

**DECONSTRUCTING “THE ABYSS OF THE FUTURE:” THEATRE,
PERFORMANCE, AND HOLES IN THE DISCOURSE OF 9/11**

by

Inga Meier

BA in English and Theatre Arts, Rutgers University, 2003

MFA in Dramaturgy, Stony Brook University, 2007

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The Dietrich School of Arts and Sciences in partial fulfillment
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DIETRICH SCHOOL OF ARTS AND SCIENCES

This dissertation was presented

by

Inga Meier

It was defended on

November 4, 2014

and approved by

Attilio Favorini, PhD, Emeritus Professor

Lucy Fischer, PhD, Distinguished Professor

Kathleen George, PhD, Professor

Dissertation Advisor: Lisa Jackson-Schebetta, PhD, Assistant Professor

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Inga Meier, M.F.A., PhD

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My dissertation examines the manner in which 9/11 has been formulated as a historical sequence of events in the United States through performance, theatre, architecture, film and photography. It has been repeatedly stated that the events of 9/11 have so completely permeated our collective consciousness as to render their narrative re-presentation, at best, ineffective, and, at worst, superfluous. Not only were the attacks pre-imagined in countless disaster films, but they were also deliberately orchestrated to maximize not so much the loss of human life, but, as Jean Baudrillard has argued, their symbolic effect. My dissertation argues the opposite, namely that the events themselves have been, from the beginning, relegated to the realm of the symbolic and that what we refer to as “9/11” is itself a narrative construction.

Furthermore, I contend that in representing 9/11, a series of liminal space(s) opened up, at the intersection between the symbolic and the real exposing radical possibilities for the configuration of identity, nation and history. My project is to pry open these liminal spaces, to examine how 9/11 plays, film adaptations, select documentaries, and performances (construed broadly) engage the narrative of 9/11 outside of its conceptual framework. I ask: how might these works be understood as productive “holes in the discourse” (to draw on Julia Kristeva’s formulation of the True-Real) of 9/11? How do these works interrogate and challenge the terms and binaries which define positionality in the wake of 9/11 and how do they redistribute cultural capital?

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PREFACE

When you're in the middle of a story, it isn't a story at all, but only a confusion, a dark roaring, a blindness, a wreckage of shattered glass and splintered wood, like a house in a whirlwind, or else a boat crushed by the icebergs or swept over the rapids, and all aboard are powerless to stop it. It's only afterwards that it becomes anything like a story at all, when you're telling it to yourself or to someone else.¹

(Margaret Atwood, *Alias Grace*)

Writing about 9/11 is gruesome business. There's no two ways about it. After ten years of sifting through what my dissertation advisor calls "grim material," the mind's defenses inevitably weaken. At various points in the course of working on this dissertation, I've found myself struggling with nightmares, flashbacks, and secondary trauma. Once, while analyzing footage from Etienne Sauret's *The First 24 Hours* for a paper (research, which would eventually inform an early draft of my third chapter), a film professor of mine asked the question all of this begs: "Why return?" Why do we constantly need to return to that moment? What is behind that compulsion? "Because," he added, "you do it too."

Strange and incredulous as it may seem, until that moment, I was not aware of my own compulsion. Or rather, I was not aware of it *as* a compulsion. I had couched my own inquiry in only the most abstract terminology, far removed from my own feelings of and connection to the events. As a scholar, I wanted to understand that moment, pick it apart and dissect it, so that I

¹ Margaret Atwood, *Alias Grace* (New York: Anchor Books, 1997) 298.

could make sense of how we, as a society, had allowed all those moments which had followed after: the persecution of Arab Americans, the War in Iraq, Guantanamo Bay, Abu Ghraib, and the countless other moments in which we had allowed our shock and fear to overwhelm us to such a degree that we came to embody the very values we attributed to those who had attacked us. And yet, as my professor reminded me with his remarks, that wasn't the whole story. There was something personal at work as well.

“Why 9/11?” is the single most frequent question I am asked about my dissertation. People's curiosity is understandable. Am I a masochist? A deeply traumatized individual? A voyeur? What would make a person want to spend the majority of her thought processes over the course of a decade watching footage of people jumping from the towers, visiting memorial after memorial, reading books and articles, watching films and documentaries, trying to uncover precisely those elements of the story of 9/11 erased from the public narrative? Why return over and over again?

To answer that question, I need to turn back to December 21, 1988, a day before my father's birthday. My older sister, who had moved back to Germany two years earlier was flying back to the United States to visit my mother, father, and me over the Christmas holiday. My father left from work that evening to pick her up at JFK airport. While I do not remember specific details, I do remember watching the news with my mother and seeing images of the wreckage of Pan Am 103, which had exploded over Lockerbie, Scotland. I vividly remember those images as well as the fact of my mother panicking and simultaneously trying to reassure me that everything was alright – efforts that at twelve-years-old were already lost on me.

As it turns out, my sister never stepped foot on Pan AM 103 – though that afternoon and for much of that evening, my mother and I had no way of knowing this. As with any large scale

disaster, the stories of near misses were widely reported. While it is well documented that a handful of people missed the flight for various reasons, a lesser known fact is that the flight was overbooked. A group of students from the University of Syracuse was flying back to New York and wanted to be booked together, on one flight. A decision which would prove tragic for the Syracuse community wound up saving my sister's life. She got bumped to a later flight and called my father from the airport. Neither she nor my father knew of the crash and my father did not think to notify my mother that he would be arriving late. Because cell phones did not yet exist, my mother, in turn, had no way of contacting him. The first my mother and I learned of my sister's survival was upon her arrival in our driveway. I have little recollection of this encounter. It is only years later that I have been able to reconstruct even the broadest of strokes.

What has remained with me is a persistent fear of flying and crippling anxiety anytime I do have to book a flight. Am I choosing the right flight? If I find a cheaper flight, do I choose that one? Will that decision save my life? Or will switching flights prove a fatal mistake? While my rational mind comprehends that I have no control over any of this, it is impossible for me to choose a flight without feeling as though life and death hang in the balance. Nightmares prior to a flight are not uncommon. Suffice it to say, I avoid flying whenever possible.

Much of that anxiety lay dormant until 9/11 however, when it surfaced suddenly with a vengeance. I don't believe that the world we occupied prior to 9/11 can ever be truly recovered. In fact, I know that that world was never real to begin with, a myth created by the shared illusion of American exceptionalism. Terrorism is and has been part of much of the world for centuries. In some instances, that terrorism has been sanctioned by the United States. However, I fiercely believe that a world without terrorism is possible. I refuse to believe otherwise.

The first time I visited “Ground Zero” was about a month after the destruction of the Twin Towers. At the time, I found myself overwhelmed by a profound disconnect between the stories being told on television, radio, and in the print media and the first-person accounts being conveyed by and through my friends and acquaintances, who had either experienced the attacks directly, or more often, knew someone in their inner circle who had. Some had lost loved ones. The “truth” I was told, time and again, was much, much worse. In fact, unlike the handful of people who sought catharsis in front of the cameras, the majority of people who had been “there” that day did not wish to discuss their experiences amidst this sort of attention. There was something about their experiences which defied description. As with veterans returning from a war, there seemed to exist a particular bond amongst the survivors of the towers’ collapse – a bond which did not require words so much as an understanding of sorts.

It was a connection I was reminded of years later as I was taking photographs in one of the numerous museums filled with artifacts related to 9/11. As a photographer, I seek to be as unobtrusive as possible, both to differentiate myself from the thanatourists I am often surrounded by and because I believe that the event of 9/11 requires a certain solemnity. However, in that particular instant, early on in my research, a tour guide approached me and began providing me with more information about the particular artifact I was documenting. On the one hand, I wanted to express my appreciation for this man’s efforts, but on the other I wasn’t terribly interested in the script he felt duty-bound to follow. When he asked me where I was on 9/11, I could sense that it was a question he had asked of others countless times before. I could also sense where those conversations often headed, a path I had no interest in following. When I told him “New Jersey,” the façade he was wearing instantly fell off. “Oh, you get it, then,” he said.

And with that, we both understood. Though we both talked some more, we also both knew that words were no longer necessary.

On the one hand, whenever I spoke with someone after 9/11, whom I had last spoken with before, the first question exchanged was always: “Is everyone you know ok?” followed by an unspoken understanding regarding the enormity of the shared experience, regardless of the answer. On the other hand, like the Challenger explosion a decade and a half before, images of the disaster were replayed in an endless loop of “breaking news.” This time however, the images were not contextualized in a national mourning process, but rather framed as an “attack” and later used as a pretext for going to war.

In late October of that year, at a taping for a television show, I met a mother and her son from Alabama. We briefly talked about the television show, until our conversation inevitably shifted to their visit to New York. They told me how excited they were to be in the city and quickly rattled off the list of places they had visited: “The Statue of Liberty, Ground Zero...” I do not remember the remainder of their list, but I do recall a distinct feeling of unease at first hearing the site listed within this new context as a tourist attraction.

While my own visit to Ground Zero shared a certain curiosity and sense of unreality in common with the intentions of the tourists, there was also something further I could not yet articulate. I did not simply want to take a picture and prove to myself that I had been there and that the events had in fact happened. I did not take a camera, or even a notebook. Whatever I was to capture, was to remain visceral and unfiltered. Also, I went late at night, when I was sure most of the tourists would be gone. I had no plan, no clear direction from which I wanted to approach. I simply followed my instincts to the location from which I had once been able to see the towers from the turnpike.

Once I was near the site, I parked and got out of my car, walking past St. Paul's chapel to a small road from which I could see the wreckage. I was passed by a fireman, walking in the opposite direction towards the church, probably to catch some sleep there after his shift. He was hunched over and – though New Yorkers are a closed off lot to begin with – it seemed as though this man was deliberately looking at the ground so as to avoid eye contact, even of the most fleeting or random variety, with other pedestrians. It was not so much that he was looking at the ground itself, but rather carefully avoiding looking at the world around him. When I saw him, the word “heroic” did not immediately come to mind, as it perhaps should have in those days. Instead, I was left with a sense of the depth of this man's pain and vulnerability – a direct contrast to the media image of the determined firefighters who had rushed into the buildings weeks before.

I walked further up the road and, along with a number of other individuals, stood by a small fence being guarded by a single police officer calmly fielding questions. Though his answers had a slightly programmed quality, as though he had been asked these questions a number of times before, they were also mixed with a sense of understanding that in some way, as a witness, he was serving as a conduit for something bigger. It was a testimony of sorts, but the tourists also lent the moment an unseemly element, even in those early days. I did not ask questions, nor did I pay close attention to the conversations taking place around me. Instead, I simply looked at the remains of the towers. And looked.

I was struck by two realizations almost simultaneously. Firstly, I was awed by the sheer immensity of the area of “the pit”. Even by New York standards, the World Trade Center covered a vast amount of space – the bases of the two towers each measured 208 x 208 feet – and walking around the entire perimeter can easily take fifteen to twenty minutes. Secondly, I

realized that the leaning tangle of steel tilting in front of me was the same one I had already seen countless times in the last month in magazines and newspapers. Already, the image had become an iconic one belonging to an ephemeral moment.

Both of these realizations were followed by a third, though more fleeting one. A few days after the attacks, I saw the cloud of debris traveling through New Jersey – the same one which had reportedly been seen from the space station. Part of me viewed the cloud physically, as being composed of the remains of the dead. The other part of me viewed the cloud as a metaphysical remnant of the roughly three thousand souls which had been extinguished in those few seconds during the collapses. Now, standing at the site where those souls had vanished, I again had a sense of their presence in the past, as though those final moments were being played back as repeatedly as the images of the collapse (a sense I have only had at one other site, namely Buchenwald).

Though the visit lasted no more than fifteen minutes, over the next several years, I would repeatedly return in my mind to those images and impressions from that first visit to Ground Zero. I did not know it at the time, but I simply needed to see for myself.

I am still looking...

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many years ago, I asked a well-known actress how she had known that she wished to pursue acting as a career. She paused for a moment and then told me that it was akin to a snowball, only in slow motion. It is a metaphor I could similarly extend to both my pursuit of a career in academia and to my particular research focus. While I have been fortunate in having had a number of influential teachers throughout my academic career, I would like to thank in

particular Drs. Elin Diamond, Ken Urban, and Matthew Buckley at Rutgers University and Dr. John Lutterbie at Stony Brook University for sharing their limitless curiosity with me and for providing me with the tools to think critically about theatre and trauma. Likewise, I would like to thank Drs. Mark Lynn Anderson and Lucy Fischer (who also sat on my committee) for providing me with a second academic home in the film department at the University of Pittsburgh and Dr. Kirk Savage for planting the seed that would eventually become the third chapter. In the theatre department at the University of Pittsburgh, I owe a debt of gratitude to Connie Markiw, whose job description is to fix the unfixable and Drs. Attilio Favorini and Kathleen George, not only for sitting on my committee, but for their support and guidance through the years. Thank you, especially, Dr. Lisa Jackson-Schebetta – dissertation advisor, mentor, advocate, friend, and editor extraordinaire.

In the course of working on this project, I have had the privilege of visiting numerous sites and museums directly associated with 9/11 or featuring exhibits related to the events. These have included the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum, the Pentagon, the Flight 93 Memorial, the 9/11 Tribute Center, the New York City Police Museum, the Museum of the City of New York, the New York City Fire Museum, the Skyscraper Museum, and the Jewish Museum in New York. At all of these locations, the staff and volunteers with whom I spoke proved to be both patient and helpful in providing guidance and answering my questions. Likewise, the staff at the New York Public Library for the Performing Arts offered valuable assistance in providing access to the archives of The Living Theatre. In particular, I would like to thank Caitlin Smith and Ryan Frank at the Granary in Connecticut for a truly memorable visit. Both were generous in sharing their time and knowledge with me and in providing access to a number of 9/11-related artworks, most notably Eric Fischl's "Tumbling Woman." Likewise, Theresa Rebeck and

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

In *Gnothi Seauton*,² the second episode of *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, the title character (Lena Headey), meets with Carlos (Jesse Garcia), a young gang leader, to obtain fake identification for herself and her son, John (Thomas Dekker). In their efforts to prevent a future nuclear apocalypse caused by the creation of a computer defense system known as Skynet, Sarah and John, along with Cameron (Summer Glau), a cyborg, sent from the future to protect them, have travelled through time from September 10, 1999 to September 10, 2007.³

² “Gnothi Seauton” is Greek for “Know Thyself.” In the opening monologue of the episode, Sarah Connor tells the viewer in voiceover, “A wise man once said, ‘Know thyself.’ Easier said than done.” A common trope in science fiction film, television, and novels is the destabilization of identity and the subsequent quest towards the salvation of that identity. In this episode, and throughout the show’s progression, the characters – human and cyborg alike – struggle to formulate identity as, in Sarah’s words, “the battlefield shifts beneath [their] feet.” This notion of the self, attempting to formulate boundaries against a fluid reality, might best be understood according to what Julia Kristeva terms “le subject en process” (“the subject in process”), a fluid self whose own formation parallels its introduction into the realm of signifying processes.

³ As I will explain further in the conclusion of my dissertation, the beginning and ending of *TSCC* are both structured by references to 9/11 – in the one instance, on a narrative level, in the other, on a visual, metaphorical level. In other words, the show’s story is bookended by and situated within a restructuring of 9/11 as a traumatic event. In addition to the scene described above, the pilot episode makes two significant references to 9/11 and collective trauma: Firstly, as revealed both in the narrative and the imagery, the bank from which the characters travel forward in time, was built in 1963 – the year of the Kennedy assassination. Secondly, a shot of video surveillance of the characters in the bank runs a time stamp from 09:03:14 to 09:04:19 – seconds after the moment that United Airlines 175 crashed into the South Tower of the World Trade Center at 09:03:02 on September 11, 2001. Thematically, the time travel from September 10, 1999 to September 10, 2007 thus mirrors this restructuring, thereby manifesting a Freudian desire to return to a moment prior to the traumatic event, in which one might prevent that moment from occurring.



Figure 1: "Pilot," TSCC.



Figure 2: "Pilot," TSCC.



Figure 3: "Pilot," TSCC.



Figure 4: "Pilot," TSCC.

Though the show's narrative unfolds within an insular reality removed from real world

events, this early episode breaks with that convention as Sarah learns of the events that have occurred in the decade she and her son have bypassed. As Carlos and another gang member (Aldo Gonzalez) enact a pantomime of the events of 9/11, Sarah looks on in horror and disbelief. She tells the viewer in voiceover:

I cannot imagine the apocalypse, no matter what Kyle Reese told me or others who have come back. I cannot imagine 3 billion dead, but I can imagine 3,000. I can imagine planes hitting buildings, and I can imagine fire. If I would have witnessed it, if I would have been here, I'm sure I would have thought the end was near. I'm sure I would have thought, 'We have failed.'⁴



Figure 5: "Gnothi Seauton," *TSCC*.



Figure 6: "Gnothi Seauton," *TSCC*.

The scene is staged as a flashback. While Sarah is inside the house with the gang members,

⁴ "Gnothi Seauton," *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles: The Complete First Season*, Writ. Josh Friedman, Dir. David Nutter, FOX, 14 Jan 2008.

Cameron waits outside. Only a portion of the exchange is initially revealed and it is only after Cameron and Sarah leave that the remainder of the discussion, the portion above, is depicted in flashback.

By thus inserting the collapse of the towers into Sarah's (and, by extension, the viewer's) conceptualizations of history and identity, the flashback ruptures both Sarah's and the episode's narrative continuity, shattering her presumed understanding of the projected past into a before and after. The towers' collapse thus functions as a traumatic rupture, which is in turn replicated in the editing of the episode and articulated in Sarah's voiceover. As film theorist Anne Friedberg argues in *The Virtual Window*:

All agonistic accounts require a theory of rupture, an account of the break. The collapse of the World Trade Towers provided a dramatic visual turning point, a break that forced a change in all accounts of the interdependence of global and technological change. The disintegration of two towers of glass and steel had an explosive epistemological charge.⁵

Like Friedberg, I believe that the attacks on the World Trade Center can only be conceptualized agonistically – if not as a so-called “clash between civilizations,” then certainly as a clash in which the technologically advanced Goliath is stunned by a David redirecting that technology against him. I likewise believe that the destruction of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001, caused a temporal, epistemological rupture – a rupture further reflected in this instance, in the editing process itself, in the cutting and rearrangement of the film stock. The scene cited above therefore not only bridges the narrative gap between *Terminator 2: Judgment Day*

⁵ Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft*. (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2006) 245-246.

(Cameron, 1994) and the television series, but also, more importantly, through the act of its insertion, erodes the line between an imagined apocalypse and the traumatic events of 9/11.

I reference this scene (and will return to it in the conclusion) because it points to the manner in which 9/11 might be formulated as a historical sequence of events, both in the liminal space(s) along the intersection between what Julia Kristeva terms the “semiotic”⁶ (i.e. the pre-Oedipal and pre-linguistic) and the symbolic (i.e. the signifying processes which formulate identity) and as an “abject,” a thing which cannot be repressed. In the instance of *TSCC* then, 9/11 is itself structured as the abject, rupturing the boundaries of the series’ fictional world. Like Sarah Connor, the viewer “can not imagine 3 billion dead,” but can recall 3,000 all too well. The viewer is thus asked to filter the fictional apocalypse through the lens of one far more real, not for the sake of allegory, but because that association cannot be repressed in a post-9/11 reality, structuring all that comes after. The abject must be continuously encountered, propelling us through fear and jouissance to that which is ultimately cathartic. It is this encounter, which Eve Ensler, writing on her “V-day” website, the day following the attacks argues for:

I have been thinking that for those of us who are living on the planet right here, right now, we must live in this dangerous space, allowing the helplessness, the grief, the sorrow to create new wisdom that can and will and must free us from this terrible prison of violence. I urge you, each one of you – fall into this space, weep, be lost, let go, die into the grief – inside the emptiness and the pain it will be revealed.⁷

⁶ Kristeva’s use of the term “semiotic” should not be confused with the term “semiotics.”

⁷ Eve Ensler, “A Message from Eve Ensler About the Recent Violence: I Have Been Thinking,” *V-Day* 12 Sept. 2001, 1 Dec. 2011 <<http://www.vday.org/node/1533>>.

Despite the degree to which 9/11 has come to pervade and shape the national discourse, the majority of that discourse obfuscates and subsumes the events within the larger discourse of the “war and terror,” perpetuating the very sort of foreign policy which contributed to the events in the first place. Instead, I argue that the events of 9/11 must be framed as an encounter with the abject, if history is not to repeat itself. For Kristeva (as for Ensler) the emptiness, the abject is a liminal space “edged with the sublime.”⁸ It is within this theoretical space in which I locate my examination of 9/11: as an abject, located liminally both within and between the symbolic and the semiotic, in a space similar to the one torn open by the flashback in *TSCC* – one which the series is continuously engaged in productively mending – in its encounter with the abject.

