bounds since it is now a matter of smashing the mirror of the real and thereby causing each and every one of us, whether allies or adversaries, to lose our perception of the true and the false, of the just and the unjust, the real and the virtual [...].” (City of Panic 42). With the attacks on the World Trade Center, the mirror of the real (or what is perceived to be ‘real’ in the reality of reproductive exposures) is shattered, leaving an exposure of the system of images and the relation to an Other beyond being. And this shattering, or perhaps better termed ‘destruction,’ is marked by the proximity of the space, the great void left by the collapse of the towers. With the shattering of the mirror (or the exposure of the reality of reproductive exposures), one knows not what is the right way to proceed; there seems no way for one to move forward. Hence the ongoing debate over what to do with the emptiness of the space at Ground Zero. The emptiness of the space has, as Blanchot asserts, resulted in a loss of the subject, whereby the ‘there is’ of the other forces subjectivity to move ‘beyond being.’ The space forces one to consider the self in relation to the Other, leaving one without any initiative other than the responsibility of answering to the existent other.

Levinas acknowledges this impossible situation for the self, asserting that it is only in a movement back through the very absence – the existent other – that one can persist. He writes, “But vision in the light is precisely the possibility of forgetting the horror of this interminable
return, this *aperion*, maintaining oneself before the semblance of nothingness which is the void, and approaching objects as though at their origin, out of nothingness” (191). One must find a way to move forward, and it is only through the emptiness that one can begin to budge. Because vision always connotes the possibility of perception of both image and space, one can only return through the light – through vision – in order to move forward. This return is a return to knowledge, a return to the knowledge of images. In other words, this means that one returns to the reality of images, the reality in which the destruction initially commenced, wherein the towers once existed as an image of presence. It means a return to the reality of reproductive exposures, and the possibility of forgetting the beyond being of the Other. Similarly, though one is filled with an urge to move away from the very thing that has caused the loss of self, one must necessarily move toward the existent other rather than running away – one must engage in, confront and acknowledge the other – the space. Blanchot writes, “I must also answer to it with refusal, resistance, and combat. I must come back to knowledge; I must return (if possible – for it may be that there is no return) to the I that knows and that knows it is exposed, not to the Other, but to the adverse I [...]” (20). One moves forward by responding to space with a refusal, as a return to knowledge. Hence the drive to want to put something in the space at Ground Zero is a natural response, perhaps because it is the only possible response. Levinas writes, “Vision is a forgetting of the there is because of the satisfaction, the agreeableness of sensibility, contentment with the finite without concern for the infinite” (*Totality and Infinity* 190). A return to vision of the image without the perception of the space is comforting, stabilizing, and agreeable, which explains the urge to fill the emptiness of the space at Ground Zero. In answering the space by building something – by covering up the exposure – one returns to knowledge, returns to the reality of reproductive exposures, one returns to a state of contentment.
One moves toward the other as a function of what Levinas defines as desire. “Because the separation of the separated being has not been relative, has not been a movement away from the other, but was produced as psychism, the relation with the other does not consist in repeating the movement apart in a reverse direction, but in going toward the other in Desire” (61). The self cannot go backwards toward the real of the space – towards the other as a reversal of the movement which brought the space into close proximity. Rather, one moves toward the other – toward the space – in terms of desire. One cannot revert back to a time prior to the proximity of the emptiness and prior to the revelatory exposure in the wake of the destruction of the towers, yet the movement forward in the direction of the other – the space – which has incited the very exposure of reality and questioned the meaning of self is necessary.