My dissertation will examine the manner in which 9/11 has been formulated as a historical sequence of events in the United States through plays, film adaptations, performances (construed broadly), and select documentaries, i.e. how the narrative has been constructed. What is its vocabulary? More importantly, what discourses have been suppressed and obfuscated in its (re)iteration, through the formation of surrogate discourses? Or, in Kristeva’s terms, what has been repressed and what refuses repression? Finally, how might performance, in its relation to affect, empathy, and liveness, serve as a conduit through which to engage and reclaim these lost discourses? My dissertation argues that the events themselves have been, from the beginning, relegated to the realm of the symbolic and that what we refer to as “9/11” is but a narrative construction. Furthermore, I contend that in the decade following 9/11, a series of liminal space(s) opened up in its representation(s), at the intersection between the semiotic and the symbolic that exposed radical possibilities for the multiple configurations of identity, nation, and history. However, these spaces (and their potentialities) were instead subsumed by the “war on

⁸ Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* Leon S. Roudiez (trans.) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982) 11.

terror.” My project then, is to pry open these liminal spaces, to examine how representations of 9/11 engaged – and continue to engage – a narrative outside of the conceptual framework formulated within the context of the “war on terrorism.” I thus ask: how might these works be understood as productive “holes in the discourse” (to draw on Kristeva’s formulation of the True-Real) of 9/11? How do these works interrogate and challenge the terms (e.g. “war on terrorism” etc.) and binaries (e.g. “us” and “them,” “victim” and “perpetrator” etc.), which define the positionality associated with these binaries in the wake of 9/11? How do they redistribute cultural capital, i.e. the ability to dictate the narratives surrounding the events? How does the very “liveness” (to borrow a term from Philip Auslander) of the more theatrical representations function to pierce the veil of the symbolic, forcing instead a direct (though in certain regards still mediated) encounter with the abject? Further, how might the ability of that liveness to elicit affect and empathy function as a political force for change? My project therefore is a historiographical intervention through performance, an attempt to conceive 9/11 rhizomatically rather than through binarisms and teleological narrative.

My first chapter focuses on the evolution of Ground Zero, from the immediate aftermath of 9/11 to its current (and still evolving and contested status) as a national memorial, museum, and center of commerce. Like so many sites of memorialization, “Ground Zero” is faced with the challenge of memorializing absence while simultaneously attempting to address the competing interests of developers, family members, survivors, artists, news media and politicians. This chapter will interrogate whether “Ground Zero” has succeeded in its efforts at reconciling such divergent interests. Does the site function to facilitate the sort of encounter described by Kristeva and Ensler or does it instead convey a broader, more facile narrative, thereby occluding a more

complex interpretation and understanding of the events? Can absence, in fact, ever be re-presented?

To address these questions, chapter one focuses on how the former site of the twin towers – and the towers’ absence – have been “staged” by artists, politicians (on both ends of the ideological spectrum), journalists, architects, and museum planners. For the purposes of these examinations, I will contextualize the site within a historiographical framework of memorialization and trauma to interrogate the constructions of memory and narrative surrounding the events of 9/11, drawing parallels to the sites in Shanksville and at the Pentagon, the Holocaust Museum and the Vietnam Memorial in Washington, D.C., the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum, and the Jewish Museum and Holocaust Memorial in Berlin. To structure some of these questions, I draw on geographer Kenneth E. Foote’s *Shadowed Ground: America’s Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy*, in which he posits four distinct categories of memorialization: sanctification, obliteration, designation, and rectification. As an antidote to the reconfiguration of Ground Zero described above, I examine the 2007 restaging of the 1963 play, *The Brig*, by the Living Theatre in opposition to the war in Iraq. I draw on Marvin Carlson’s notion of “ghosting,” as outlined in *The Haunted Stage: Theatre as Memory Machine*, as presenting to audience members “the identical thing they have encountered before, although now in a somewhat different context.”⁹

In my second chapter, I examine Spike Lee’s 2002 film, *25th Hour*, adapted from the novel of the same name by David Benioff. Throughout, Lee illustrates Benioff’s fictional narrative with images of post-9/11 Manhattan in 2002: the “Tribute in Light” memorial, American flags, makeshift memorials, and “Ground Zero.” At first glance, the film’s 9/11

⁹ Marvin Carlson, *The Haunted Stage: Theatre as Memory Machine* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2003) 10.

scenes appear jarring (and were certainly more so a year after the attacks). Taken as a whole however, these images operate on numerous, often inter-connected levels, constituting what critic David Edelstein calls a “melancholy tone poem”¹⁰ and what film scholar Stephen Prince terms an “emotional framework.”¹¹ Expanding upon Edelstein’s and Prince’s notion that these scenes function within, not against, the film’s narrative and tonal framework, what I wish to focus on in my discussion of these scenes then, is the collision between the fictional world of the main character, Monty Brogan, and the reality of post-9/11 New York they facilitate. It is on this juxtaposition between the imagined and the real that I will therefore focus in my examination of the film’s four primary 9/11 sequences. In doing so, I will utilize the theoretical frameworks of Roland Barthes, Mary Anne Doane, and Julia Kristeva.

To properly contextualize the significance of Lee’s project however, I will first provide a brief explanation of the post-9/11 Hollywood landscape within and against which it was conceived. Further, because much of my argument is centered on the manner in which Lee integrates documentary-style shots of sites related to 9/11 within his fictional narrative, I will also preface my examination of *25th Hour* with a brief analysis of one specific 9/11 documentary, *WTC the first 24 hours* (Sauret, 2002). I hope to elucidate the various ways in which documentary and narrative interact and collide, examining both their relation to what Barthes terms the “denotative” and the “connotative,” and the manner in which they operate within a trajectory which posits narrativization as what psychologist Nigel Hunt terms “reconciliation,” and how these elements may be understood to be indicative of or resistant to the notion of narrativization as a response to trauma.

¹⁰ David Edelstein, “Back Door Blues: What Spike Lee’s *25th Hour* is really about,” [Slate.com](http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/movies/2002/12/back_door_blues.html) 19 Dec. 2002, 1 Nov. 2012 <http://www.slate.com/articles/arts/movies/2002/12/back_door_blues.html>.

¹¹ Stephen Prince, *Firestorm: American Film in the Age of Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009) 81.

The third chapter focuses on the “jumpers” of 9/11, specifically on the photograph referred to as “The Falling Man” by Richard Drew, which I juxtapose with the trope of the “hero” firefighter. Anthony Kubiak proposes that, “Theater [...] becomes the space of history’s ruptures, its ecstasies, read through history back to cosmological deep time.”¹² In other words, it is in performance that the gaze is not averted from the abject but rather brought to bear directly upon it. I will therefore investigate performances, which resist what Joseph Roach terms “surrogation” and turn our focus back to the “falling man,” allowing us to augment and restructure the narratives and discourses of 9/11.

I begin this chapter with a discussion of Philippe Petit’s tightrope walk across the Twin Towers in 1974 and subsequently examine a series of representations of “The Falling Man:” Eric Fischl’s “Tumbling Woman” sculpture, Kerry Skarbaka’s performance series “The Struggle To Right Oneself,” Don DeLillo’s novel *The Falling Man*, and Jonathan Safran Foer’s novel (and its subsequent film adaptation) *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. All four works puncture holes in the discourse of 9/11, revealing, rather than denying the “falling man” and the questions he raises. In exploring how these works cited function in these terms, I intend to reveal how they restructure the traumatic instance they seek to represent, not through omission but through direct engagement. My discussion of these performances (construed broadly) is therefore informed by Dominick LaCapra’s concepts (borrowed from Freud) of “acting out” and “working through,” examining how the progression from one performance to another (and also within) represents a striving towards what Nigel C. Hunt calls “narrative cohesion,” i.e. an attempt to narratively heal the trauma of 9/11.

¹² Anthony Kubiak, “The Sacred Clade and the Rhizomatic Dis-ease of History,” *Modern Language Quarterly* Vol. 70, No. 1 (March 2009) 45.

While the previous chapter discusses surrogation as a coping response to trauma, one which structures the narratives by which we construct our selves against the shifting frames of history, memory and identity, the fourth chapter explores how those selves are iterated and reinforced in relation to the “other.” In other words, if the second chapter examines the inner (re-)construction of the self, this chapter turns that examination outward, asking how that self attempts to formulate a social, political, and historical structure – particularly when that striving toward narrative cohesion is disrupted by these very structures from which it seeks to wrestle meaning.

Chapter four explores the binary construction of “us” and “them” (as well as analogous, related binarisms) through the mechanism of “othering” (and by extension, scapegoating). I will interrogate representations of 9/11, which challenge these binary constructions, favoring instead a broader, more complex understanding of the events’ context. What are these binaries and how are they constructed? More importantly, how might performance disrupt and challenge these binaries? To examine how these tropes work more specifically, I offer an analysis of the films *Flight 93* (Markle, 2006) and *United 93* (Greengrass, 2006) and their representations of the terrorist “other.” I juxtapose these films with the musical *Wicked* and the film *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (Nair, 2012), drawing on the theoretical frameworks of Edward Said’s *Orientalism* and René Girard’s *The Scapegoat*. In doing so, I intend to formulate a conception of the Muslim “other” beyond the political ideology of the “clash of civilizations,” and to replace the binarisms of the films with a more rhizomatic conception of positionality in the “war on terror.”

If 9/11 scrambled meaning and the binary formulations by which that meaning is constituted, the “war on terror” reconfigured those binaries. The challenge to narrative

representation then, is not the undeniable reality of the events, but, to paraphrase Joseph Campbell, that the metaphor can become the thing itself.¹³ In the instance of 9/11, the representation of the events thus becomes indistinguishable from the events themselves and “the war on terror” is perceived as an actual war rather than as a series of loosely connected operations. By contrast, the means by which film and theatre formulate narrative, I contend, inherently carry the capacity to challenge this co-option. I therefore argue that 9/11 must be engaged precisely at the liminal intersection of the semiotic and the symbolic, to point to the manner in which the two realms are intertwined, to untangle those threads which connect them, and to locate these instances in representations of 9/11, in order to re-structure and re-examine the narratives surrounding 9/11.

The works I examine are therefore located within these extremes: steeped in binarisms, “othering,” and scapegoating on the one hand, and slouching towards the Bethlehem of utopian performatives on the other. My project then is a resistance of sorts, locating through performance instances in which the encounter with the abject remains possible. My dissertation is an examination of performance across various media, an attempt to undo and reformulate the manner in which memory, identity, and history are binarily constructed in the context of 9/11. I seek to reclaim potentialities and to restructure possibilities which have been suppressed by the narrativization of the events of 9/11 in public discourse.

¹³ Joseph Campbell, The Power of Myth (New York: Anchor Books, 1991) 67-73.

2.0 CHAPTER ONE: THE DEMOCRACY OF DEATH – MEMORIALIZATION, NAMING THE DEAD, AND STAGING GROUND ZERO

Who's afraid of the big, bad buildings? Everyone, because there are so many things about gigantism that we just don't know... The Trade Center towers could be the start of a new skyscraper age or the biggest tombstones in the world.¹⁴

(Ada Louise Huxtable)

We are breathing the dead, taking them into our lungs as living, we had taken them into our arms.¹⁵

(Hettie Jones)

Statue of Liberty, long live the World Trade
Long live the king, yo, I'm from the Empire State that's
In New York, concrete jungle where dreams are made, oh
There's nothing you can't do, now you're in New York¹⁶

(Jay-Z, *Empire State of Mind*)

On September 29, 2001, *Saturday Night Live* returned from its summer hiatus for its twenty-seventh season premier – a week earlier than planned, motivated in large part by New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's call for a "return to normal."¹⁷ The show shifted from its conventional opening format and instead began with Mayor Giuliani addressing the audience:

¹⁴ Ada Louise Huxtable, "Who's Afraid of the Big, Bad Buildings?" *New York Times* 29 May 1966. D13. As Elizabeth Greenspan rightly points out in *Battle for Ground Zero*: "It's difficult to read her words this way now, but 'tombstones' referred to the death of Radio Row." [Elizabeth Greenspan, *Battle for Ground Zero: Inside the Political Struggle to Rebuild the World Trade Center* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2013) 27.]

¹⁵ The quote is displayed on a panel at the 9/11 Tribute Center in New York.

¹⁶ Jay-Z, *The Blueprint 3*, Roc Nation, 2009.

¹⁷ James Barron, "A NATION CHALLENGED: New York Overview; For Some, 'Normal' Means Being Able To Go Home," *New York Times on the Web* 23 Sept. 2001, 10 Oct. 2014 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/23/us/nation-challenged-new-york-overview-for-some-normal-means-being-able-go-home.html>>.

Good evening. Since September 11th, many people have called New York a city of heroes. Well, these are the heroes. The brave men and women of the New York Fire Department, the New York Police Department, the Port Authority Police Department, Fire Commissioner Tom Von Essen, and Police Commissioner Bernard Kerik. On September 11th, more lives were lost than on any other single day in America's history. More than Pearl Harbor, and more than D-Day. The men, women and children who were in the World Trade Center came from across the country and 80 different nations. They were living their lives and pursuing their dreams, and they, too, are remembered as heroes. On our city's darkest day, our heroes met the worst of humanity with the best of humanity. Their acts of heroism saved more than 25,000 lives. But even as we grieve for our loved ones, it's up to us to face our future with renewed determination. Our hearts are broken, but they are beating, and they are beating stronger than ever. New Yorkers are unified. We will not yield to terrorism. We will not let our decisions be made out of fear. We choose to live our lives in freedom.¹⁸

Subsequently, the camera panned to the stage reserved for musical guests, where Paul Simon performed "The Boxer."¹⁹ The performance was followed by a brief exchange between Lorne Michaels, the show's creator and executive producer, and Mayor Giuliani. Giuliani proclaimed, "Having our city's institutions up and running sends a message that New York City is open for business. 'Saturday Night Live' is one of our great New York City institutions, and that's why it's

¹⁸ Saturday Night Live, host Reese Witherspoon, musical guest Alicia Keys, head writ. Tina Fey and Dennis McNichols, dir. Beth McCarthy-Miller, NBC, 29 Sept. 2001.

¹⁹ In an odd turn of events, Clear Channel radio stations deemed the more appropriate choice, "Bridge Over Troubled Water," (along with John Lennon's "Imagine") unsuited for airplay following its performance by Simon at the Sept. 21st telethon.

important for you to do your show tonight.”²⁰ Lorne Michaels then asked the question on everybody’s minds: “Can we be funny?” Giuliani deadpanned in response, “Why start now?”²¹

Certain topics, though not strictly off-limits, were avoided. Will Ferrell’s impersonation of President Bush was temporarily scrapped in light of the president’s high approval rating. Tina Fey, the show’s head writer admitted, “I was very concerned with even the language of the jokes.”²² Lorne Michaels explained, “I don’t think there’s a blanket taboo. I think we can find a way to say some funny things. I’m not talking about gallows humor. We think we can find some humor, though mostly I think we’ll go for big broad stuff. Silly is more than welcome right now.”²³

By December, *Saturday Night Live* had shifted from the “broad stuff” to once again critiquing current events. “The Narrator that Ruined Christmas,” a *TV Funhouse* skit by Robert Smigel, is a parody of the classic Rankin / Boss stop motion animation of *Rudolph, the Red Nosed Reindeer*. In Smigel’s rendering however, the focus of the story is no longer on Rudolph, but on the Snowman narrator, who laments:

If I live to be 100, I’ll never forget that big snowstorm here at Christmas Town.
The weather closed in only two days before Christmas Eve. And it all started from
the cave of the abominable snow monster. He was as mean and big as the whole
North Pole, and no one knew how to stop –

²⁰ *Saturday Night Live*, 29 Sept. 2001.

²¹ While Reese Witherspoon honored her commitment to host the show’s premiere, Ben Stiller had to be replaced by Seann William Scott the following week, stating in a *New York Times* interview, “It was a really hard decision for me. I didn’t know how to be funny right now in the way it takes to do that show – the amount of energy it takes.” Michaels took offense to the cancellation, stating, “I thought he was a New Yorker.” Stiller also cancelled a number of events related to the marketing of his film, *Zoolander*. (Bill Carter, “‘S.N.L.’ Tries to Balance Bite and Good Taste,” *New York Times* on the Web 27 September 2001, 10 October 2014 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/27/arts/television/27SNL.html>>.)

²² Josh Wolk, “The Daily Show & SNL: Post-9/11 Comic Relief: Late-night TV tries to get back to funny business as usual,” *Entertainment Weekly* 12 Oct. 2001, 2 Oct. 2014 <<http://www.ew.com/ew/article/0,,254104,00.html>>.

²³ Carter.

I'm sorry. It just all seems so trivial right now. I mean, we're still in Afghanistan, the country's under siege, we're getting warnings every week. What are we talking about here, an abominable snow monster? Ooh, a giant snow monster, I'm so scared! Let's all worry about some crappy-ass snow monster. Come on, folks, you watch CNN. I'm holding three months of Cipro up my butt hole. And I'm supposed to pick up a freakin' banjo and sing? Screw it, I can't do this.²⁴

The shot cuts to a boy and girl, watching the narrator on television. They are confused and frightened by the Snowman's words and behavior. Together with Rudolph and Sam the elf, the children attempt to convince the Snowman to help them save Christmas. Instead, the Snowman convinces them to meet him downtown, at "Ground Zero:"



Figure 7: "The Narrator that Ruined Christmas."

Rudolph: I don't like Ground Zero.

Girl: Why are we here?

Mr. Snowman: It's my responsibility as someone in the public eye. When they see me, it'll help.

²⁴ "The Narrator That Ruined Christmas," *Saturday Night Live*, host Reese Ellen Degeneres, musical guest No Doubt, head writ. Tina Fey, dir. Chel White, NBC, 15 December 2001.

Boy: And why do we have to give blood? Don't they have enough already?

Mr. Snowman: Trust me, you need to give blood more than they don't need to get it.

Rudolph: But I want to save Christmas.

Mr. Snowman: [to Cop] Excuse me. I'm here to give these men a boost.

Cop: You can't come through here. They're very busy. Right this way, Mr. Stiller.

Mr. Snowman: Hey, why does Jerry Stiller get through? I'm the narrator from "Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer."

Cop: Well, I don't see you narrating.²⁵

Revisiting this sketch now, more than a decade later, provides an important glimpse into the historical, liminal moment it encapsulates: It was a moment prior to the quagmires in Iraq and Afghanistan, prior to the war crimes of Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib, and prior to the widespread use of drone strikes as a tactic of war. However, it was also a moment following the single largest terrorist attack against the United States to date. It was a moment in time in which the recent past had not yet paved the road for the horrors which would follow in its name.²⁶

I begin my chapter with this sketch because the moment it preserves is anchored to the specific location of "Ground Zero" – a site fraught with contested meanings, then as now. Throughout this chapter, I will attempt to elucidate those various meanings and their relationship to the public discourse surrounding 9/11. According to a recent NJ.com article, "The [World Trade Center] site now draws about 10,000 visitors a day, which would put it on pace to match

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ Perhaps it comes as no surprise then, that two of the main genres to actively and consistently engage 9/11 are science fiction and fantasy – where alternate realities and / or timelines remain a possibility, a possibility I examine further in my introduction and conclusion.

or exceed the 3.5 million who visit the Statue of Liberty and Empire State Building annually.”²⁷ In fact, on December 29, 2011, the memorial celebrated its millionth visitor.²⁸ As of June 2014, that number has risen to “more than 12 million” with “visitors from all 50 states and from around the world”²⁹ – thereby exceeding previous estimates. In a city that hosted roughly 54 million tourists in 2013³⁰, the 9/11 Memorial constitutes its most visited tourist attraction, included as a destination on numerous tours now offered throughout New York. However, unlike the Statue of Liberty or the Empire State Building, “Ground Zero” is a heavily contested site. Like so many sites of memorialization, “Ground Zero” is faced with the challenge of representing the unrepresentable while attempting to reconcile a multitude of divergent perspectives – torn between its function(s) as memorial architecture on the one hand and the interests of developers, the business community, victims’ families, survivors, artists, news media, and politicians on the other.

On a larger scale, the same questions apply to 9/11 itself, i.e. the discourse surrounding the events is one which is fiercely fought over by the same parties competing for dominance over meaning-making at “Ground Zero.” In the words of George Lakoff, “In politics, whoever frames the debate tends to win the debate.”³¹ While my subsequent chapters will be focused on that debate – over the very beliefs and ideals which ultimately define the United States as a nation state in the 21st century – this chapter is concerned with the framing of the debate. “Ground

²⁷ The Associated Press, “NYC 9/11 Memorial Popular Among Tourists,” NJ.com 29 Dec.2011, 22 March 2012 <http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2011/12/nyc_911_memorial_popular_among.html>.

²⁸ Unknown Author, “9/11 Memorial Celebrates One Million Visitors,” CBS New York 29 Dec. 2011, 2 Oct. 2014 <<http://newyork.cbslocal.com/2011/12/29/911-memorial-set-to-celebrate-one-million-visitors/>>.

²⁹ Unknown Author, “Facts and Figures” National September 11 Memorial & Museum 2014. 2 Oct. 2014 <<http://www.911memorial.org/facts-and-figures>>.

³⁰ Michael Howard Saul, “New York City Sees Record High Tourism in 2013: Hotel Room Rates, Bookings Up; Number of International Visitors Doubled in 12 Years,” The Wall Street Journal 10 Dec. 2013, 2 Oct. 2014 <<http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB10001424052702304744304579250521791383050>>.

³¹ George Lakoff, Whose Freedom? The Battle Over America’s Most Important Idea (New York, Picador, 2006) 12.

Zero” is therefore significant within the context of 9/11 not solely as a site upon which a horrific terrorist act was committed, but also as a site where the framework through which that event is understood is formulated.

In fact, the site is so fraught in its efforts at meaning making, that even the term “Ground Zero” is a highly contested one. According to the OED, “Ground Zero” refers to “that part of the ground situated immediately under an exploding bomb, especially an atomic one.”³² First used in the context of the Manhattan Project and the subsequent bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945, the term has since been used in the context of other disasters and, more recently, the attacks on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. The first known use of the term in the context of 9/11 is by Mark Walsh, a Fox News freelancer, who, in an interview with Rick Leventhal, stated, “Those guys [from the 7th Precinct of the FDNY] were all right there at Ground Zero when those things went down.” Leventhal, in turn, picked up the term less than two minutes later, setting up an interview with another eyewitness, stating, “Some of those people – they haven’t recovered them yet and that’s a big issue right now, trying to get the rescue workers and the emergency crews to the building. There were police officers there and rescue crew there, when this was all happening, and they were all at Ground Zero when it all went down.”³³ Peter Jennings on ABC, Jim Axelrod on CBS and Rehema Ellis on NBC, all used the term later that day. Since then, the term “Ground Zero” has increasingly come to refer to the site itself. However, the reappropriation of a term originally used to describe an act of violence committed by the United States in 1945 to later describe an act of violence committed against the United States in 2001 is highly problematic, particularly when applied by a news corporation as

³² Gideon52480, “FOX NEWS: Rick Leventhal interviews 9/11 WTC Witness Mark ‘Harley Guy’ Walsh,” [youtube.com](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=07hJhmiWZSY) 23 November 2010, 10 October 2014. <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=07hJhmiWZSY>>.

³³ Ibid.

ideologically biased as Fox News.³⁴ While I therefore prefer to describe the sixteen acres of the former World Trade Center with the more neutral term “the site,” to avoid repetition and to acknowledge the degree to which even the terminology used to describe the site is contested, I will sometimes use the latter term. However, because “Ground Zero” is neither an official nor a fixed label, when using it, I will frame it in quotation marks.

This chapter will examine to what extent the memorial and museum at the site of the former World Trade Center have or have not succeeded in negotiating the competing interests I’ve outlined above as construction has progressed over the last decade. To what degree does “Ground Zero,” in its efforts at meaning making, elucidate the events it seeks to memorialize and represent? How has the former site of the twin towers – and the towers’ absence – been “staged” – by artists, politicians (on both ends of the ideological spectrum), architects and museum planners, particularly during anniversaries of these attacks? How is absence represented? How does the site negotiate its efforts to revitalize lower Manhattan while simultaneously marking a violent act? Conversely, to what degree do these efforts occlude more complex meanings, favoring instead the tropes of a broader, more facile narrative about the events? Can absence, in fact, ever be re-presented?

In addressing these questions, I will contextualize the site within a historiographical framework of memorialization and trauma to interrogate the constructions of memory and narrative surrounding the events of 9/11, providing a comparison not only to the sites in Shanksville and at the Pentagon, but also to the Holocaust Museum and the Vietnam Memorial

³⁴ On a smaller scale, this conflict is evidenced in the naming of the skyscraper, which has replaced the Twin Towers. Though attempts were made by Libeskind and others to label the skyscraper “Freedom Tower,” it is now more commonly referred to as “1 World Trade Center.”

in Washington, D.C., the Oklahoma City National Memorial and Museum and the Jewish Museum in Berlin.

Further, my analysis of the conflicts and the staging I describe is informed by the work of geographer Kenneth E. Foote in *Shadowed Ground: America's Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy*, where he posits four distinct categories of public commemoration: sanctification, obliteration, designation, and rectification. At one end of the spectrum, sanctified sites are those which are designated as worthy of memorialization and remembrance, often tied to notions of heroism or sacrifice. At the other end of the spectrum, obliterated sites are those which the public would choose to forget. Designation and rectification form the middle ground, whereby designated sites are marked for their importance and rectified sites are returned to use after all signs of trauma have been removed.³⁵ In identifying these categories, Foote largely ignores sites associated with terrorist attacks and could not have foreseen the large-scale terrorist attack of 9/11.³⁶ Therefore, while Foote is himself hesitant to classify sites associated with terrorism, I argue that the sixteen-acre site of the former World Trade Center constitutes a tenuous union between sanctification and rectification, attempting to memorialize the lives lost through a memorial and museum on the one hand, while seeking to reclaim the site's functionality and usability through numerous office towers, a cultural center, and a transportation hub on the other.³⁷ As Daniel Libeskind, the site's master planner, states, "It's the balance between the

³⁵ Kenneth E. Foote, *Shadowed Ground. America's Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2003) 9.

³⁶ He does briefly address the events of 9/11 in an afterword for the revised 2003 edition. There, he proposes a number of important points worthy of consideration in the planning of the memorial and museum. Suffice it to say, the subsequent planning and rebuilding of the site unfolded in a manner in direct contradiction to Foote's proposals.

³⁷ In this regard, the site is unique. In Shanksville, PA, the crash site of United Airlines 93, the land upon which the memorial is located is largely rural, much of it located on a former stone quarry. While the land had to be acquired by the federal government before construction of the memorial could begin, no previously existing structures needed to be rebuilt. No "rectification" in Foote's sense was therefore necessary. The Flight 93 Memorial may thus be understood as a purely "sanctified" site. By contrast, American Airlines Flight 177 caused damage to a significant

memory of what happened and also using the opportunity to create a twenty-first century New York.”³⁸

However, as Foote explains, “In the United States death by violence or accident rarely inspires sanctification, unless the individuals are great leaders, heroes, or martyrs.”³⁹ Further, the event affects a “single, relatively homogenous self-identified community, one that comes to view the tragedy as a common loss.”⁴⁰ In other words, for sites to be sanctified, the loss must be perceived as a common one, relying on rigid notions of heroism and community – categories I believe are themselves constructed – and abstracting the material reality of the deaths of the victims of 9/11. Consequently, the collective memory surrounding the attacks and their geopolitical context is a memory based upon exclusion (a memory which is, incidentally, in the very act of its construction, selective). On the one hand, I repeatedly – here and in future chapters – seek to examine those deaths to free them from the grip of abstraction. On the other, I contend, that their abstraction forges a series of false binaries: between “us and them,” “heroes and villains,” “good and evil” etc. In the instance of “Ground Zero,” that binarism is most clearly evidenced in the controversy surrounding the “Ground Zero mosque” – a binarism, which will be

portion of the Pentagon on 9/11. Because the Pentagon was already undergoing renovations at the time of the crash, the task of rebuilding fell on contractors already working on the building, allowing the process to be completed within a year. Though a small memorial and chapel are located within the Pentagon, at the site of impact, and are accessible to the public during guided tours, the primary public memorial is located adjacent to the building, where much of the wreckage was located and where the victims were brought in the immediate aftermath. The memorial is thus separate from the building itself. While the Pentagon itself may therefore be understood as “rectified,” the memorial, located on former parking and lawn space, is “sanctified.”

³⁸ “Reclaiming the Skyline: Part 1,” *Rising: Rebuilding Ground Zero*, Writ. Jessica Lyne de Ve and Kate Cohen, Dir. David Nutter, Discovery Channel, 25 Aug. 2011. While that plan has undergone numerous alterations – some of which have been the cause of significant discord – Libeskind stands by his vision, stating, “As a master planner, I understood that what is important is the interpretation. I didn’t want to create a shackle for the designers. I wanted to give a creative space for people to work creatively with their own interpretation. [...] I don’t want to minimize — there were challenges with Larry (Silverstein). I think that’s the nature of creating a work of this scale.” (Blair Kamin, “Discord aside, architect embraces memorial,” *Chicago Tribune* 15 Aug. 2011, 10 Aug. 2013).

<http://articles.chicagotribune.com/2011-08-15/entertainment/ct-ent-0815-memorial-libeskind-20110815_1_master-plan-ground-zero-architect>.)

³⁹ Foote 14.

⁴⁰ Ibid 15.

examined in greater detail in my final chapter on representations of the Muslim “other,” where I will be drawing on the works of René Girard and Edward Said.

As an antidote to these processes, I will discuss The Living Theatre’s restaging of Kenneth H. Brown’s *The Brig*, at “Ground Zero” in 2007. When the play was first produced in 1963, *The Brig* was most directly responding to The Korean War and the escalating conflict in Vietnam. By the time of its 2007 re-staging, that historical frame of reference had grown to include 9/11, Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay – connections made all the more explicit by the company’s selection of “Ground Zero” as its venue. Like the *Saturday Night Live* sketch described above, The Living Theatre’s re-staging of “The Brig” transports its audience back to a moment in which there were discursive and material possibilities which have since been foreclosed. In staging a play about war crimes at the very site referenced time and again by politicians to justify the United States’ own war crimes in the Middle East following 9/11, The Living Theatre, in its very theatricality, forces an encounter between the audience and the material reality represented by the play. Further, because the play was written following the Korean War, staged during the Vietnam War, and restaged during the second invasion of Iraq, the Living Theatre forces its audiences to reconfigure the events of 9/11 within a historical context larger than the one espoused by politicians. To elucidate these reconfigurations, I draw on Marvin Carlson’s concept of “ghosting,” as outlined in *The Haunted Stage: Theatre as Memory Machine*, as presenting to audience members “the identical thing they have encountered before, although now in a somewhat different context.”⁴¹

Here and throughout the dissertation, I seek to challenge the conventional narratives surrounding 9/11 and significantly problematize them. I argue for reality over abstraction, and

⁴¹ Carlson 10.

complexity over binarisms to suggest that despite the vastness of public discourse surrounding 9/11, the events have never been fully and truthfully addressed. This failure to address the reality of the events is not a matter of conspiracy theory, but rather indicative of the fact that the events have become so obfuscated in our public thinking, that the United States has, in the years since 9/11, found itself entangled in two wars on foreign soil, dramatically increased its reliance on drone attacks as a tactic of war, experienced a financial crisis from which it has yet to recover, seen its political system strangled by gridlock, and sacrificed many of the civil liberties domestically it claims to espouse on a foreign soil. To change course, I argue, the inciting incident of 9/11 must be addressed in a fresh and substantive manner.

“REFLECTING ABSENCE”

Like all sites of 9/11 memorialization, “Ground Zero” is faced with the challenge of representing the unrepresentable, namely a loss of life framed as an absence.⁴² As Dominick LaCapra writes in “Trauma, Absence, Loss,” “A crucial issue with respect to traumatic historical events is whether attempts to work through⁴³ problems, including rituals of mourning, can viably come to terms with (without ever healing or overcoming) the divided legacies, open wounds and unspeakable losses of a dire past.”⁴⁴ In this chapter, and throughout the dissertation, it is therefore my intention to humanize and specify these losses in direct contrast to the abstract terminology associated with the events of 9/11. The dead were not a homogenous entity, but rather individuals, who existed within a material reality. The lives of these individuals spanned

⁴² This notion of absence as presence is ubiquitous in commemorative culture related to the Holocaust, whose influence is notable in various facets of 9/11 commemorative culture, which will be discussed here and in subsequent chapters.

⁴³ LaCapra’s notion of “working through” will be further explored in the third chapter.

⁴⁴ Dominick LaCapra, “Trauma, Absence, Loss” Critical Inquiry, Vol. 25, No. 4 (Summer 1999) 697-698.

the human spectrum with regard to age, race, gender, culture, sexuality, class, ideology, and religion. In pointing to and highlighting this material reality, it is my intention here to pry the dead loose of the abstract terminology of “heroism” and “sacrifice,” and to suggest that they can not be merely subsumed within the national narrative of the “war on terror.”

A significant challenge in humanizing these individuals is that at all three 9/11 sites – the Pentagon, the World Trade Center and Shanksville – the majority of human remains are so small or damaged that they can only be identified through the latest DNA technology or, in many cases, cannot be identified at all. The term “vaporized”, which would sound more familiar in a science fiction context, has been applied repeatedly to the damage inflicted by the intensity of the fires and explosions. As Robert C. Schaler, the former director of the Forensic Biology Department at the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner writes in *Who They Were. Inside the World Trade Center DNA Story: The Unprecedented Effort to Identify the Missing*:

The falling buildings fragmented everything in their wake, most especially the people. The recovery process was prolonged – nearly nine months – and the World Trade Center rubble burned at near or higher than cremation temperatures for three months, accelerating the decomposition of the remains and affecting the quality of the DNA. Possibly too, many were entirely cremated and will never be identified. Dental and fingerprint records certainly could not suffice, thrusting DNA into a prominent role in identifying the missing. Sadly, we will never identify everyone who perished. Many were likely cremated from either being in close proximity to or in the rubble that burned for three months, or if they had been in the fireball when the planes exploded. As of April 2005, when the process

was suspended, we had identified only 1,592 out of the presumed 2,749 who died.⁴⁵

The efforts to identify the dead remain ongoing as DNA technology advances. However, Schaler's general assessment remains accurate. As of July 2013, when the most frequent remains – those of firefighter Jeffrey Walz⁴⁶ – were identified, the total number of remains identified had only risen to 1,637.⁴⁷

In short, the remains of a significant number of those who died on 9/11 will never be identified, even in those cases in which remains were recovered.⁴⁸ In those instances in which family members and loved ones have received remains, the term “remains” should be understood quite literally. As Schaler explains, “I learned that a remain could be anything from a mostly intact body to a foot, a finger, a single piece of bone or flesh, or even a single hair.”⁴⁹ Lacking remains to mourn, the site of “Ground Zero,” therefore takes on added significance, as Schaler explains:

Many of those who lost their loved ones on September 11 have nothing more than pictures, films, or memories to remind them of the wonderful moments they enjoyed. Their loved one – whether a firefighter, a police officer, or someone who worked at the World Trade Center – was simply an innocent person who left

⁴⁵ Robert C. Shaler, Who They Were: Inside the World Trade Center DNA Story: The Unprecedented Effort to Identify the Missing (New York: Free Press, 2005) Viii-ix.

⁴⁶ The Associated Press, “Remains of New York firefighter killed in the World Trade Center Attacks have been identified more than 11 years after his death,” Daily Mail Online 6 July 2013, 2 Oct. 2014. <<http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2357240/Remains-New-York-firefighter-killed-World-Trade-Center-attacks-identified-11-years-death.html>>.

⁴⁷ It should also be pointed out that, due to a variety of reasons, the most accurate number of those who perished on 9/11 is 2,753. On May 10, 2014, all remains were transferred from the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner of New York to the newly built repository (which will be discussed later in this chapter) at “Ground Zero.” As various news outlets reported “Four new remains were identified this past year.” However, Walz's name was the last name publicly released and it is unclear if these four identifications occurred after that of Walz or include Walz.

⁴⁸ Conversely, in numerous instances, family members have received multiple individual remains – often months or years apart.

⁴⁹ Shaler 14.

home that morning and never returned. For slightly less than half of these families, nothing of their loved ones came home. They have no one to bury.⁵⁰

Rosaleen Tallon, who lost her brother on 9/11, explains it more succinctly, “We were so fortunate to recover most of Sean, but we also got to know so many families that never recovered any part of their loved one, never had a cemetery to visit. Their cemetery is ground zero.”⁵¹

Consequently, the challenge in memorializing the lives lost is a difficult one. Often lacking proper burial sites, family members frequently refer to the former site of the Twin Towers as “sacred” or “hallowed ground,” the closest approximation for being in the presence of their loved ones’ remains. However, in rebuilding the World Financial Center and designing a memorial, the voices of family members struggled to be heard amidst the cacophony of competing interests of the developer (Larry Silverstein), the leaseholder (the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey), politicians, and the public.⁵²

In order to bring some structure into the re-development process, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation was formed, “by then-Governor Pataki and then-Mayor Giuliani to help plan and coordinate the rebuilding and revitalization of Lower Manhattan...”⁵³ To assist in determining the design of the memorial, members of the LMDC and its advisory councils, in the fall of 2002, visited a number of prominent memorials: the Oklahoma City Memorial, memorials in New York, the National Law Enforcement Officers Memorial, and the National Mall in Washington D.C.⁵⁴ While a number of lessons were learned in this process, the most important

⁵⁰ Shaler 307.

⁵¹ Frontline: The Man Behind the Mosque, dir. Dan Reed, PBS, 27 Sept. 2011.

⁵² While I can only provide a brief summary of the events here, a far more thorough and nuanced history can be found in Elizabeth Greenspan’s meticulously researched *The Battle for Ground Zero*.

⁵³ Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, “About Us,” [renewnyc.com](http://www.renewnyc.com) 2002-14, 10 Oct. 2014 <<http://www.renewnyc.com/overlay/AboutUs/>>.

⁵⁴ Allison Blais and Lynn Rasic, *A Place of Remembrance: Official Book of the National September 11 Memorial* (Washington, DC: National Geographic Society, 2011) 188.

of these was to create opportunities for dialogue about the design process to include as many voices as possible.

In formulating guidelines to settle upon a design, the LMDC drew in particular on similar guidelines formulated by Jan Scruggs, a Vietnam veteran and the president and founder of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund. In 1979, Scruggs had developed the idea “to create a memorial to the three million men and women, who [had] served in the nation’s longest and most controversial war to date.”⁵⁵ Scruggs’s arguably greatest innovation in the development of the memorial was to solicit designs through an anonymous, international competition, open to both professionals and amateurs. More than 1,400 proposals were submitted, making the competition to design the Vietnam Memorial the largest architectural design competition to date. Scruggs formulated three requirements: 1) The memorial had to contain all of the names of the dead or missing. 2) The memorial had to be harmonious with the site. 3) The memorial had to be free of political statements.⁵⁶ The selected proposal, designed by architecture student Maya Deren, not only addressed all of these requirements, but also stood out for its simplicity.

After September 11, 2001, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation (LMDC) administered a similar competition to find the most suitable memorial, issuing the following guidelines:

- Remember and honor the thousands of innocent men, women, and children murdered by terrorists in the horrific attacks of February 26, 1993 and September 11, 2001.
- Respect this place made sacred through tragic loss.

⁵⁵ Remembering Vietnam: The Wall at 25, prod. + writer: Lynn Kessler, A Smithsonian Channel Production, 2007.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

- Recognize the endurance of those who survived, the courage of those who risked their lives to save others, and the compassion of all who supported us in our darkest hours.
- May the lives remembered, the deeds recognized, and the spirit reawakened be eternal beacons, which reaffirm respect for life, strengthen our resolve to preserve freedom, and inspire an end to hatred, ignorance and intolerance.⁵⁷



Figure 8: National 9/11 Memorial, 2011.



Figure 9: National 9/11 Memorial, 2011.

⁵⁷ LMDC, World Trade Center Site Memorial Competition Guidelines, (New York: 2003) 18.

The selected design by Michael Arad (and later enhanced by landscape architect Peter Walker), chosen from over 5,000 submissions, incorporated all of those elements. Central to the design were the “footprints” of the two towers in the form of “two large voids containing recessed pools”⁵⁸. As evidenced in a series of public forums regarding the site, a large number of victims’ family members had, as previously suggested, felt it inappropriate to rebuild on “sacred ground.”

The “footprints” conceived by Arad are best understood within the context of other works of memorial architecture, most notably the Jewish Museum in Berlin and the Holocaust Museum in Washington, D.C. The Jewish Museum in Berlin opened in 2001, only two days before 9/11. The Jewish Museum was the first building designed by Daniel Libeskind, who would go on to become the master planner of the World Trade Center site. Throughout the structure, he incorporated six “voids,” “negative spaces arranged along an absolutely straight line.... Only the first two and the last, largest and smallest Voids can be physically entered; the two in between are inaccessible, though they can be looked into from the upper floors.”⁵⁹ The Voids are designed to “evoke the gap that evolved in German and European culture and history by the destruction of Jewish lives on every floor of the museum.”⁶⁰ Like the Voids, the reflecting pools are meant to evoke an absence. However, in the instance of the reflecting pools, that absence is not recalled abstractly, but structurally tied to a physical site, wherein the absence of the twin towers synecdochally points to the thousands of lives lost inside their structures.

The Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C., a continent removed from the atrocities it memorializes, while largely focused on the task of bearing witness through photographs and artifacts, does, in two particularly chilling exhibits likewise evoke the absence of those lost. In

⁵⁸Michael Arad and Peter Walker, “World Trade Center Site Memorial Competition: Reflecting Absence,” wtcsitememorial.org 2002-2007, 20 May 2012 <<http://wtcsitememorial.org/fin7.html>>.

⁵⁹ Bernhard Schneider, *Daniel Libeskind: Jewish Museum Berlin* (Munich: Prestel, 1999) 51.

⁶⁰ *Ibid* 53.

one exhibit, hair shorn from inmates at Auschwitz is displayed, while in another room, shoes seized from prisoners at Majdanek are displayed. Above the shoes is an inscription by Yiddish poet Moses Schulstein:

We are the shoes, we are the last witness.

We are shoes from grandchildren and grandfathers,

From Prague, Paris, and Amsterdam,

And because we are only made of fabric and leather

And not of blood and flesh, each one of us avoided the hellfire.

While shoes are featured prominently both at the 9/11 museum and at numerous other 9/11 exhibits throughout New York, their incorporation is not meant to invoke loss. Rather, in the context of 9/11, the tattered, sometimes dust-covered shoes of survivors, are meant to signify resilience. At “Ground Zero,” the dead need not be evoked, as they are omnipresent. To the public, they are present in the dust which still lingers upon the displayed artifacts.



Figure 10: Exterior wall of repository containing unidentified remains at National 9/11 Museum, 2014.

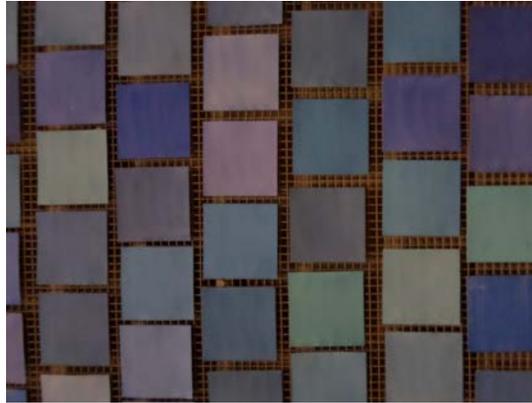


Figure 11: Close-up of individual panels of exterior wall of repository containing unidentified remains at National 9/11 Museum, 2014.

However, the dead’s presence also lingers in a more literal sense, namely in a repository run by the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner of New York, housed within the museum, containing unidentified and unclaimed remains. Originally conceived as a symbolic vessel – a tomb for the unknown⁶¹ – the repository has become far more complex and embattled over time. The repository is not accessible to the public and the wall that separates it from the museum is covered in two ways. Firstly, a quote by Virgil (“No day shall you erase you from the memory of time.”) forged out of World Center steel is located upon the center of the wall. Secondly, the wall is covered by a series of square, paper tiles. Together, the tiles form an artwork entitled “Trying to Remember the Color of the Sky That September Morning” designed by Spencer Finch. While the actual remains are inaccessible to the public,⁶² visitors must pass both a plaque stating “Reposed behind this wall are the remains of many who perished at the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001” and a guard manning the entrance to the repository if they wish to enter the museum’s “historical exhibit.” Thus, the repository attempts to function both as a tomb for the unknown and as forensic laboratory, but it fails to fully function as either. In other words, the

⁶¹ The term “tomb for the unknown” will be further explained in the third chapter.

⁶² Family members may gain access by appointment. Steve Kandell offers a disturbing account of his visit inside the repository in his article for *Buzzfeed*, “The Worst Day Of My Life Is Now New York’s Hottest Tourist Attraction.”

dead are both present and not present, occupying a liminal space within the museum. As I will examine further in the following section, it is this liminality which proves problematic in the context of sanctification.

NAMING THE DEAD: THE SIGNIFICATION OF LOSS AND ITS SANCTIFICATION



Figure 12: Hand-painted memorial tiles on fence at Greenwich Ave. + Mulry Sq., 2013.



Figure 13: Memorial tiles at Union Square Station, 2014.

In the days and weeks that followed 9/11, a number of makeshift memorials sprang up in New York. Most immediately, candles appeared on doorsteps and American flags were mounted on houses, storefronts, and car antennae as an expression of solidarity.⁶³ Ironically however, one

⁶³ Conversely, American Muslims business owners and cab drivers, fearing retaliation, also displayed American flags.

of the more lasting and iconic acts of memorialization was never intended as such, but rather served a more practical function. Though now regarded as a footnote in the attacks, one of the consequences of the collapse of the towers was the destruction of the 360 foot-high antenna on the roof of the North Tower, affecting television coverage in the area. Further, cell phone carriers, overwhelmed by the volume of calls, ceased to function.

Unable to obtain information from other resources, people started crafting handmade “missing” signs, searching for their loved ones. In the days immediately after the attacks, the term “missing” was the one most commonly applied to those lost. With reports of cell phone signals coming from under the wreckage,⁶⁴ hospitals calling for blood donations in anticipation of the wounded (who, a few exceptions notwithstanding, never materialized), and occasional reports in the following days of people being recovered (twenty in all),⁶⁵ the use of the term “missing” was therefore not based so much in a state of denial, as in a very real sense that hope was still possible.

Gradually, though, as hope faded, so did the “missing” signs. Over time, however, the signs have acquired new meaning as memorials, standing in for the deceased themselves. The Museum of the City of New York for example, has taken great pains to preserve a temporary construction fence at Bellevue Hospital, which “became an icon of the city’s response to the

⁶⁴ To date, none of these rumors are known to have been verified.

⁶⁵ Two Port Authority officers, John McLoughlin and William Jimeno, were rescued from rubble surrounding a freight elevator. Their story is told by Oliver Stone in his 2006 film *World Trade Center* – a film, which contains numerous egregious factual errors. Pasquale Buzzelli, a structural engineer for the Port Authority, and Genelle Guzman, a secretary, were rescued from the remains of the B-Stairwell of the North Tower. Other members of their group, further behind, did not survive. The bulk of survivors were rescued from a different section of the same stairwell, sometimes referred to as the “miracle” stairwell: Firefighters Billy Butler, Tommy Falco, Jay Jonas, Michael Meldrum, Sal D’Agastino, and Matt Komorowski of Ladder 6; Firefighter Mickey Kross of Engine Company 16, Firefighters Jim McGlynn, Rob Bacon, Jeff Coniglio, and Jim Efthimiaddes of Engine 39; Port Authority Police Officer Dave Lim; Battalion Chief Rich Picciotto of the 11th Battalion; and civilian Josephine Harris. Additionally, Tom Canavan, an employee of First Union Bank, managed to free himself. A further, unidentified man, ahead of Canavan on the stairwell they were descending crawled out as well. The number of survivors is sometimes listed as eighteen or nineteen, depending on the inclusion of Canavan and the unidentified man.

tragedy. Covered with posters of the missing, it also included statements of support from New Yorkers and people around the country.”⁶⁶ Originally presented as part of a one-week exhibition from September 1, 2006 – September 7, 2006, an eighty-foot section of the wall has now become part of the museum’s permanent archive and is available for loan by other institutions.⁶⁷



Figure 14: "Missing" signs at the 9/11 Tribute Center, 2007.



Figure 15: "Missing" signs at the 9/11 Tribute Center, 2007.

⁶⁶ Museum of the City of New York, “Past Exhibitions: September 11, 2001: The Bellevue Wall of Prayer,” [mcny.org](http://www.mcny.org/exhibitions/past/453.html) 2012, 20 May 2012 <<http://www.mcny.org/exhibitions/past/453.html>>.

⁶⁷ “Panel 26 of the Wall of Prayer was on loan to the Smithsonian Institution National Museum of American History for their exhibition "September 11, 2001: Bearing Witness to History" for the loan period of 8/02 through 5/16/03” – Lindsay Turley, E-mail to the Author, 10 March 2014.

The signs also feature prominently at the Tribute WTC 9/11 Visitor Center, a 6,000 ft. exhibit presented by the September 11th Families Association which, was originally meant to function as a temporary museum until the intended opening of the official memorial in 2009⁶⁸. The 9/11 Museum likewise incorporates the “Missing” signs. Shortly upon entering the museum and beginning their descent to the main exhibit area, visitors pass a number of signs projected onto a wall. The signs, like the hope of the survival of those they depict, disappear after being projected. Additionally, within the main “historical exhibit,” a panel from the Pier 94 Family Assistance Center and a panel from the New Jersey Family Assistance Center are displayed.⁶⁹ Historically speaking, the practice of naming the dead constitutes a relatively recent phenomenon. As architecture and art historian Kirk Savage writes:

After the U.S. Civil War, the practice of naming the dead on public monuments became commonplace, even as those monuments moved out of the cemetery and into the street and town square. [...While] the soldier statues that often accompanied these monuments were generic. The names by contrast represented specific individuals and were supposed to keep their memory and their example alive long after all who knew them had passed away.

The inscription of individual names became even more systematic after World War I and reached an artistic high point in Maya Lin’s celebrated Vietnam Veterans Memorial (1982), which remains the only comprehensive list in stone or

⁶⁸ David W. Dunlap, “Tribute center, an ‘Interim Destination’ Memorial, Gets Set to Open,” New York Times on the Web 6 September 2006, 20 May 2012.

< <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/fullpage.html?res=9F05EFD91631F935A3575AC0A9609C8B63>>.

⁶⁹ As with numerous artifacts within the museum, which appears to lack a curatorial through-line, it is unclear, why the signs are incorporated both concretely and abstractly in different sections of the museum.

metal of national war dead in the U.S.⁷⁰

Built in 1982 amidst significant controversy, the Vietnam Wall in Washington, DC has since become a site of pilgrimage for veterans of the war in Vietnam, who come to pay their respects. At the wall, visitors touch the names of fallen comrades or family members and create rubbings of the names, which are arranged on a series of seventy black, granite panels. Together, these panels are arranged along two sides, which converge at an angle of 125°, pointing to the NE corners of the Washington Monument and the Lincoln Memorial. The largest of these panels, reaching over 10 ft., bear 137 lines of names, the smallest only one. The names are categorized only by year and by whether the individual was confirmed dead or missing.

At the Oklahoma City Memorial, commemorating the victims of the April 19, 1995 bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, 168 empty chairs, located on the former site of the building, bear the names of the dead. Each chair is located in one of nine rows, symbolizing the floor on which the victim was working at the time of the bombing and further arranged according to the blast pattern. Children are represented by smaller chairs and the three unborn children killed that day are listed on the chairs of their mothers.

⁷⁰ Kirk Savage, "Faces of the dead," [kirksavage.pitt.edu](http://www.kirksavage.pitt.edu) 6 Aug.2011, 20 May 2012 <<http://www.kirksavage.pitt.edu/?p=209>>.



Figure 16: The 9/11 Memorial at the Pentagon, 2012.



Figure 17: 9/11 memorial bench at the Pentagon, commemorating Dana Falkenberg, 2012.

The names at the Pentagon memorial are arranged in a similar manner. Here, the names are engraved on wing-shaped benches, which are grouped in two ways. First, the benches are arranged by the birth year of the victim. Second, the direction of the bench – whether it is facing the Pentagon or not – indicates the location of the victim at the time of the impact of American Airlines 77. The benches facing the building represent victims who died on the flight. Benches facing away from the building represent those who were inside the Pentagon at the time of impact. The name of the individual killed in the attacks is located at the top of the bench. Below

each bench, there is a small reflecting pool. If family members of that individual died in the attack as well, their names are engraved, below, in the pool itself.



Figure 18: Benches at the 9/11 Memorial in Shanksville, 2009.

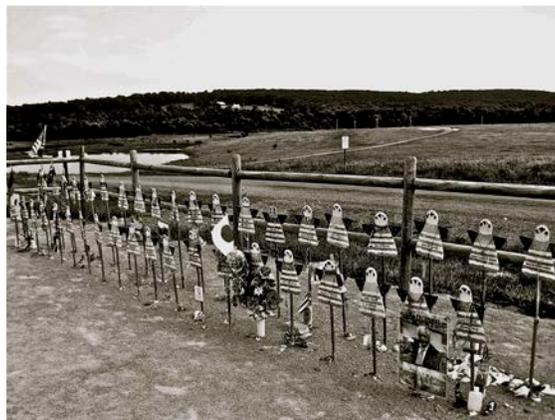


Figure 19: "Angels of Freedom" at the 9/11 Memorial in Shanksville, 2009.



Figure 20: The "Wall of Names" at the 9/11 Memorial in Shanksville, 2012.

In Shanksville, PA, the names of those who died aboard United Airlines 93 were initially found in two locations. The first of these locations was upon a series of memorial benches, facing the crash site. The second was a series of forty slate angels, referred to as the “Angels of Freedom,” located between the benches and the crash site. While the benches were erected by the National Park Service, in anticipation of the construction of the memorial, the angels were crafted and erected by the public. However, both of these temporary memorials have been replaced with a permanent memorial, a newly erected “Wall of Names,” consisting of forty white marble panels,⁷¹ along a black granite walkway marking United 93’s flight path.

At “Ground Zero,” the names of the dead are located upon bronze parapets surrounding the footprints of the former towers. These names include not only those of individuals who died at the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. The names of the victims of the February 6, 1993 attack are included, as well. The names of those who died on all four planes and at the

⁷¹ Designed by architect Paul Murdoch, each white marble panel has one name inscribed upon it. From a distance, the panels appear to form a wall. Close-up however, a small space between the panels is visible. The space is intentional and is meant to suggest that while the victims occupied the same flight, in death they were individuals.

crash sites at the Pentagon and in Shanksville are likewise included.⁷² First responders are listed as their own group. Within these groupings, names are listed according to affiliations, referred to as “adjacencies,” in the proximity of loved ones, relatives, friends, and colleagues.

In all of these instances – whether in Oklahoma City, Washington, D.C., Shanksville, PA, or Manhattan – the naming of the dead is of utmost importance. Often, these efforts are enhanced by, the fact that, as Kirk Savage points out, “[...] faces – or, more precisely, photographs of faces – have become ever more prominent in commemorative practice.” In New York, these faces are made visible not only through the previously discussed “missing” signs, but are also visible as photographs displayed in the museum within a “Memorial Hall.”⁷³



Figure 21: "Memorial Hall" at the 9/11 Museum, 2014.

⁷² The names of the hijackers have been (understandably) omitted.

⁷³ The “Historical Exhibit” and the “Memorial Hall,” are housed in the original remnants of the Twin Towers below-ground, with the “Memorial Hall” sharing half of its Tower space with offices. The architectural rationale for this is unclear, particularly given the claustrophobic manner in which the “Historical Exhibit” is housed while much of the space surrounding the original towers is unused.



Figure 22: "Memorial Hall" at the 9/11 Museum, 2014.

The names and faces of the dead of 9/11 also appear in the *New York Times*' "Portraits of Grief" series. In the introduction to the 2002 book compilation of the series, titled *Portraits 9/11/01*, Janny Scott explains the series' origins:

The portraits came into being almost haphazardly in the immediate aftermath of the disaster [...] On September 14, a half-dozen reporters divided up a stack of one hundred missing-persons flyers, collected from the friends and family members haunting lower Manhattan. What we wanted were stories, anecdotes, tiny but telling details that seemed to reveal something true and essential about how each person lived.⁷⁴

The end result consisted of 1,910 "snapshots"⁷⁵ published over the course of the following year. The "snapshots" are brief, consisting of roughly 200 words and largely anecdotal. Unfortunately, in its very conception, the series undermines its own intentions. In attempting to offer portraits of

⁷⁴ The New York Times, *Portraits 9/11/01: The Collected "Portraits of Grief" From The New York Times* (New York: Times Books, Henry Holt and Company, 2002) ix.

⁷⁵ *Ibid* vii.

everyone, the series sheds light on no one. One reason for this failure may be attributed to its scope. Consequently and disturbingly, the snapshots appear bound by similar, recurring narrative themes. As Jan Hoffman, one of the reporters who worked on the series, explained at “Making Meaning of 9/11 Ten Years After: Local Impacts, Global Implications,” a conference held at St. John’s University in 2011, the series sought to highlight moments of “beauty and pedestrian normalcy.”⁷⁶

As a consequence, the snapshots excise any narratives which might contradict these notions of homogeneity. For example, the reporters had great difficulty in contacting family members of illegal workers, as they “went very quickly underground.”⁷⁷ Additionally, the “three or four”⁷⁸ Muslim families Hoffman interviewed “were almost desperate to show what good citizens they were.”⁷⁹ In one instance, Hoffman got the strong sense that the individual about whom she was writing was physically abusive towards his wife.

As Hoffman explained, “We packaged. We’re packagers. That’s what we do.” However the series’ simplistic packaging of the victims construes these individuals as a homogenous entity and it is this homogeneity, which proves highly problematic when tied to Foote’s notion of “sanctification.” As Foote explains:

[...] sanctification is a natural response to the grief of community loss. The creation of memorials both honors the victims of the disaster and helps the community to mourn. Relatively few tragedies result in sanctification, however. Many factors are involved, but the most important is whether the tragedy touches

⁷⁶ “Making Meaning of 9/11: Local Impacts, Global Implications,” St. John’s University, New York, 16-17 Sept. 2011.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

a single, relatively homogenous, self-identified community, one that comes to view the tragedy as a common, public loss.⁸⁰

Whereas the simple act of naming – as seen at the Vietnam Veterans’ memorial, the Oklahoma City memorial, the 9/11 Memorial, the memorial at Shanksville, and countless other memorials – marks the loss of a specific human life (while largely avoiding commentary regarding that life) “Portraits of Grief” makes specific narrative choices which situate those lives within a larger framework. Painting the victims with a broad, homogenous brush allows their deaths to be “sanctified,” a process which is generally reserved to “honor a martyr, fallen hero, or great leader, irrespective of how they died.”⁸¹ While I will examine these tropes of heroism and sacrifice more closely in subsequent chapters and while it is not my intention to suggest that there were not, in fact, individuals who acted heroically that day, I do wish to point to the fact that “Portraits of Grief” contributes to the narrative construction of these tropes in the context of 9/11. Further, these tropes of heroism and sacrifice echo off of and contribute to the similarly framed, larger public discourse regarding the events of that day (i.e “the war on terrorism) – an echo which eventually reverberates back to the memorials themselves, where visitors subsequently “read” the names marked there within this larger context.⁸²

STAGING POLITICS AT GROUND ZERO

The notions of heroism and community described above are reified by politicians in their own staging of the site. As Foote states, “sanctified sites frequently attract continued ritual

⁸⁰ Foote 15.

⁸¹ Ibid 36.

⁸² This fact was disturbingly illustrated on Oct. 3, 2014, when a fire broke out at the Flight 93 Memorial in Shanksville, destroying four office buildings. While numerous personal mementos donated by family members were destroyed in the fire, media coverage tellingly focused on the destruction of the flag which had flown over the U.S. Capitol on 9/11.

commemoration, such as annual memorial services or pilgrimage.”⁸³ The first memorial event held at the site occurred on October 28, 2001, shortly after the structurally compromised slurry wall had been fortified.⁸⁴ Though individual services had been held as victims’ bodies were recovered, the October 28 event marked the first instance of a large-scale, public memorial service at the site. At the time, the cleanup and recovery efforts were still under way and were temporarily halted for the service. Forty-one hundred sixty-seven people were still considered “missing,” with 506 bodies recovered and 454 identified.⁸⁵ Family members, many of whom attended the site for the first time following the attacks, were presented with urns containing ashes from the rubble.⁸⁶ Both Mayor Guiliani and Governor Pataki were in attendance, with speeches held by religious leaders from various faiths: Catholic, Jewish, Protestant, and Muslim.⁸⁷

Memorial services have since been held at the site annually. Names of the victims are read aloud, with both politicians and family members in attendance. According to Public Law 107-89, the day has been designated “Patriot Day.” Additionally, on May 5, 2011, three days after the shooting and death of Osama Bin Laden, President Obama, after meeting with firefighters, police and family members, laid a wreath at the foot of the survivor tree.⁸⁸ The visit marked the president’s first visit since assuming office.

⁸³ Ibid 9.

⁸⁴ The slurry wall is now a key feature of the National 9/11 Memorial and Museum.

⁸⁵ Unknown Author, “Memorial service set for Ground Zero,” [CNN.com/U.S.](http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/10/28/rec.giuliani.memorial/index.html) 28 October 2001, 20 May 2012 <<http://edition.cnn.com/2001/US/10/28/rec.giuliani.memorial/index.html>>.

⁸⁶ Family members were provided with artifacts related to 9/11 at a number of events – either collectively or individually.