Levinas introduces the idea of desire in terms of the necessary but impossible situation of the self bereft of self in the wake of intrusion of the other – the proximity of the space. According to Levinas, the desire of the self is ultimately the desire caused by the object – in this case, the object is the emptiness, the void, the space at Ground Zero. It is not that this absolute desire is a desire for the object. This desire is not consumable, not satisfied or achieved. Yet this does not mean that the object – the space as other – is not connected to this desire, for as Levinas argues:

It is a desire that can not be satisfied. [...] Desire is absolute if the desiring being is mortal and the Desired invisible. Invisibility does not denote an absence of relation; it implies relations with what is not given, of which there is no idea. Vision is an adequation of the idea with the thing, a comprehension that encompasses. Non-adequation does not denote a simple negation or an obscurity of the idea, but – beyond the light and the night, beyond the knowledge measuring
beings – the inordinateness of Desire. Desire is desire for the absolutely other.

(34)

Desire is not for an object, but the object serves as a marker of the absolutely Other which is the actual ‘object of desire,’ although the Other is not an object. The absolutely Other rather exists completely outside of knowledge, beyond objects and images, beyond consciousness. Levinas asserts that the desire for the Other which cannot be satisfied is absolute Desire. In recalling the previous discussion of desire with respect to architecture, the desire for destruction is always already implied in the reality of reproductive exposures. As an object, the emptiness of the space at Ground Zero is the object which is not the fulfillment of desire, but that which acts as the marker of the desire for destruction.

In other words, as the result of the desire for destruction, the towers fell, revealing the emptiness of the space as the marker and catalyst in the exposure of absolute Desire. Yet the space as the object marker of the desire for destruction still must not be confused with the ultimate fulfillment of Desire. For although the space is not of the reality of reproductive exposures wherein knowledge, understanding, and the self remain ordered, it is still an object, and absolute Desire is desire for the Other, beyond being. This explains the great controversy over what should be built to memorialize the space that the World Trade Center once occupied, because it is bound to the notion of a desire which can never be satisfied. The subject is confronted with the space, devoid of self, unsure of the very notions of true and false, right and wrong, and yet the responsibility to the other issues forth. One must move forward in desire, but toward a desire which is never satisfied. This points to Baudrillard’s comment: “As for what should be built in place of the towers, the problem is insoluble” (The Spirit Of Terrorism 46). Indeed, impossible is the drive to want to put something in the great void left by the destruction
of the towers, because one gets caught in a chain of desire wherein desire is ultimately never fulfilled.

At the point that one comes too close to the object of desire, one desire disappears, and takes on the form of another. If one looks at the desire for destruction as the first in the circuit of absolute unsatisfiable desire, the desire for destruction is a desire for the proximity of the space, a desire for the revelatory exposure: a desire to not want to put something in the space. The moment the desire for destruction seems to be fulfilled (in the destruction of the towers), this desire fades and becomes a desire to fill the space – to want to put something in the space to eliminate the exposure. If, as Baudrillard argues, the only architecture worth constructing is that which is most worthy of destruction, then rebuilding Ground Zero in an attempt to satisfy the 'desire to fill the space,' would only guarantee the recurrence of the horrors of the precession of images in a destruction, because with the prospect of filling the space, the architecture would be built in an attempt to satisfy the other aspect of the circuit of desire, which is the desire for destruction. This would necessitate another image of deletion and the horrific revelatory exposure of the reality of reproductive exposures through the proximity of the space. This leads back yet again to the appearance of the space as an existent other, whereby the cycle can only eternally commence. To want to put something in the space or not to want to put something in the space perpetuates the cycle of desires which ultimately can never be fulfilled.