⁸⁷ Jim Zarroli, “Memorial Service at Ground Zero,” [npr.org](http://www.npr.org) 28 Oct. 2001, 20 May 2012 <<http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=1132260>>.

⁸⁸ “Survivor Tree” refers to a pear tree located at the site of the former Twin Towers, which survived the buildings’ collapse and was first discovered roughly a month after the attacks. The tree, initially almost entirely decimated, is now four times taller than at the time of the attacks, and thereby significantly taller than the newly planted trees in the memorial plaza. It has since grown to over thirty feet and continues to thrive. The term is possibly borrowed

Foote explains that, “Sites created in this way [sanctification] are shaped to express heroic lessons about the triumph of freedom over tyranny or of justice over injustice.”⁸⁹ Both the annual commemoration events as well as the president’s visit to the site following the death of Osama Bin Laden provide evidence of the site’s sanctification within the context of public discourse surrounding 9/11. At the commemoration events, American flags are prominently displayed, both on the podium and, at the 10th anniversary, draped from the newly erected 1 WTC, as well as at other key moments during the ceremonies. Within this context of nationalism, those figures most closely and easily associated with the trope of heroism, the NYPD and the FDNY, perform key functions within the ceremonies. At the 10th anniversary for example, the FDNY Emerald Society Bagpipers played music. Similarly, the rhetoric employed by politicians during such events often mirrors these displays, with words such as “heroism,” “sacrifice,” and “freedom” frequently used. Resilience and nationalism are key themes, as evidenced in the following excerpt from President Obama’s 2011 speech.

Our character as a nation has not changed. Our faith – in God and each other – that has not changed. Our belief in America, born of a timeless ideal that men and women should govern themselves; that all people are created equal, and deserve the same freedom to determine their own destiny – that belief, through test and trials, has only been strengthened.

These past ten years have shown that America does not give in to fear. The rescue workers who rushed to the scene; the firefighters who charged up the stairs; the passengers who stormed the cockpit – these patriots defined the very nature of

from the Oklahoma City Memorial, which similarly holds a “survivor tree” – an American elm. In both instances, the tree is construed as a living symbol of resilience.

⁸⁹ Foote 111.

courage. Over the years we have also seen a more quiet form of heroism – in the ladder company that lost so many men and still suits up to save lives every day; the businesses that have rebuilt; the burn victim who has bounced back; the families that press on.⁹⁰

I cite this excerpt at length because it encapsulates a narrative, which has, with variation only in its wording, been repeated countless times by politicians on both sides of the ideological spectrum, both at the site and elsewhere. In tying this narrative to the materiality of site itself, politicians formulate an ideological bond, which only enhances the site's status as one that is sanctified. The site's sanctification, in turn, reifies the narrative of heroism and resilience espoused by politicians.

The reading of the names of the victims of 9/11 at the ceremonies, which might otherwise pierce this bond, is the very part which is ignored in news coverage of the events, where instead, anchors provide anecdotes or interview politicians and survivors, many of whom likewise adhere to the prescribed narrative. Like the "Portraits of Grief" series which formulates the victims as a homogenous entity, the staging and rhetoric of commemorative events, particularly at "Ground Zero" subsume the individuality of the victims within a greater ideological context.

However, because "Ground Zero" can no longer be understood as such, because construction on the memorial, the museum, and 1 WTC has been completed, the process of sanctification must be understood as one that has essentially concluded – despite its reification at subsequent events and in public discourse. Despite the two gaping holes, which mark the place where the towers once stood, the absence they signify is one whose silence can no longer be heard. Due to its overabundance of signification, the site no longer signifies the one true thing at

⁹⁰ Unknown Author, "Obama's Speech on the Anniversary of 9/11," *wsj.com* 11 Sept. 2011, 10 Oct. 2014 <<http://blogs.wsj.com/washwire/2011/09/11/obamas-speech-on-the-anniversary-of-911/>>.

its core, namely the overwhelming loss of human life, which once occurred on its soil. Thirteen years later, the site has now become so enveloped in the rhetoric surrounding it, that those wishing to visit the “sacred ground” which holds the remains of their loved ones, must now navigate a crush of tourists, guidebooks in hand, posing for selfies, and rushing to the gift shop to buy souvenir hoodies. The dead, robbed of the signification of their loss, are condemned to a second death, their voices spoken over and drowned out amidst a cacophony of tourism and politics.

As though to mark the conclusion of the site’s sanctification, Obama returned to the site on June 14, 2012 – this time looking down on the site from the twenty-second floor of 1 WTC, where he inscribed a steel beam:

We remember

We rebuild

We come back stronger!

Barack Obama⁹¹

Also present at the signing were New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie and first lady Michelle Obama.⁹²

PARK51 / “THE GROUND ZERO MOSQUE”

A consequence of broadly applying the tropes of heroism and resilience to “Ground Zero”, is the equally broad application of the trope of villainy. While I will focus on the

⁹¹ Laura Macinnis, “Obama vows ‘we remember, we rebuild’ at World Trade Center,” [Reuters.com](http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/06/14/us-usa-obama-towers-idUSBRE85DISW20120614). 14 June 2012, 19 June 2012 <<http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/06/14/us-usa-obama-towers-idUSBRE85DISW20120614>>.

⁹² Byron Tau, “Obama at Ground Zero: ‘We remember. We rebuild. We come back stronger,’” [politico.com](http://www.politico.com/politico44/2012/06/obama-at-ground-zero-we-remember-we-rebuild-we-come-126232.html). 14 June 2012, 19 June 2012 <<http://www.politico.com/politico44/2012/06/obama-at-ground-zero-we-remember-we-rebuild-we-come-126232.html>>.

“othering” of Muslims in greater detail in my final chapter, I will examine the phenomenon briefly here, as a consequence of sanctification, in the context of the controversy surrounding the Park51 community center – more commonly referred to as the “Ground Zero Mosque.”

In “Willie Pete,” the July 28, 2013 episode of *The Newsroom*, anchor Will Macavoy (Jeff Daniels) tells Mackenzie McHale (Emily Mortimer). “You know what opened four days ago? Park51: the Ground Zero Mosque. Turns out the sky didn’t fall down. Nobody, including us, covered it. I found out by walking in there. I said, ‘You guys open?’ They said, ‘Yeah.’ I wonder why people hate the media.”⁹³ As *The Atlantic* rightly points out, in reality, numerous new outlets did in fact cover the opening including *The Huffington Post*, *Gothamist*, *Newsday*, *The Washington Times*, and *Bloomberg Businessweek*.⁹⁴ Nonetheless, numerous others did not. However, the media’s coverage, or lack thereof, proved irrelevant. By the time of Park51’s opening, even the media was powerless to undo the controversy it had helped to create.

⁹³ “Willie Pete,” *The Newsroom*, Writ. Aaron Sorkin, Michael Gunn, and Elizabeth Peterson, Dir. Lesli Linka Glatter, HBO. 28 July 2013.

⁹⁴ Ashley Fetters, “The News vs. *The Newsroom*: Yes, That GOP Debate Really Did Get That Nasty Comparing the HBO series’ depictions of Occupy Wall Street, the Republican presidential campaign, and the opening of the “Ground Zero Mosque” to what really happened,” *theatlantic.com* 29 July 2013, 10 October 2014 <<http://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2013/07/the-news-vs-i-the-newsroom-i-yes-that-gop-debate-really-did-get-that-nasty/278158/>>.



Figure 23: Park 51, 2014.



Figure 24: Park 51, 2014.

Shortly after 9/11, Sharif el-Gamal, a Muslim property developer born and raised in Brooklyn, formulated plans to build a mosque near “Ground Zero.” The site would eventually be named Project Park51, but came to be commonly known as the “Ground Zero Mosque.” El-Gamal had previously been attending services at a mosque at 1214 Warren St., which had been in its location, four blocks from the World Trade Center, close to forty years. When the building was sold and the mosque lost its lease, the congregation temporarily met in a basement bar down the street. To help in selecting an appropriate site for the new mosque and community center, el-

Gamal hired an assistant, who pointed him to the former location of the Burlington Coat Factory, which had been severely damaged when the undercarriage of United Airlines Flight 175, upon impact with the South Tower, crashed through the roof and several floors. The Burlington Coat Factory was located on Park Place, two blocks from Ground Zero.

El-Gamal asserts that his intentions were not related to the events of 9/11. He states:

I'm a New Yorker from Brooklyn. I'm not a community activist. I'm not a community leader. I'm not an Islamic academic. This isn't something I have been studying. I'm a New Yorker who is a real estate junkie who [...] that's who I am. [...] This project had nothing to do with Ground Zero. It had nothing to do with 9/11. I just thought about how valuable the real estate would be once everything is built... I never associated my faith or Islam with the horrific events of 9/11.⁹⁵

El-Gamal found support for his venture with American investors of Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Christian faith. To run the mosque, el-Gamal hired Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf, a devotee of mystical Sufi Islam, whose writings promote the United States as a model for Muslims worldwide. It was at Feisal's suggestion, that el-Gamal decided to transform the entire property into a community center – something Feisal had independently attempted and failed to achieve in 1999 due to failed financing. As Feisal explained:

The objective of our community center was to be a rallying point. It was to be a place where people could get to know about each other, where people would get to know about each other's religions. We want Muslims to learn about

⁹⁵ Frontline: The Man Behind the Mosque.

Christianity and Judaism. We went members of other faiths to know about Islam...⁹⁶

El-Gamal similarly stated:

We ultimately wanted to build a community center, right? Though it's going to be Islamic with Muslim values and heritage, it's gonna be open for all people. It's gonna be a community center. We got the temperature of New York: from the local elected officials to the politicians to the community leaders to the community board. All around the light was green.⁹⁷

It was proposed that the \$100 million cultural center would be named "Cordoba House," after the Spanish city known for religious tolerance under Muslim rule.

The controversy began with an online "activist" name Pamela Geller, who, with Robert Spencer, formed the group "Stop the Islamization of America." Spencer proclaimed, "On September 11, 2001, they took down the twin towers. Now they are trying to mark their victory." This type of rhetoric was frequently repeated in the weeks and months that followed. Worse, it was unquestioningly repeated by a vocal minority of victims' family members and was quickly picked up by the news media, first by Fox News, and later by more respectable news outlets as well. The story snowballed and in May 2010, el-Gamal and Imam Feisal took their case to the lower Manhattan community board meeting. The meeting was open to the public and lasted four hours. Eventually, the community board voted twenty-nine to one to support building the mosque.

On August 3 of that same year, the New York Landmarks commission held a hearing on Park51's status as a possible landmark. Landmarked status would have prevented future

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Ibid.

construction at the site. However, the commission voted 9-0 to remove the status. As one of the commissioners poignantly summarized:

I do not find the importance of 47 Park Place to be its architecture. I do think about the significance though of its connection to the events of September 11, 2001. However, I make it akin to a guardrail where fatalities have occurred. The guardrail is not preserved. Likewise the memory of that day does not reside in the landing gear or the building.⁹⁸

Overall, El-Gamal was “caught completely off guard by the public response,” while Feisal continued to assert their intentions:

I have condemned Hamas. I have condemned terrorism. I was invited to speak to all 1200 FBI agents in NY to not speak to them about Islam but to explore how we can work with law enforcement agencies to make sure that any potential radicals or terrorists in our mosques would be filtered out. We are very much aware that there is a radical extremist element in our faith community.⁹⁹

The controversy became so widespread that in August 2010, President Obama spoke publicly on the matter, stating, “I believe that Muslims have the right to practice their religion as everyone else in this country. And that includes the right to build a place to worship in a community center on private property in lower Manhattan.”¹⁰⁰

As tensions began to build between el-Gamal and Imam Feisal over their varying responses to the controversy, the controversy itself only grew more pronounced. Likewise, tensions grew within the Muslim community. One Muslim leader, Imam Muhhamad Musri, a

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰⁰ Unknown Author, “Remarks by the President at Iftar Dinner,” whitehouse.gov 13 August 2010, 10 October 2014. <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/08/13/remarks-president-iftar-dinner>>.

leader of ten mosques in Florida stated, “To me as a Muslim leader, hurting the feelings of so many people and disrespecting, walking all over their opinions and feelings to try to build whatever that feeling is, no matter how holy it is, is not Islam.”¹⁰¹ Outside the Muslim American community, the conflict escalated as well, as Terry Jones, the pastor of a small church in Florida, threatened to burn the Koran if the mosque were not closed, declaring March 20, 2011 “International Judge the Koran day.”

In January 2012, el-Gamal ousted Imam Feisal. As of 2014, the center remains a single floor prayer space, lacking the majority of the \$100 million required to expand and renovate the space. In fact, the building lacks any kind of a façade which might communicate what is housed inside the building. In April 2014, el-Gamal requested a permit to demolish the building.¹⁰² I point to this controversy because it seeks to define the very parameters of “Ground Zero.” 47-51 Park Place is located roughly two blocks – a five to ten minute walk – from the 9/11 memorial. It is not visible from the memorial and, while it is true that landing gear fell through the building’s roof on 9/11, this fact does not make the building unique. In 2006 for example, human remains were found in a manhole that had been paved over, and as late as 2013, a 225-pound piece of airplane debris was located in a trash-filled alley near the 9/11 memorial.¹⁰³ Neither Park51’s geographical proximity to the 9/11 memorial, nor the fact that debris fell through its roof on 9/11 make it unique within the physical landscape surrounding the 9/11 memorial.

That the reflecting pools designed by Arad are considered “sacred ground” is understandable. To extend that designation beyond the sixteen acres which once held the former

¹⁰¹ Frontline: The Man Behind the Mosque.

¹⁰² Reuters, “Park51, So-Called ‘Ground Zero Mosque’ Site, Has Been Requested For Demolition,” [huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/09/park51-ground-zero-mosque_n_5113092.html) 8 April 2014, 10 Oct. 2014 <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/04/09/park51-ground-zero-mosque_n_5113092.html>.

¹⁰³ CBS New York and Associated Press, “9/11 Plane Debris Found Near WTC Site Removed,” [cbslocal.com](http://newyork.cbslocal.com/2013/05/01/911-plane-debris-found-near-wtc-site-could-soon-be-removed/) 1 May 2013, 10 Oct. 2014 <<http://newyork.cbslocal.com/2013/05/01/911-plane-debris-found-near-wtc-site-could-soon-be-removed/>>.

World Trade Center is deeply problematic. Should this designation be expanded anywhere that debris fell? Anywhere remains were found? Anywhere the dust cloud containing human ash travelled? Anywhere that the burning fires could be smelled? Where, exactly, should the line be drawn?

Unlike in Shanksville, where United Airlines 93 crashed into an empty field, the damage caused by American Airlines 11 and United Airlines 175 occurred within the context of a densely populated metropolis. The site's sanctification therefore must occur alongside its rectification, which Foote describes as "the process through which a tragedy site is put right and used again."¹⁰⁴ It is not surprising that friction would occur as these two processes come into conflict with one another.

The Park51 controversy can be understood as an outgrowth of this conflict – a moment in which the tectonic frictions between sanctification and rectification push what has been underground to the surface. However, rather than giving voice to the Muslim American community within the public discourse surrounding 9/11, the controversy, exacerbated by a vocal minority of extremists and the lack of due diligence by the media, served instead to further alienate and "other" that community.¹⁰⁵ If, through the process of sanctification I have outlined above, the victims of 9/11 are unilaterally portrayed as "heroes," then the Park51 controversy

¹⁰⁴ Foote 23.

¹⁰⁵ The ramifications of that controversy can be further felt in the 9/11 museum itself, where a film, *The Rise of Al Queda*, is shown within the "Historical Exhibit." The film, like the portion of the exhibit on Al-Qaeda, within which it is situated, is profoundly problematic in its simplified depiction of terms such as "Islam," "Muslim" and "Al-Qaeda." As Sheikh Mostafa Elazabawy, the imam of Masjid Manhattan, wrote to the museum's director, "Unsophisticated visitors who do not understand the difference between Al Qaeda and Muslims may come away with a prejudiced view of Islam, leading to antagonism and even confrontation toward Muslim believers near the site." Unfortunately, his concerns fell on deaf ears and the film is now an integral part of the exhibit. A full description of the controversy surrounding the film can be found in: Sharon Otterman, "Film at 9/11 Museum Sets Off Clash Over Reference to Islam," New York Times on the Web 23 April 2014, 10 Oct. 2014 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/04/24/nyregion/interfaith-panel-denounces-a-9-11-museum-exhibits-portrayal-of-islam.html>>.

designates Muslims as the “villains.” While I will examine issues of scapegoating, as defined by René Girard, in far greater detail in my final chapter, it is worth noting the significance of the Park51 controversy in that regard here. Within the national narrative of 9/11, the tropes of heroism and villainy operate similarly, though inversely, both relying on generalization over nuance and abstraction over materiality. As Edward Said writes in a preface to the twenty-fifth anniversary edition of *Orientalism*, “neither the term Orient, nor the concept of the West has any ontological stability; each is made up of human effort, partly affirmation, partly identification of the Other.”¹⁰⁶ In examining the manner in which the tropes of heroism and villainy are formulated here and in my final chapter, I therefore wish to disrupt that “ontological stability” in an attempt to formulate a more nuanced dialogue regarding the events of 9/11.

“THE BRIG:” “GHOSTING” A HISTORY OF VIOLENCE

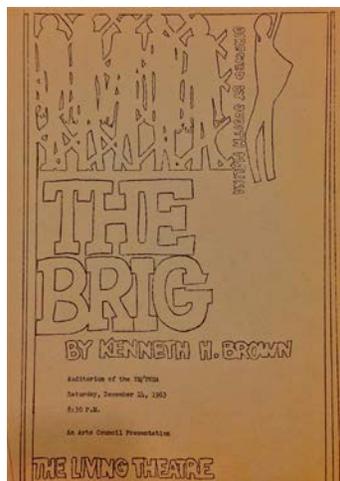


Figure 25: Program from original 1963 production of *The Brig*.

¹⁰⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books, 1979) xvii.

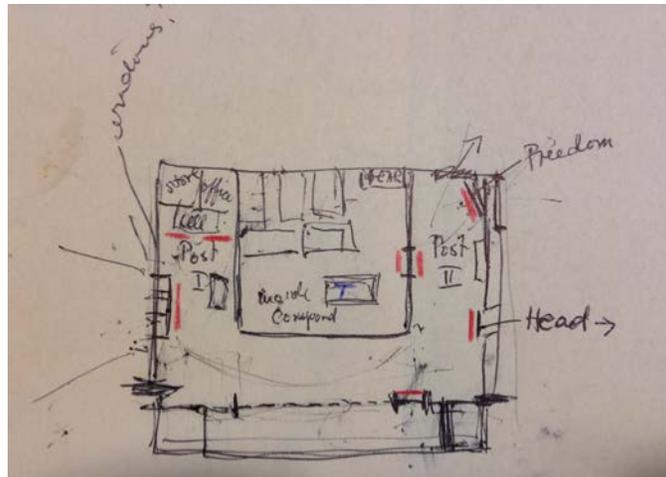


Figure 26: Set design by Julian Beck for 1963 production of *The Brig*.

Public commemoration of “Ground Zero,” requires that the site be both sanctified and rectified. As I have demonstrated above, these processes obfuscate the greater socio-political contexts in which the attacks of 9/11 occurred. 9/11 is posited as an isolated event lacking causality, removed from a highly complex socio-historical background including (though hardly limited to) the Cold War, the United States’ proxy war against the USSR in Afghanistan, the United States’ training of the Mujahideen and of Osama Bin Laden to fight that war, and the abandonment of Afghanistan at the end of the Cold War. The 2007 restaging of Kenneth Brown’s “The Brig” seeks to reforge and highlight these connections, to point to the manner in which the site has been craved out of its context and reconfigured within the “war on terror” by staging the play at “Ground Zero” itself.

Brown, who had served in the Marines during the Korean War, from 1954 to 1957, first wrote the play in 1960. Declared AWOL after returning from leave late one evening, Brown was subsequently incarcerated in the marine Brig for thirty days. As John Tytell writes in *The Living Theatre: Art, Exhile, Outrage*: “The program employed depersonalization, anonymity, and isolation as methods of control. [...] The action of *The Brig* was simple, repetitive, and

hellish.”¹⁰⁷ The story the play conveys is in fact, startling in its simplicity, informed less by the conventions of narrative and more by Artaud’s “theatre of cruelty.” The only actions are a series of meaningless, repetitive tasks required of the soldiers by their jailers: push ups, running in place, etc. The pace is frantic and the sole purpose of these actions is obedience, stripping the inmates of their humanity.

In January 1963, Brown submitted the play, based on his experiences, to Judith Malina and Julian Beck. While Judith Malina directed the 1963 production and Julian Beck designed the set (a recreation of the brig, where audiences were separated from the stage via a wire fence), the production relied on a number of influences, particularly the previously mentioned theatre of cruelty of Antonin Artaud, the constructivism of Meyerhold, and the teachings of Erwin Piscator. Further, during rehearsals Malina required her actors to read *The Guidebook for Marines* and regimented rehearsals around the guidelines it set forth. Actors who failed to follow her strict rehearsal rules were subjected to work penalties.

Though the theatre would be shut down over the course of this production due to ongoing entanglements with the IRS, *The Brig* would prove to be one of the company’s most successful productions. In 2003, after several years abroad, the Living Theatre once again found a home in New York on Clinton Street, where its inaugural production was once again *The Brig*. Of the decision, the Living Theatre wrote:

We also have chosen to open our new theatre here on Clinton Street (LES) with the revival of *The Brig*: a play written by a Marine in the late fifties and presented by the living in 1963. It not only won many awards but Howard Taubman and other critics called for a congressional investigation which led to policy changes

¹⁰⁷ John Tytell, *The Living Theatre: Art, Exile, and Outrage* (New York: Grove Press: 1995) 179-180.

in the treatment of Marines in their own brigs. It has again received an Obie as many incredible reviews, many writing about its pertinence to today's war climate and specifically about Guantanamo and Abu Grav.

But this is not enough! Not enough to simply work for a paying public. Thus in these last weeks we have been presenting *The Brig* in the street: in Union Square and also Columbus Circle. Now we are going to going to Ground Zero where this new cycle of violence and war has started.^{108 109}

Most notable in this re-staging is, as pointed out above, the selection of "Ground Zero" as a venue. The venue is as intertwined and linked with the sequence of events which form its political and historical context – Vietnam, Afghanistan, 9/11, Abu Ghraib, and Guantanamo – as with the metal in the barbed wire used to separate the audience during the original production from the Artaudian acts of cruelty they were witness to. At "Ground Zero," that barbed wire was no longer physically present, though police, unsure of whether the production constituted a protest or a work of art, formed a more contemporary, Orwellian barricade. Similarly, the production once viewed by the audience of the revolutionary 60's is now seen through the eyes of a generation occupying a world in which the hopes and promises of that revolution are but a distant memory: where income inequality has reached staggering levels, the climate is changing even more rapidly than scientists once predicted, and genocide, civil wars, and state sanctioned violence remain a daily reality for millions of people throughout the world.

¹⁰⁸ Jay Babcock, "The Living Theatre at Ground Zero – July 1 and 4." arthurmag.com 29 June 2007, 10 October 2014 <<http://arthurmag.com/2007/06/29/the-living-theatre-at-ground-zero-july-1-and-4/>>.

¹⁰⁹ Fittingly, the production at "Ground Zero" occurred on July 1st and 4th. The selection of these dates is not coincidental, as the site is itself fraught with patriotic symbolism. The "Freedom Tower," for example, with its antenna stretches to 1776 feet.

What remained unchanged were the roles played on either side of the divide: the police-state committing acts of violence on the one side and the audience, in whose name those acts are committed, bearing largely silent witness on the other. As Katy Ryan writes in “A View from *The Brig*,”:

The passive, obedient audience may be the most real element of the reenactment. This lack of movement obviously does not apply to human rights organizations and individuals who have struggled to end the detention, the torture, and the war, but it does capture a complicit tolerance for violence among US citizens.¹¹⁰

That the atrocities had not been altered to reflect more recent events is not a weakness in the dramaturgy, but rather, its greatest asset, destroying the notion that 9/11 is an isolated event, lacking political or historical context.

In bringing a play written by a Marine about the Korean conflict and originally staged during the Vietnam War to “Ground Zero” during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, while evoking the war crimes in Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo, the production engaged in what theatre scholar Marvin Carlson, in *The Haunted Stage: The Theatre as Memory Machine*, terms “ghosting.” Building upon previous works by Herbert Blau and Joseph Roach, Carlson proposes that theatre:

is the repository of cultural memory, but, like the memory of each individual, it is also subject to continual adjustment and modification as the memory is recalled in new circumstances and contexts. The present experience is always ghosted by

¹¹⁰ Katy Ryan, “A View of *The Brig*” in Political and Protest Theatre After 9/11 Jenny Spencer (ed.) (New York: Routledge, 2012) 164.

previous experiences and associations while those ghosts are simultaneously shifted and modified by the process of recycling and recollection.¹¹¹

The production brought that political context front and center, suggesting that while the actors may have changed, the play in which they contribute a verse has not. These actions persist on the global stage, unabated by the steady march of time. As Noam Chomsky points out, “Everyone’s worried about stopping terrorism. Well, there’s a really easy way. Stop participating in it.”¹¹² Violence, the play suggests, begets violence. The violence committed against the detainees in the brig, is inextricably linked to the violence committed against detainees at Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib, but also to 9/11, to drone attacks, to the invasion of Iraq etc. A violent attack was committed at “Ground Zero,” but that act of violence occurred within a global context of violence in which all acts of violence are fused together and the only escape is, in fact non-violence.

While the handful of critics who reviewed the more recent production generally criticized its inability to more accurately reflect current events¹¹³, this criticism fails to address the production’s own intentions and the Living Theatre’s fierce commitment to non-violence. On the one hand, as Katy Ryan points out, the production “is not driven by [the] kind of ‘testimony’”¹¹⁴ of contemporary productions such as Victoria Brittain and Gillian Slovos’ *Guantanamo: ‘Honor Bound to Defend Freedom’* or Jessica Blank and Erik Jensen’s *The Exonerated*, both of which convey the actual words of their subjects. In the instance of *Guantanamo: ‘Honor Bound to Defend Freedom,’* those subjects are both detainees at the controversial prison and lawyers and

¹¹¹ Carlson 2.

¹¹² *Power and Terror: Noam Chomsky In Our Times* dir. John Junkerman, First Run Features, 2002.

¹¹³ See: Peter Wood, “Behind the Bars,” *PAJ: A Journal of Performance and Art* Vol. 30, No. 1 (2008) 58-63; Alexis Greene, “A Curtain Up Review: The Brig,” curtainup.com 17 May 2007, 10 Oct. 2014 <curtainup.com/brig.html>; Charles Isherwood, “Keeping the Old Off Broadway Spirit Alive,” *New York Times* 27 April 2007, 1.

¹¹⁴ Ryan, “A View of The Brig” 163.

public officials, whereas the subjects of *The Exonerated* are individuals falsely convicted of murder, sentenced to the death penalty and later imprisoned. While both plays are concerned with larger themes such as the “war on terror” and the death penalty, their focus remains on the individuals and their personal stories. In other words, the political is told through the personal. In the instance of *The Brig* however, I believe, the production opts for a heightened sort of verisimilitude that is viscerally Artaudian. In other words, the audience does not merely witness the violent acts committed onstage, but experiences them as a relentless assault upon their senses. Here, the notion of individual identity is decimated altogether. The violence depicted continues without stop and, while the audience may be physically separated from the action, there is no escape.¹¹⁵ The violence depicted in the 2007 production of *The Brig* may appear naïve when compared with more contemporary acts of violence, such as those depicted in the images of Abu Ghraib circulated in the media. However, that contrast should not be read as a fault of the production, but more productively as an indictment of the audience’s complicity in allowing these changes to occur in the first place. The point is not to accurately reflect current events, but to suggest that violent events are linked. As I have demonstrated throughout this chapter, the site is itself already deeply politicized. The Living Theatre seeks to expose that politicization – as nakedly as the soldiers stripped of their dignity and humanity in the brig. While the narratives of heroism and sacrifice which have come to envelop “Ground Zero” foreclose the possibility of situating the event within its socio-historical context, *The Brig* seeks to reassert those possibilities, positing that violent events such as 9/11 occur within a context of other acts of violence, that violent acts committed against the United States cannot be understood without examining violent acts committed *by* the United States – both abroad and within its own borders.

¹¹⁵ Malina extended this verisimilitude to the rehearsal process itself, where actors were punished for a variety of infractions.

In the following chapters, I will seek to examine how that foreclosure has expanded outward from the traumascapes of “Ground Zero” to the debate over 9/11 itself. I will also explore how the foreclosure of certain narrative possibilities allows for the ultimate perpetuation of the very sort of violence indicted by the Living Theatre. Throughout, I will point to possibilities for the expansion of discourse surrounding the events of 9/11, positing alternative narratives towards a more “utopian performative” of 9/11.

3.0 CHAPTER TWO: INTO THE ABYSS – *THE FIRST 24 HOURS, 25TH HOUR, AND THE ENACTMENT OF ABSENCE*

It was an early dynamic in moviegoing that we, the chumps, would pay money to test our own fears, to imagine our courage. And there was also that stealthy possibility growing that reality was not all it had been cracked up to be – that it might be something that stayed on the screen – like the screen where, one day, airliners slice into towers one morning in New York and we wonder what movie that was.¹¹⁶

(David Thomson, *The Whole Equation*)

and every borough looked up when it heard the first blast
and then every dumb action movie was summarily surpassed
and the exodus uptown by foot and motorcar
looked more like war than anything i've seen so far [...]
so fierce and ingenious
a poetic specter so far gone
that every jackass newscaster was struck dumb and stumbling
over 'oh my god' and 'this is unbelievable' and on and on¹¹⁷

(Ani DiFranco, *Self Evident*)

Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And when you look long into an abyss, the abyss also looks into you.¹¹⁸

(Friedrich Nietzsche)

Adapted for the screen by David Benioff from his novel of the same name, Spike Lee's 2002 film, *25th Hour*, focuses on the last night of freedom of a convicted drug dealer, Montgomery Brogan (Edward Norton), before he begins a seven-year prison sentence.¹¹⁹ While both the novel and the screenplay were written prior to 9/11, Lee's film began principle photography on location in New York City roughly eight months after the attacks, on May 13, 2002 and

¹¹⁶ David Thomson, *The Whole Equation. A History of Hollywood*. (New York: Vintage Books, 2004) 235.

¹¹⁷ Ani DiFranco, *So Much Shouting, So Much Laughter*. Righteous Babe Records, 2002.

¹¹⁸ Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil: Prelude to a Philosophy of the Future* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989) 89.

¹¹⁹ Monty, as a first time, non-violent offender, is allowed to spend the time between sentencing and the beginning of his sentence on "Step Back" – a program allowing him to put his affairs in order.

completed its final shot less than two months later, on July 3. The film was released little more than a year after 9/11 on December 19, 2002 – initially in five theatres in New York and Los Angeles.¹²⁰

While Benioff’s novel unfolds in a largely linear manner, incorporating a handful of flashbacks across twenty-four chapters – one for each hour of Monty’s final day – the film adaptation is structured more loosely, wending its way backwards and forwards through time, while simultaneously maintaining its momentum towards the inevitable. Throughout, Lee, who usually relies on his own screenwriting skills, infuses Benioff’s narrative with images of post-9/11 Manhattan in 2002: the “Tribute in Light” memorial, American flags, makeshift memorials, and “Ground Zero.”

Critics deemed the film’s 9/11 scenes jarring,¹²¹ not so much because they forced a confrontation with the reality of 9/11, but because they did so in a fictional context. In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, fictions appeared to constitute a safe haven, a means through which to escape the continued media onslaught of 9/11 coverage. It is no coincidence then, that the two highest grossing films that year were *Harry Potter and the Sorcerer’s Stone* (Columbus, 2001) and *Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring* (Jackson, 2001), both firmly rooted within the fantasy genre.¹²² Not surprisingly, the majority of critics at the time of the film’s release failed to adequately address the manner in which the 9/11 sequences were incorporated within the film’s structure, despite praising the film overall. Andrew Sarris, for example, ignored

¹²⁰ As Lee has said of the process, “We had a fairly accelerated post-production period. We had to haul ass to finish this film.” (“Director’s Commentary,” *25th Hour*, dir. Spike Lee, Buena Vista Pictures, 2002.)

¹²¹ Unfortunately, the analysis of numerous critics did not go significantly beyond this assessment.

¹²² Unknown Author, “2001 Domestic Grosses,” boxofficemojo.com Unknown Date, 10 October 2014 <<http://boxofficemojo.com/yearly/chart/?yr=2001&p=.htm>>. The two large-scale works of scholarship focused on the relationship between 9/11 and film genre have focused on horror: *Horror after 9/11: World of Fear, Cinema of Terror* by Aviva Briefel and Sam J. Miller, *Post-9/11 Horror in American Cinema* by Kevin J. Wetmore. However, it is my hope that this field of scholarship will eventually expand to include both science fiction and fantasy, both of which saw an equal, if not greater resurgence following 9/11.

the scenes related to 9/11 altogether,¹²³ whereas Roger Ebert, while acknowledging some of the 9/11 related content, chose to universalize its implications: “All three men are willing to see others suffer, in one way or another, or even die, so that they can have what they want. The movie suggests a thought that may not occur to a lot of its viewers: To what degree do we all live that way?”¹²⁴ However, now, more than a decade later, I believe Lee’s film deserves a reassessment. I propose to explore how Lee’s inserted 9/11 images operate on numerous, often inter-connected levels, constituting what critic David Edelstein calls a “melancholy tone poem”¹²⁵ and what film scholar Stephen Prince terms an “emotional framework”¹²⁶ – but also functioning structurally as a backdrop of collective trauma and mourning.¹²⁷

Expanding upon Edelstein’s and Prince’s notion that the film’s four primary 9/11 sequences operate within, not against, the film’s narrative and tonal framework, what I wish to focus on in discussing their inclusion is not the manner in which they are grafted into the narrative, but rather, the manner in which they cause a collision between the fictional world of Monty Brogan and the reality of post-9/11 New York, forcing an encounter, I argue, with what Julia Kristeva calls the “abject.” By analyzing these sequences as encounters with the abject, I contend that Lee’s film marks a critical turning point in the cultural discourse regarding 9/11, as not only one of the first films to engage the events, but also, to date, one of the few to do so in a direct and meaningful way. To further enhance my argument, I will also draw on the theoretical

¹²³ Andrew Sarris, “After an Enigmatic Beginning, Visual Concentration Pays Off,” observer.com 3 March 2003, 10 Oct. 2014 <<http://observer.com/2003/02/after-an-enigmatic-beginning-visual-concentration-pays-off/>>.

¹²⁴ Roger Ebert, “25th Hour,” rogerebert.com 10 Jan. 2003, 10 Oct. 2014 <<http://www.rogerebert.com/reviews/25th-hour-2003>>.

¹²⁵ Edelstein.

¹²⁶ Prince 81.

¹²⁷ An argument can certainly be made for the fact that, in Lee’s rendering, Monty’s coming to terms with his past parallels the collective grief of New Yorkers post-9/11. While it may be useful to engage in a close reading of the film through this metaphor, my project here is focused on the manner in which the film operates structurally.

frameworks of Roland Barthes' concepts of denotative and connotative imagery, Mary Ann Doane's work on so-called "actualities," and Sergei Eisenstein's notion of montage.

POST-9/11 HOLLYWOOD

In order to interrogate the manner in which *25th Hour* engages the events of 9/11, it is first necessary to provide some historical context regarding the conditions under which it was produced. Namely, at the time of the film's release, Hollywood's engagement with the attacks was characterized primarily by its willful *lack* of engagement, thus making *25th Hour* a significant and radical departure.



Figure 27: *Die Hard*.



Figure 28: *Independence Day*.



Figure 29: *Fight Club*.



Figure 30: *Donnie Darko*

Decades before the al Qaeda terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, the violent imagery associated with the events had already become familiar in numerous films including *Die Hard* (McTiernan, 1988), *Independence Day* (Emmerich, 1996), *Fight Club* (Fincher, 1999) and *Donnie Darko* (Kelly, 2001). As film scholar Stephen Prince, who examines this phenomenon in his book, *Firestorm: American Film in the Age of Terrorism*, succinctly writes, “In pursuing visions of epic destruction, filmmakers got there first, well before al Qaeda did.”¹²⁸ While Prince explores the Hollywood disaster films, which preceded 9/11, in far greater depth and scope than I could hope to do so here – tracking not only the evolution of the genre, but also elucidating the numerous ways in which it reflects issues of domestic and foreign politics – his argument that these attacks existed in the cultural imagination prior to their realization on September 11, 2001, is one I wish to expand upon.

¹²⁸ Prince 18.

If 9/11 momentarily resembled a film, it was also disseminated and processed in filmic terms. At the moments of the attacks' most undeniable reality, countless onlookers, often described the events as being "like a film." This relationship between the imagined and the real is considerably problematized by Jean Baudrillard in *The Spirit of Terrorism*, where he states:

In all these vicissitudes, what stays with us, above all else is the sight of the images. This impact of the images, and their fascination, are necessarily what we retain, since images are, whether we like it or not our primal scene.¹²⁹

Lacking other means by which to make sense of the events, witnesses therefore returned to this primal scene of the image. As Susan Sontag points out in *Regarding the Pain of Others*, "After four decades of big-budget Hollywood disaster films, 'It felt like a movie' seems to have displaced the way survivors of a catastrophe used to express the short-term unassimilability of what they had gone through: 'It felt like a dream.'¹³⁰ In other words, if Baudrillard's "primal scene" of the image once found its expression in the dream, by the time of the attacks of 9/11, that dream had been absorbed by the language of film. That relationship between the imagined and the real however, is one which is constantly shifting and evolving, the boundaries of one often overlapping with those of the other. As Sontag states, "Something becomes real – to those who are elsewhere, following it as 'news' – by being photographed. But a catastrophe that is experienced will often seem eerily like its representation."¹³¹ To Sontag then, for those watching news coverage of the events in Washington, Shanksville, and New York on September 11, 2001,

¹²⁹ Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism* (London, New York: Verso 2003) 26-27.

¹³⁰ Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003) 22.

¹³¹ Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* 21.

that news coverage was virtually interchangeable with that which it represented, appearing to collapse the temporal and spatial distance between the viewer and the event.¹³²

I argue that this “collapse” is not merely problematic, but also provides an opportunity through which to begin to make sense of the terrorist acts of 9/11, i.e. that this intersection between the imagined and the real opens up a series of liminal spaces, which may expose radical possibilities for the multiple configurations of identity, nation and history. By interrogating the manner in which this intersection between the real and the imagined operates in *25th Hour*, I therefore hope to pry open some of these liminal spaces, to examine how Lee’s re-presentation(s) of 9/11 engage a narrative outside of the conceptual framework formulated within the context of the “war on terrorism.”

HOLLYWOOD IN THE AFTERMATH OF 9/11

Perhaps not surprisingly, Hollywood’s response to this collision of the imagined and the real was characterized by a stupefied inertia – a denial not only of the events of 9/11, but a wholesale erasure of the Twin Towers themselves. In a sense, this is not surprising. In *Sweet Violence: The Idea of the Tragic*, literary theorist Terry Eagleton posits a new definition of tragedy; i.e. that contemporary western culture and postmodernism are themselves a form of tragedy. As Eagleton explains, “Culture and death are not rivals at all. There is a tragic self-mutilation at the very root of civilization.”¹³³ The referent having therefore been reduced to a toxic cloud of ash, the reference soon followed suit. Ironically, that second disappearance only

¹³² Because so much of the terminology surrounding 9/11 tends to be politically and ideologically fraught, I will limit myself to more neutral words such as “event” or “attack” wherever possible.

¹³³ Terry Eagleton, *Sweet Violence* (Malden, Oxford, Carlton South, and Berlin: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 2003) 208.

further iterated the very real loss, not only of the towers, but also of the thousands of individuals who had died that day.

In the immediate aftermath of the attacks, numerous television shows set in Manhattan, which had previously incorporated the Twin Towers in their opening credits, now removed the iconic buildings. Returning from its summer hiatus on September 28, 2001, *Law and Order: SVU*, which had previously featured two shots of the towers in its opening credits, now removed these shots. Among Hollywood films, the much-anticipated *Spiderman* (Raimi, 2002) had released teaser posters prior to the attacks depicting the Manhattan skyline, which were immediately recalled. Similarly, the film's original trailer had featured the comic book hero catching villains in a net sprung between the Twin Towers. The trailer was likewise pulled and by the time the film was released on May 3, 2002, all references to the Twin Towers had been omitted.¹³⁴ Likewise, the ending of *Men in Black II* (Sonnenfeld, 2002), originally set at the World Trade Center, had to be fully re-shot prior to the film's July 3 release of that year.¹³⁵ And *Collateral Damage* (Davis, 2002), a film about a fireman (Arnold Schwarzenegger) battling terrorists was postponed from October 5, 2001 to February 8, 2002.¹³⁶ *Sex and the City*, which similarly to *SVU* had featured two separate shots, removed the footage from its opening credits

¹³⁴ Drew Grant, "10 year time capsule: 'Spider-Man' and the erasing of the World Trade Centers" [Salon.com](http://www.salon.com/2011/05/10/10_year_time_capsule_spiderman_wtc/) 10 May 2011, 1 Nov. 2012 <http://www.salon.com/2011/05/10/10_year_time_capsule_spiderman_wtc/>.