In the wake of the attacks and the perception of the space as other, the exposure of the reality of exposures remains, which is ultimately a revelatory exposure of Desire. Desire in this sense is all encompassing as a single desire because the desire to fill the space and the desire for destruction are ultimately the same. They together define the impossible desire for the absolutely Other. In the context of the World Trade Center within the reality of reproductive
exposures, the desire for the image of deletion is inherent in architecture: buildings are erected for the image of their deletion. And with the destruction of the towers, the complementary desire, the desire to put something in the space of the towers, is revealed as well. This desire may be understood as a desire to hide the exposure of the exposure. The desire to put something in the void left by the towers is to want to fill the space, hiding the marker of reality. Thus, it is a return to the reality of reproductive exposures which seems to be desired in the wake of the attacks on the World Trade Center, yet this is the desire for destruction in itself. In other words, the desire to hide the catalyst of the revelatory exposure (the space), is ultimately a desire for destruction. Building something in the place of the towers (effectually covering up the exposure of the exposure) and returning to a system of knowledge dominated expressly by image, only reaffirms and reasserts the desire for the image of destruction. The desires, though they may seem to be oppositional, are actually one and the same. The desire is, therefore, not a physical or formal desire, not a desire to fill ‘space,’ but an ultimate desire that cannot ever be fulfilled; it is a desire for the Other.

Filling the space at Ground Zero thus guarantees a perpetuation of the system of reproductive exposures – producing another reproduced image in the unending system of reproduction. It is a guarantee of the persistence of images because the desire for the Other can never be fulfilled. In this sense, rebuilding would not result in an image of the form of the World Trade Center, and not an image of their deletion, but an image of form in deletion – or more simply stated, another image of form. Thus, yet another image in the unending system of reproduction which characterizes the reality of reproductive exposures manifests itself in the context of the towers. However, the perpetuation of image is not the only thing that filling the space guarantees. To put something in the space – filling the void and concealing once again the
marker of the reality of reproductive exposures – guarantees another coming of the void, another intrusion of the other (the space), another revelatory exposure. It is within this cycle that it is possible to identify the source of the effect of the space – the massive outpouring of unrest, anxiety and debate. Slavoj Zizek writes, “We can in this way grasp the Lacanian notion of anxiety; anxiety occurs not when the object-cause of desire is lacking; it is not the lack of the object that gives rise to anxiety but, on the contrary, the danger of our getting too close to the object and thus losing the lack itself. Anxiety is brought on by the disappearance of desire” (Looking Awry 8). The anxiety and panic that the emptiness of the space incited was thus a reaction not simply to the proximity of the space, but a reaction to the proximity of the object of desire: the desire for the Other which is marked by the emptiness of the space in consciousness. The space serves as the catalyst in the confrontation with the notion of the absolute Other. Zizek asserts that desire is founded on an inherent lack, and in the case that one comes too close to the object of desire, its ultimate fulfillment is too close and thus the necessary lack in desire fades. It is the fading or loss of the lack that incites great fear and anxiety. In the context of the World Trade Center, the object of desire before the attacks was the desire for destruction, the desire for the other. When the destruction commenced, the proximity of the space served as the catalyst in the exposure of the reality of reproductive exposures from the position of an existent other. The space is not the absolute Other, nor is it the ultimate fulfillment of desire, but the proximity of the space is enough to constitute a loss of the lack in desire, whence an overwhelming amount of anxiety floods reality.

Zizek’s assertion not only suggests that anxiety is precipitated by a close proximity to the object of desire, but his logic also posits that in the impossibility of the fulfillment of desire and the inescapable responsibility of the subject to the other, the chain of desire is unending and only
guarantees another closeness to the object, another loss of desire. Yet the emergence of still another desire in the cyclical chain necessarily follows. With the guarantee of a perpetuation of the unending chain of desire, the prospect of building at the site at Ground Zero in a return to knowledge in the reality of reproductive exposures seems undoubtedly grim. Yet this is the only option, one must move forward, and to move forward in desire is to perpetuate the cycle.