¹³⁵ Todd Weiser, "Have movies desensitized us to real tragedy?" [michigandaily.com](http://www.michigandaily.com/content/have-movies-desensitized-us-real-tragedy?page=0,0) 19 Sept. 2001, 1 Nov. 2012 <<http://www.michigandaily.com/content/have-movies-desensitized-us-real-tragedy?page=0,0>>.

¹³⁶ This sort of self-induced censorship lasted some time. In 2004, British Airways censored screenings of the romantic holiday comedy *Love Actually* (Curtis, 2003) aboard its planes: At the beginning of the film, the British prime minister (Hugh Grant) stands at an airport and observes people arriving. He states, "When the planes hit the twin towers, as far as I know, none of the phone calls from the people on board were messages of hate or revenge. They were all messages of love." This line was cut from screenings. Gary Anderson, "BA under fire for cutting 9/11 speech from *Love Actually*" [telegraph.co.uk](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1451389/BA-under-fire-for-cutting-911-speech-from-Love-Actually.html) 11 Jan. 2004, 10 Oct. 2014 <<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/uknews/1451389/BA-under-fire-for-cutting-911-speech-from-Love-Actually.html>>.

when it returned on January 8, 2002, as did *The Sopranos*, which had featured one shot, when it returned on September 15, 2002.

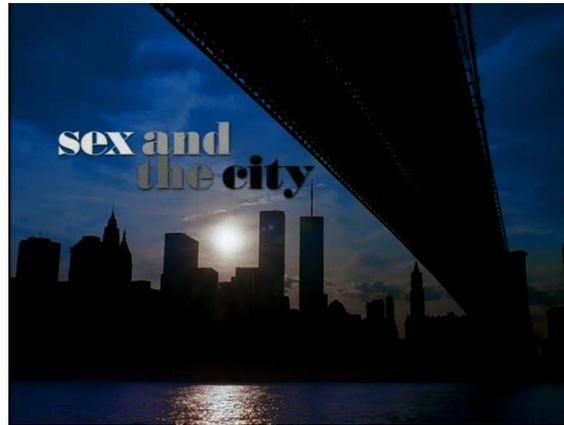


Figure 31: *Sex and the City.*



Figure 32: *Sex and the City.*



Figure 33: *The Sopranos*

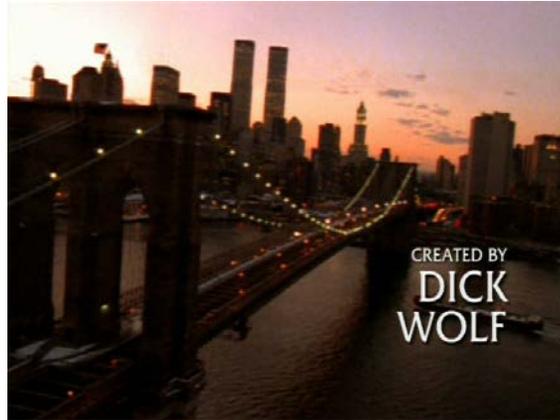


Figure 34: *Law and Order: SVU*.



Figure 35: *Law and Order: SVU*.

It may be argued that in erasing the towers, the individuals responsible for these decisions merely wished to accurately reflect reality, that in erasing references to terrorism or 9/11 they responded with a heightened sensitivity, choosing to err on the side of caution. While I will explore the ramifications of the media's self-censorship of imagery related to 9/11 more closely in the following chapter, I focus here on the absence itself. The removal of these icons from the fictional worlds they had once helped cement only served to heighten the disparity between fiction and reality, pointing to the inability of these narratives to engage an event as massive and horrifying as 9/11 without compromising their structural integrity. Ironically, these erasures

served only as heightened reminders, in absentia, of what was once there, thereby puncturing the fictional worlds regardless.

In many of the instances cited above, the issue of 9/11 was subsequently addressed. All of the *Law and Order* franchises subsequently incorporated the events of 9/11 and their aftermath into their storylines,¹³⁷ as did the *Sopranos*. The *Spiderman* franchise re-incorporated the Twin Towers into a video game and released an issue, *The Amazing Spiderman #36*, addressing the attacks.

Sex and the City, in “Anchors Away,” its first episode shot post-9/11, while not incorporating the attacks directly, did do so allegorically, with Carrie (Sarah Jessica Parker), the show’s newly single protagonist developing a love affair with the city itself. The show begins with Carrie’s ringing of the New York Stock exchange and ends with her abruptly dumping a handsome sailor (Daniel Sunjata), who had been portrayed as a potential romantic interest throughout the episode, because he did not share her love of the city:

CARRIE: I'm glad I stayed. After the way this city kicked my ass today, I needed that dance.

LOUIS LEROY I have to say, this is my first trip to New York. Not for me. I mean, the garbage, the noise, I don't know how you put up with it.

CARRIE: Thanks. Good night. –

¹³⁷ In 2001, a planned crossover story arc, combining *Law and Order*, *Law and Order: Criminal Intent*, and *Law and Order: SVU* was cancelled because it would have dealt with a biological terrorist attack in Manhattan. This concept was not revisited until the October 17, 2012 *SVU* episode, “Acceptable Loss,” albeit on a markedly smaller scale. The detectives of the Special Victims Unit, in examining a sex slavery ring, inadvertently stumble upon a terrorist cell. Their investigation collides with that of Alexandra Eames (Kathryn Erbe), who since leaving the Major Case Squad of *Criminal Intent* has become a lieutenant with the joint City / Federal Homeland Security Task Force. At one point, Detective Olivia Benson (Mariska Hargitay) confronts Eames regarding her concerns and dissatisfaction with having to put her own investigation on hold to further the terrorist investigation. “How can you tell us to stand down?” she asks. Eames responds, “You were here for 9/11? This is the right decision.” Though *SVU* remains the only series in the franchise still on air, all three shows, since 9/11, have integrated the events in their storylines to a significant degree.

LOUIS LEROY: Wait. Going home all alone? It's rough out there.

CARRIE: It isn't so bad.

As Carrie departs, wandering the city streets alone, she tells the viewer in voiceover:

If Louis was right, and you only get one great love, New York may just be mine. And I can't have nobody talking shit about my boyfriend. A short while later, I had a thought.... Maybe the past is like an anchor holding us back. Maybe you have to let go of who you were, to become who you will be.¹³⁸

Unabashedly hopeful, the episode suggests that like Carrie, we must come to terms with our losses, while still finding a way to move forward.

While “Anchors Away” may have marked the first celluloid engagement with the attacks to look into a future that acknowledged the past, Hollywood did gradually begin to acknowledge and engage the attacks, realizing that it could, in fact narratively engage the events of 9/11. That being said, while Hollywood has slowly begun to produce more and more works dealing with the attacks, with increasing directness, and while the public has become increasingly receptive to these narratives, the process remains ongoing. To a large degree, 9/11 is still considered “box office poison.”

WTC: THE FIRST 24 HOURS: FRACTURED MEANING AND TRAUMATIC RETURN

Given Hollywood’s reluctance to narratively respond to the events of 9/11 in their immediate aftermath as outlined above – not to mention a logistical inability¹³⁹ – it is perhaps not surprising that the first films tackling 9/11 were largely documentaries. Additionally, as Stephen

¹³⁸ “Anchors Away,” *Sex and The City* Writ. Darren Starr, Michael Patrick King, and Candace Bushnell, Dir. Charles McDougall, HBO, 21 July 2002.

¹³⁹ Narrative films, even low-budget ones, require a complicated planning, production, and post-production process, which documentaries require only to a lesser degree.

Prince points out, documentary films were *perceived* differently than narrative films by the public post-9/11:

About [dramatizations and docudramas], many viewers asked “why?” Why make a dramatization when public awareness of the attacks was so high? What new information would a dramatization impart that would enable it to escape questions about capitalizing on tragedy for entertainment’s sake? A documentary doesn’t face this barrier of suspicion. Its assertion – this *is* – is compelling in ways that are commonly recognized as important.¹⁴⁰

Yet ironically, as Prince adds, “Virtually all documentaries about the destruction of the World Trade Center place the event inside a narrative framework, even when [...] the films are composed largely of amateur candid footage shot as things were happening.”¹⁴¹ Prince notes, and I strongly concur, that Étienne Sauret’s 2002 film, *WTC: The first 24 hours* constitutes a significant exception to this rule. Unfortunately, due to the encyclopedic nature of Prince’s work, his analysis of the film is necessarily limited to largely general observations and description. I believe the film merits closer investigation, particularly in the context of attempting to understand *25th Hour*.

As Sauret writes in the opening title of his film, “*The First 24 Hours* began as a raw reflection of “Ground Zero” in the aftermath of the collapse of the World Trade Center.”¹⁴² In

¹⁴⁰ Prince 125.

¹⁴¹ Ibid 125-6.

¹⁴² The film received its premiere at the 2002 Sundance film festival as part of a special event entitled “September 11th” which also featured *From the Ashes: 10 Artists* by Deborah Shaffer, *Site* by Jason Klot and *Voice of the Prophet* by Robert Edwards. The film’s only other public screening occurred from March 3 – 16, 2004 at New York’s Film Forum, where it was grouped with another film by Sauret, *Collateral Damages*. Preceding both films was a 1986 short by Zbigniew Rybczynski entitled *Imagine* – an experimental music video (the first to be shot in HD) for the song of the same name by John Lennon. In the foreground, a series of characters appear to move from one identical room to the next, passing through various life stages, with each door that is opened. In the background, seen through a window, is the Manhattan skyline. While the rooms themselves appear to move from right to left,

the chaos immediately following that collapse, Sauret was able to secure access to the site itself, thus capturing unique footage inaccessible to other filmmakers. The film was shot over twenty-four hours, beginning on the morning of September 11, 2001 to the following morning. While the news media had already begun to formulate a certain narrative of the events – a narrative I will explore in detail in the following chapter – cinema, as a whole, and Sauret, in particular, had not yet begun to think in these terms. As Prince states in summation, “The brilliance of the film lies in the patient, unhurried way that it captures the resonances of this physical space.”¹⁴³ Sauret’s footage, particularly in retrospect, is about as raw footage as one is to find regarding 9/11.

Devoid of mediatization, the images therefore operate, in large part, as what Roland Barthes terms “denotative images.” In his essay “The Photographic Message,” Barthes states that “the press photograph is a message,”¹⁴⁴ adding that the nature of that message, while generally deemed denotative, is in fact also connotative. Barthes explains, “The photographic paradox can then be seen as the co-existence of two messages, the one without a code (the photographic analogue), the other with a code (the ‘art’, or the treatment, or the ‘writing’, or the rhetoric of the photograph)...”¹⁴⁵ Despite Barthes’ examination of the extent to which photographic connotation can reach, the question remains, “Is this to say that a pure denotation, a this side-of language, is impossible?”¹⁴⁶ It is this question, which leads Barthes to trauma:

with the characters moving left to right, like pages in a book, the skyline, with the Twin Towers at its center, is essentially static. As Keith Phipps, of the AV Club, wrote at the time: “A memorable touch of art begins the program, however, and though it predates Sept. 11 by several years, it couldn’t be a better fit. [...] Lennon’s call for a “brotherhood of man” has never seemed so poignant, or so pointed. Keith Phipps, “Collateral Damages (w/ WTC: The First 24 Hours and Imagine)” [avclub.com](http://www.avclub.com/articles/collateral-damages-w-wtc-the-first-24-hours-and-im,5204/) 2 March, 2004, 1 Nov. 2012 <<http://www.avclub.com/articles/collateral-damages-w-wtc-the-first-24-hours-and-im,5204/>>.

¹⁴³ Prince 127.

¹⁴⁴ Roland Barthes, *Image-Music-Text* Stephen Heath trans. (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977) 15.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid 19.

¹⁴⁶ Ibid 30.

Truly traumatic photographs are rare, for in photography the trauma is wholly dependant on the certainty that the scene ‘really’ happened: the photographer had to be there....Assuming this..... the traumatic photograph.... is the photograph about which there is nothing to say; the shock-photo is by structure insignificant: no value, no knowledge, at the limit no verbal categorization can have a hold on the process instituting the signification.¹⁴⁷

In other words, the traumatic image shocks, rupturing language and our ability to separate and distance through connotation, and it is precisely in this rupture that an encounter with the abject may be enacted. I therefore argue in the following chapter that the photograph must be encountered directly and therefore denotatively, as in the instance of Richard Drew’s “Falling Man” photograph.

Mary Ann Doane further complicates this notion of the denotative in her book, *The Emergence of Cinematic Time*, where, building upon the theories of Andre Bazin and Siegfried Kracauer, she examines the function of film as memory machine. While Doane’s work is framed as a discussion of so-called “actualities¹⁴⁸,” the implications of her examination extend beyond the historical framework within which she is working. She states, “Death is perhaps the ultimate trauma insofar as it is situated as that which is unassailable to meaning...”¹⁴⁹ What Barthes therefore defines as “denotative,” Doane refers to as “unassailable to meaning.” Both are referring to the notion that meaning is fractured or uncoded by trauma and that we thus lack the connotations necessary to read the image. Barthes thus states, “The trauma is a suspension of

¹⁴⁷ Ibid 30-31.

¹⁴⁸ “Actualities” recorded common daily events – a novelty and phenomenon associated with the infancy of film.

¹⁴⁹ Mary Anne Doane. *The Emergence of Cinematic Time* (Cambridge + London: Harvard University Press, 2002) 163.

language, a blocking of meaning.”¹⁵⁰ As I will illustrate, it is the denotative image, the trauma itself, which is at the heart of Sauret’s film and my engagement with it is therefore structured as an attempt to formulate such an encounter, an encounter with the object.

The ability of film to capture and, in a sense, freeze that which has already been lost (either to time or death or both) – thus ironically retrieving the moment from its very irretrievability by making that which it captures available for infinite recall – is one which is directly mirrored in the manner in which we experience and process traumatic events. Yet, in order for their illusions to take hold, both film and trauma require a certain willingness to suspend disbelief. Whereas the ability of film to infinitely return to the past is one subject to a certain degree of control by the viewer, who can pause, rewind, and fast forward the imagery at will, the return of trauma is compulsive, fueled by the need of a ruptured psyche to make that which is broken whole. In both instances, the ultimate effect is that of an illusion: the ability of film to wrench the past into the present is as false a promise as the notion that one might return to a reality prior to the traumatic experience.

The images contained within Sauret’s film are ultimately not dissimilar to those shown on television and subsequently repeated time and again in the days following 9/11. However, in compressing and summarizing the events as experienced by the majority of witnesses across the world that morning – namely from a mediated distance – Sauret has, in his documentary, stripped them to their bare essence, peeling away the connotative to get to as much of the denotative as possible. These images are as close to purely denotative as are likely to exist in relation to 9/11 and they are the images which formulate the unspoken background of Lee’s film.

¹⁵⁰ Barthes 30.

The majority of Sauret's film is structured as a silent maneuvering through a surreal, ashen landscape permeating every frame – more Hiroshima than New York – in which Sauret's camera serves as a disembodied observer of sorts, a surrogate where we cannot go, functioning invisibly in this landscape. While a small handful of rescue personnel take notice of the intrusion, most do not. Instead, the eyes of the firemen, paramedics and police officers are trained either to the ground or fiercely ahead, a gaze the camera might record, but not penetrate. The individuals recorded by the camera are thus simultaneously intensely *there* and *not-there*.

The images captured are more easily contextualized as fitting our understanding of a war zone than of a metropolis. The grey dust. The debris. The crushed cars. The scattered pieces of paper. The fires and the smoke. The holes ripped into adjacent buildings. And yet, amidst all of this, there is something noticeably absent. While this early stage is officially labeled a “rescue effort”, there are few to be rescued. The number of rescuers not only outnumber the remaining victims, but the collapse has literally erased any trace of the thousands of bodies of those who perished in the disaster. It is perhaps for this reason that a number of the sequences captured by Sauret function equally powerfully as photographic images,¹⁵¹ removed from the temporal and spatial context of the film, which lends them their power. As Mark Holcomb writes in the *Village Voice*:

The footage [Sauret] captures (sans commentary) is both gut-wrenchingly familiar and disconcertingly foreign. Devoid of the conventions of other filmed accounts – braying reporters, numbingly excessive replay, avuncular Rudy Giuliani as tour guide – Sauret's expedition uncovers the aptness in the “ground zero” sobriquet:

¹⁵¹ A number of stills can be accessed via the DVD.

with its structures reduced to meaningless ruin, the WTC's poignant emptiness is horrifically unmasked.¹⁵²

It is therefore not what the images show, so much as the absence they evoke – precisely in their inability to capture that which is no longer there. It is an absence which permeates *25th Hour*.

It is not the documentary as a whole which best illustrates the ways in which rupture functions and in which the film ontologically enacts trauma cinematically, but the roughly three-minute prologue. While the majority of the film focuses on the recovery efforts, the prologue briefly summarizes the impact of UA 175 with the South Tower and the subsequent collapse of both the South and North Towers, providing a “before” to the film’s focus on the “after.”¹⁵³ What is remarkable about Sauret’s film is the degree to which it resists narrativization, striving for that which is “unassailable to meaning.” This is not to suggest that framing and editing do not constitute narrative choices, but to point out that Sauret foregoes any narrative beyond this, resisting both voiceover and titles. What remains instead are the denotative images themselves, simultaneously providing a wealth of interpretable information, while revealing only an absence.

The entire prologue sequence consists of only three shots, all static, all depicting the World Trade Center, as seen from the North. As with the rest of the documentary, the only sound is ambient, possibly from a single mic, which in this case offers its own telling soundtrack: sirens, car alarms, helicopter blades, screams. In Sauret’s filmscape then, even the sound is designed to push the viewer towards an encounter with the denotative. These shots are intercut with a one-second black screen, allowing the viewer to transition from one shot to the next. However, given that the illusion of filmic continuity is a tenuous one, constituted by the rapid

¹⁵² Mark Holcomb, “Retouching the Void: Two docs ponder physical and emotional wreckage of 9/11” [villagevoice.com](http://www.villagevoice.com) 24. Feb 2004, 1 Nov. 2012. <<http://www.villagevoice.com/2004-02-24/film/retouching-the-void/>>.

¹⁵³ It is reasonable to assume that Sauret set up his camera following the first impact, of flight American Airlines 11 with the North Tower.

succession of a series of still images, the black screens here noticeably complicate that transition. While the black screens function, in part, to mark the passage of time, they also function as signifiers of loss, if not representing that which resists re-presentation, then certainly marking its place.



Figure 36: The First 24 Hours.



Figure 37: The First 24 Hours.

The first shot, lasting forty-two seconds, records the impact of UA 175 hitting the South Tower. At the beginning of the shot, the viewer sees both the North and the South Towers. The North Tower is situated in the forefront of the frame and can thus be inferred to be the subject of the shot. However, even closer to the camera, a bird on the central bottom edge of the frame is perched on a nearby roof and it is the bird who becomes the focus of the viewer's attention, the only stabilizing force in an otherwise grotesque image. In Doane's conception, the bird, operating as a sign, may be understood to be accidental. In Barthes however, the bird serves as a means by which the denotative image, struggling towards connotation, is penetrated. Whether the bird functions denotatively or connotatively is therefore ultimately left to the viewer.

Eighteen seconds into the shot, the bird, startled, exits the frame at a sharp forty-five degree angle. Two seconds later, the camera shakes as it too absorbs the impact, losing its omniscience as the reality of that, which it is recording, is absorbed by the recording apparatus itself as a fireball rises from the South Tower and engulfs the building in thick, black-grey smoke. The two people falling from the North Tower during these moments are barely noticeable.



Figure 38: *The First 24 Hours.*

The second shot, from 0:00:44 – 0:01:14, depicts the collapse of the South Tower. Though zoomed in to the zone of impact, this shot ultimately provides the same vantage point, framing the same material, as the previous shot. However, in separating this shot from the previous one by a black screen, Sauret also removes the audience from experiencing the charge of the zoom, which is achieved through a longer telephoto lens, thereby making the towers appear closer together. As Barthes points out time and again, no image can ever be purely denotative, but Sauret, in eliminating the zoom, certainly masks and thereby minimizes its “connotative procedures,”¹⁵⁴ shielding the viewer from its effects.

The smoke patterns have changed from those last seen in the previous shot and the image as a whole is now more tightly framed. An unspecified period of time has elapsed since the first shot. Again, it is the North Tower, which is in the forefront. However, half way through the shot, the South Tower buckles and collapses. Despite the amount of smoke and the speed of the

¹⁵⁴ Barthes 24.

collapse, it is apparent – even without the benefits of slow-motion playback – that a segment of the tower collapses at a forty-five degree angle, an unintentional parallel to the flight of the bird. As I will demonstrate later in this chapter, this representation of absence at Ground Zero, in Lee’s film, is likewise formulated as an encounter with the abject. Lee’s film is situated largely within the aftermath of the moments represented here. The abject lingers in *25h Hour*, its traces wending through the film, but here, the moment of rupture is itself the focus.