With Zizek’s reasoning, one is always in a state of moving towards but never obtaining, because the moment one thinks he is close to the ultimate fulfillment of his desires is actually the moment he is too close to the object, because the desire for the other “[...]does not consist in being “fulfilled,” ‘fully satisfied,’ it coincides rather with the reproduction of desire as such, with its circular movement (Looking Awry 7). The reproduction of desire in this circular movement is the interminable interchange between the two desires which are ultimately the same but which can never be fulfilled. Zizek asserts that it is the movement along this circuit that is characterized as an ‘aim,’ (connected to desire) which is to be distinguished from a ‘goal.’ Zizek writes, “The goal is the final distinction, while the aim is what we intend to do, i.e. the way itself. Lacan’s point is that the real purpose of the drive is not its goal (full satisfaction) but its aim: the drive’s ultimate aim is simply to reproduce itself as drive, to return to its circular path, to continue its path to and from the goal. The real source of enjoyment is the repetitive movement of this closed circuit” (5). Desire in the context of ‘aim’ is a perpetual movement between goals, which fits well with the notion that it is desire for the Other which can never be fulfilled. Zizek’s comment, that the enjoyment comes with the repetitive movement within a closed circuit, directly links to the situation with the World Trade Center and explains why the only option in the wake of the revelatory exposure is to move forward in desire, yet back to the reality of reproductive exposures. It is because this movement is ultimately the real source of enjoyment.
The opposing desires to want to fill and space and not to want to fill the space demonstrate how the circuit of desire perpetually cycles. If true enjoyment comes with the movement within the circuit and is never the result of an arrival at a goal, then the ultimate revelatory exposure propagated by the space after the attacks is part of this movement, part of the enjoyment. The space as other serves as the marker and catalyst of this unending movement – always moving towards but never obtaining which is the ultimate source of real enjoyment.

To trace the movement of desire in the context of destruction once more, when one comes too close to the object of desire, the lack that is necessary for desire dissipates, and one is left only in a state of extreme anxiety and fear which ultimately gives rise to another desire – as is the case with the attacks on the World Trade Center. The object of the desire for destruction of the Twin Towers (the fulfillment of the latent demand of architecture) having been almost completely fulfilled, great fear and anxiety necessarily ensued. It was not the disappearance of the towers or the disappearance of the desire that caused the great panic and anxiety in the population after the attacks on September 11, but rather the fear erupted because of the consciousness of the marker of the absolute other, the existent object as the catalyst in the exposure of exposures: the proximity of the space.

It is thus necessary to consider how the emptiness of the space functions in order to understand the effects of the destruction of architecture in the context of the attacks on the World Trade Center in September of 2001. In a reality utterly dominated by images – a reality of reproductive exposures, the effect of the attacks not only resulted in the destruction of the image of the form of the towers, but it propagated the precession of the image of the deletion of the towers as well. The image of deletion is necessary within the reality of reproductive exposure as the perpetuation of the system of images, and it is also necessary for the proximity of the space
to enter into consciousness as something other. The emptiness of the space is the marker of the possibility of the existence of something outside of the system of knowledge which dominates perception through image in the reality of reproductive exposures. And it is this distinction as other which allows the space to serve as a catalyst – the necessary existent object – in the revelatory exposure. It is the exposure of the reality of reproduction at its limit, for the emptiness of the space as other intrudes as the marker of the limit of the reality of reproductive exposures. The space also propagates the exposure of one’s relation to, and ultimate desire for, the Other. Because the nothingness of the space is the means by which it intrudes as something other in the reality of reproduction, it is comprehensible, serving as the marker for the absolute other which is beyond being.

Although the attacks on the World Trade Center undoubtedly resulted in innumerable reproductive exposures: images of the destruction, collapse, and emptiness of the towers, the effects of the images are ultimately only links in a perpetual system of reproduction – a reality of reproductive exposures which dominates knowledge. It is not until the space as an existent object enters into close proximity in consciousness as something other that the staggering effect of the destruction commences. The emptiness of the space at Ground Zero is the marker of the absolute Other, and it is the catalyst in the ultimate revelatory exposure, the exposure of the very system of exposures which dominates our understanding and knowledge. The proximity of nothingness at the site at Ground Zero is certainly not nothing; the space is rather the presence of nothing as an existent other which enables a confrontation with the ultimate meaning of the destruction.
Works Cited –