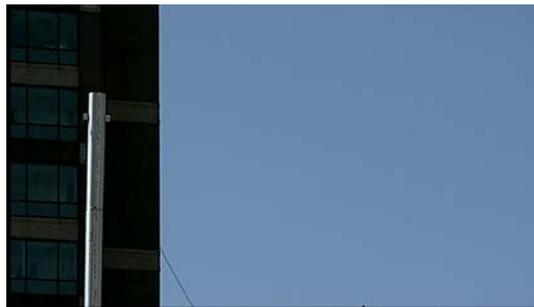


Figure 39: *The First 24 Hours.*

The third shot, from 0:01:16 – 0:02:51, is the longest – and, in its final moments, the most open to interpretation of the three, neither connotative nor denotative, neither containing meaning nor completely without meaning – conveying the collapse of the North Tower. Again, what has been cut out by the black screen, is a compositional shift to accommodate the framing of the remaining South Tower. The asymmetry of the framing – the tower occupying the margin of the frame with the vast, empty space encroaching upon it – foreshadow the collapse of the South Tower. The shift itself is minor, unobtrusive, again meant to disguise the film’s connotative procedures, but the ease with which it appears to compensate for the absence of the South Tower is nonetheless disconcerting.

A person can be seen falling from one of the top floors, possibly from the restaurant “Windows on the World” on the top floor of the skyscraper, from which the majority of victims are reported to have jumped. The smoke escaping from the window from which the individual

jumps is many times the size of the pixel as which his body appears. It is this fall, which anticipates the collapse of the North Tower by seconds – one death briefly foreshadowing those of hundreds. Unlike the previous shot, which ended with the South Towers’ collapse, this shot remains focused on the spot where the tower stood after its collapse. It takes only a few seconds for the smoke to completely vanish from the frame, revealing an impossibly blue sky. After the disappearance of the smoke, the camera remains focused on that spot for another ten seconds before the film properly begins with Sauret’s footage of the site. This moment constitutes what Doane describes as “the specter of pure loss,” namely “the possibility of complete obliteration of the passing moment, the degradation of meaning, [but] it also elicits a desire for its opposite – the possibility of structure.”¹⁵⁵ Like the previously discussed erasure of the towers from film and television in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the tower’s absence therefore simultaneously reinforces that absence and signals a desire for its opposite. Caught in a moment of cognitive dissonance, the mind seeks to replace the tower the eye no longer beholds. However, by keeping the camera firmly trained on this void, Sauret allows for no such reconciliation.

Unlike so many of the mediatized images re-presenting the same series of events as those captured by Sauret, the images here are stripped further and further of their connotative elements, pushing ever deeper into the denotative traumatic encounter, until the viewer is literally left to face an unfathomable void; and it is this void which largely anticipates Lee’s project. In other words, if Sauret’s film facilitates the traumatic encounter, Lee’s examines the aftermath of that encounter. Both films are centered around this void, seeking to confront it as directly as possible. However, in Lee’s film that void is neither denotative nor connotative, not a moment, which can, to paraphrase Sontag, be sliced out and frozen from time. In *25th Hour*, that moment has already

¹⁵⁵ Doane 140.

swept a trail of further moments upon moments into the present, which the survivors are left to stumble through and navigate. If Sauret's film seeks to represent that which is "unassailable to meaning," then the core of Lee's film, in its encounter with the abject, is structured around that unassailability.

STUMBLING TOWARDS NARRATIVE

At the time *25th Hour* was released, only a handful of narrative films had yet engaged the events of 9/11. In fact, as Prince notes, *25th Hour* marked Hollywood's first major engagement with the attacks:

The industry viewed 9/11 as a kind of box office poison, as a topic that audiences would prefer not to see depicted on movie screens, and so the studios were loathe to green-light productions that took the attacks as their subjects. Spike Lee was the first major filmmaker to reference 9/11, although the film in question is not principally about 9/11.¹⁵⁶

Nonetheless, Lee felt uncomfortable with this role, stating, "I never looked at it as, 'OK, I want to be the New York film-maker who takes the mantle of dealing with 9/11.' It was just an honest way of dealing with being a New Yorker afterwards [...]."¹⁵⁷

At the time of the film's release, reviewers' assessments of the film ran the gamut from "symphonic in its ambition"¹⁵⁸ and "the first great 21st century movie about a 21st century

¹⁵⁶ Prince 80-81.

¹⁵⁷ Danny Leigh, "Ghosts of New York" [guardian.co.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2003/apr/11/artsfeatures.spikelee) 10 April 2003, 1 Nov. 2012 <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2003/apr/11/artsfeatures.spikelee>>.

¹⁵⁸ Ibid.

subject”¹⁵⁹ to “a turgid, bombastic and outrageously self-satisfied movie,”¹⁶⁰ with a great deal of criticism directed toward Lee’s decision to incorporate the aftermath of the terrorist attacks within his fictional narrative – a decision many critics found confusing, calling it “at times obtrusive”¹⁶¹ and “reality overwhelming fiction.”¹⁶² The film’s reception was further hindered by what Edward Norton described as a “lousy release strategy”¹⁶³ – releasing the film shortly before Christmas in a rush toward Oscar season, rather than a slower release, with an opening at the Cannes Film Festival, where it may have had the opportunity to generate positive word of mouth. Despite the substantive body of scholarship dedicated to Lee’s films, discussions of *25th Hour* have remained largely absent from these discourses – precisely due to this inability to neatly categorize the film. In addressing these critiques, Spike Lee explained:

The novel took place before 9/11, and it was simple: we felt that in shooting a film like this in New York City, so close to what happened on 9/11, in being responsible filmmakers we had to reflect that in the film. Ed Norton and I both felt that we could comment on post-9/11 New York City. So New York City became even more of a character in the film, even though it was a wounded New York City with people trying to cope with their own particular lives.¹⁶⁴

For Lee then, the insertion of the 9/11 scenes constitutes not so much the forced juxtaposition for which he has been criticized, but rather an uneasy symbiosis, in which fiction and reality merge,

¹⁵⁹ Mick LaSalle, “Spike Lee’s love poem to New York / ‘25th Hour’ is a magnificent elegy for the post-Sept. 11 city,” [sfgate.com](http://www.sfgate.com) 10 Jan. 2003, 1 Nov. 2012 <<http://www.sfgate.com/movies/article/Spike-Lee-s-love-poem-to-New-York-25th-Hour-2687253.php>>.

¹⁶⁰ Peter Bradshaw, “25th Hour,” [theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com) 24 April 2003, 10 Oct. 2014 <<http://www.theguardian.com/culture/2003/apr/25/artsfeatures5>>.

¹⁶¹ A.O. Scott, “Confronting the Past Before Going to Prison,” [New York Times on the Web](http://www.nytimes.com) 19 Dec. 2002, 10 Oct. 2014 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/12/19/movies/19HOUR.html>>.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Spike Lee (as told to Kaleem Aftab), *That’s My Story and I’m Sticking To It* (New York + London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2006) 360.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid 355.

with the former ultimately functioning as a catalyst through which to elucidate the latter. In other words, in Lee's hands, the fictional story of a drug dealer becomes a vehicle through which to navigate the complex and contradictory landscape of post-9/11 Manhattan. However unlikely the analogy may appear at first glance, Lee pushes its limits to extract all that it has to offer.

That being said, it is the void so fiercely penetrated by Sauret that is at the center of the film and it is worth examination here. More than a decade after its release, the film deserves a closer look – not only because it marks the moment in which Hollywood first engaged the events of 9/11 on a meaningful scale, but also because, to date, it still constitutes one of the few efforts to truly wrestle with that void. Whereas Sauret approaches that void denotatively, stripping away the connotative elements, which might block the traumatic encounter, Lee does so through meticulously crafted moments of juxtaposition. In doing so, he is able to produce a film which tackles the events of 9/11 in a manner, which mirrors the nature of the events themselves, thereby crafting a liminal, conceptual space at the intersection of the imagined and the real.

In doing so, Lee resists a straightforward path, choosing instead to merge his narrative with images, which evoke the events of 9/11. For every step that Lee takes toward what psychologist Nigel Hunt terms “narrative reconciliation,” i.e. “the integration of traumatic events into the overall life story, removing (or at least reducing) the threat of traumatic memories, and thereby increasing autobiographical coherence”¹⁶⁵ he takes another, in which he, like Sauret keeping the camera focused on the nothingness, forces an encounter with the void. Yet Lee does not juxtapose these elements haphazardly. Rather, it is the juxtaposition itself which provides the film's structure, as he meticulously and deftly maneuvers from one moment to the next. It is through this juxtaposition that Lee facilitates an encounter with the abject. Lee does not provide a

¹⁶⁵ Nigel Hunt, Memory, War and Trauma (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010) 128.

simple narrative of redemption. Rather, the “reconciliation” his film stumbles towards is jagged, hard-won, and tenuous.

NAVIGATING THE LANDSCAPE OF THE REAL

The most over-arching element in Lee’s conception is perhaps the world in which he sets his film. As a quintessential New York filmmaker, Lee sets *25th Hour* – like most of his films – in and around New York City. As he states, “New York City has always been an important character in my films, much more in this case.”¹⁶⁶ Notably, in his choice of location, Lee, unlike other filmmakers, does not shy away from incorporating the reality of a post-9/11 Manhattan.

Throughout, Lee injects elements of reality associated with the catastrophe. American flags, for example, are omnipresent: in windows, on cars, hanging from houses. However, Lee, through his characters, does not comment on these artifacts. He does not seek to explicate their meaning, but merely documents their existence, leaving questions of meaning to his viewers. Further, Lee, at various points, populates his landscape with native New Yorkers. In a scene with firefighters, for instance, he relies not on professional actors, but rather on firefighters, who experienced 9/11, to fill the scene.

A further element of this landscape is a memorial. Early in the film, when Monty meets with his father at the latter’s bar, Lee prefaces the sequence with a series of establishing shots. These shots are of stained glass, flowers, insignia, flags, and a memorial to the firefighters of Staten Island’s Rescue 5. The shrine is real, borrowed with the permission of the station’s captain and the widows – a further element of post 9/11 reality penetrating the fictional world of

¹⁶⁶ Spike Lee’s ‘25th Hour:’ The Evolution of an American Filmmaker, dir. Lorna Anozie, Touchstone Home Entertainment, 2003.

the film. Though Monty's father is a retired firefighter in Benioff's book as he is here, in a post-9/11 landscape, this takes on new meaning. The fictional characters have evolved from the film to absorb real world events.

The city the characters must navigate and which serves as a backdrop is therefore one whose reality penetrates the narrative and reminds the viewer of recent events. Throughout, Lee creates the ambience of a shell-shocked city, one that is like Monty, doing its best to come terms with what has happened. Yet, the city itself does not function as metaphor. Rather, it is Monty and the other characters who are the strangers in a strange land, functioning as the metaphors. They appear discordant with the landscape they occupy because the landscape itself is discordant, no longer bearing any resemblance to the one that existed a year prior. Lee does not narrativize the city, which resists narrativization, instead allowing the on-location images to speak for themselves.



Figure 40: *25th Hour*.

ART IN CONFLICT: THE WOUNDED ANIMAL, “TRIBUTE IN LIGHT,” MONTAGE, AND THE ABJECT

The opening scene of *25th Hour* begins with violence. Over a black screen, we hear the sounds of a dog being beaten. Unlike Sauret, who utilizes the blackness as a reprieve, as a means by which to maintain the denotative, Lee penetrates the silence with the sound of suffering.

Monty is then shown discovering the wounded animal. Initially, he intends to shoot the dog as a “mercy thing,” but after the dog lunges for him, Monty changes his mind. “He’s got a lot of bite left in him,” he tells his associate, Kostya (Tony Siragusa). While this is the only scene shown of Monty’s life prior to his arrest, it nonetheless informs the remainder of the film. The dog, whose rescue Monty subsequently describes as “the best thing I ever did my whole life” functions as a metaphor throughout, not only for Monty’s wounded psyche, but also for that of a post-9/11 Manhattan. Like this wounded animal, Lee appears to be telling us, the city still has “got a lot of bite left” in it. It too can be resurrected.

However, the dog also serves a further function. Described in Benioff’s novel as “A crippled castoff, left ear chewed to mince, hide scored with dozens of cigarette burns – a fighting dog abandoned to the mercy of river rats,”¹⁶⁷ the dog constitutes what Julia Kristeva terms “abject:” “It is death infecting life. Abject. It is something rejected from which one does not part, from which one does not protect oneself as from an object.”¹⁶⁸ In both Benioff’s description and Lee’s realization, the dog, literally infected by death is saved by mercy, the same mercy by which Monty, only moments before would have killed it. That he does not is due as much to the dog’s tenacity as his own. However, for Kristeva, the abject is unstructured by the boundaries, binaries, and meanings of the “symbolic” – i.e. the pre-Oedipal and pre-linguistic (as opposed to the “semiotic”, i.e. the signifying processes which formulate identity) – and it is the encounter with the abject to which we are, as in Freud’s understanding of the traumatic encounter, compelled to return. Consequently, as I will later demonstrate, Lee returns us to the abject.

The scene, set three to four years prior to the remainder of the main narrative ends abruptly, with Monty slamming the car’s trunk – a shot repeated through overlap editing. While I

¹⁶⁷ David Benioff, *The 25th Hour* (New York, Plume: 2002) 1.

¹⁶⁸ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 4.

will discuss the technique in greater detail at the end of the chapter, for now, it should be noted that the repetition of the shot serves to highlight this instance, emphasizing its metaphorical content. In other words, in focusing on the slamming of the car trunk, Lee is simultaneously closing the door on this chapter of Monty's life and on pre-9/11 New York. As journalist Mick LaSalle points out, "The scene serves a function, to show an earlier mood, a last gasp of optimism and decisiveness that's nothing like anything or anyone in the rest of the film."¹⁶⁹ All that follows occurs post-9/11.

"TRIBUTE IN LIGHT"

The following, opening credit sequence, consisting of thirteen individual shots of the "Tribute in Light" art installation hurtles the viewer three to four years into the future – post-9/11. As Lee explains, "We always take a lot of care with our opening credit sequences [...] and we feel with it, you can really set the tone, or, you might say, set the tape of what the film is to be about. And, right away, we wanted to establish that this New York City is a very different New York City, that this is a post-9/11 New York City."¹⁷⁰ The shift is sudden and immediate, jolting the viewer from one visual landscape to the next. As Serge Schmemmann writes in the *New York Times*, "Like 'the fall of the Berlin Wall' a decade earlier, '9/11' has become shorthand for a momentous shift in geopolitical tectonics."¹⁷¹ It is a shift mirrored in the film and, while Lee does not depict the towers' collapse, he does, in pointing to the before and after, frame their absence.

¹⁶⁹ LaSalle.

¹⁷⁰ Lee, "Director's Commentary."

¹⁷¹ Serge Schmemmann, "Separating the Moment from What Came After," *New York Times on the Web* 10 Sept. 2011, 10 March 2012 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/09/11/opinion/sunday/separating-the-moment-from-what-came-after.html>>.

These sequences, and the manner in which they serve as bookends to a rupture signified by absence, may best be conceptualized as a sort of Eisensteinian montage. Sergei Eisenstein, in “The Dramaturgy of Film Form,” declares, “Art is always in conflict.”¹⁷² To examine the nature of that conflict, Eisenstein provides a close analysis of a sequence from his own film, *The Battleship Potemkin*: “Representation of a spontaneous action, *Potemkin*. Woman with pince-nez. Followed immediately – through a discontinuous cut – by the same woman with shattered pince-nez and bleeding eye. Sensation of a shot hitting the eye.”¹⁷³ Though Lee’s discontinuous cut occurs on the sequence, not the shot level, and though these sequences are separated by the slam of the car door trunk, they nonetheless operate similarly, signifying a before and after through which the causal element is eliminated.

For Eisenstein, what is significant about the moment of “conflict” namely, is not that which is represented, but what is omitted. Eisenstein does not depict the moment in which the bullet hits the eye, but rather, the before and the after, suggesting that the continuity of filmic language, which is literally fractured by the traumatic event, is again reconstituted in the body of the spectator. Lee’s editing likewise suggests that the filmic continuity of *25th Hour* is fractured – in this case, by 9/11 – and yet, due to the incorporation of on-location images throughout the film, it is nonetheless an event that permeates, rearing its head, time and again.

What Eisenstein wishes to ultimately realize is a filmic language beyond montage, which “derives from the collision between two shots that are independent of each other.”¹⁷⁴ Borrowing from his understanding of Japanese ideograms, he suggests that he wants to achieve a

¹⁷² Sergei Eisenstein, “The Dramaturgy of Film Form,” *Film Theory and Criticism* Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen eds. (New York + Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004) 24.

¹⁷³ Ibid 35.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid 26.

“transcendental result.”¹⁷⁵ While Lee does not incorporate Eisensteinian montage on a shot-by-shot level, he does do so on a larger structural level, constantly causing opposing viewpoints to collide: not just in the instance of these two sequences, but also musically, thematically, and narratively.



Figure 41: "Tribute in Light," 2011.

Taken as a whole, the opening credit sequence depicts “Tribute in Light,” an art installation designed by artists Julian LaVerdiere and Paul Myoda, architects John Bennett and Gustavo Bonevardi of PROUN Space Studio, architect Richard Nash Gould, and lighting designer Paul Marantz. It is composed of eighty-eight light fixtures forming two shafts of light in the approximate location where the towers once stood. “Tribute in Light”, on clear nights, can be seen from up to sixty miles away.¹⁷⁶ Originally conceived as a twenty-eight day project¹⁷⁷ titled “Towers of Light,” beginning on March 11, 2002, the art installation, despite funding

¹⁷⁵ Ibid 27.

¹⁷⁶ Originally used for military purposes during World War I and World War II, they were first used to artistic effect by Alfred Speer during the Nurember rallies to form the so-called “Cathedral of Light.” Today, searchlights are more commonly associated with movie premieres and other public events and their inclusion here may be interpreted metacinematically. They are still featured as a design element in the logo for 20th Century Fox.

¹⁷⁷ The number of days was selected to each reflect one year that the Towers stood.

challenges,¹⁷⁸ has shone on every annual anniversary since the attacks. As David Ebony wrote in “Towers of Light for New York City” in 2001:

Without interfering with the ongoing recovery efforts, the light beams would add to the Manhattan skyline a suggestion of the commanding physical presence of the twin towers while evoking the immaterial essence of those killed in the attack, many of whose remains may never be found. Rather than a memorial however, *Towers of Light* is seen by the group as a symbol of hope and resiliency, a reclamation of New York City’s strength and identity.¹⁷⁹

The light beams function to simultaneously fill the void of the towers – literally producing light within the darkness – while, through their ephemerality, signifying that void. Lee, in his depiction, complicates the installation further.

The first shots of Lee’s opening credit sequence depict the art installation abstractly, initially as little more than geometric shapes from various angles, all rendered with a high degree of aesthetic sophistication. Gradually, the shots are framed from a greater and greater distance, eventually incorporating surrounding buildings, and finally, shown within the New York City skyline, bookended by the Empire State Building on one side, and the Statue of Liberty on the other. As Lee explains, “So we started to shoot as the sun was coming down and what we wanted to do was [...] really try to keep the stuff abstract, so it really wasn’t until halfway through the opening credit sequence, you pull back and you see what it is.”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁸On July 24, 2012, the Municipal Art Society announced that it would begin transitioning management of the project to the National September 11 Memorial and Museum. It is hoped that this transition will ensure future funding for the installation. The Municipal Art Society of New York, “Tribute in Light and the September 11 Memorial & Museum,” mas.org 24 July 2012, 10 Oct. 2014 <<http://mas.org/tribute-in-light-and-the-september-11-memorial-museum/>>.

¹⁷⁹ David Ebony, “Towers of Light for New York City,” *Art in America*, Nov. 2001, 35.

¹⁸⁰ Lee, “Director’s Commentary.”

Lee formulates a number of transitions within this sequence: from dusk to night, from close up to far away, and from abstract to real. These transitions, expressed visually, are enhanced by the introduction of the film's main musical theme, composed by long-time Lee collaborator, Terrence Blanchard. The theme consists of both Irish and Middle Eastern elements, which harmoniously play off of one another only to each build in intensity as the musical piece progresses, until they appear to be violently crashing into one another.

Eisenstein, in his explanation of montage points out that “In any event, each individual piece is already almost abstract in relation to the action as a whole. The more differentiated they are. The more abstract they become, aiming only at provoking a certain association.”¹⁸¹ Lee reverses this order, beginning with the abstraction and moving outward. In doing so, he begins with the absence of Sauret's void, gradually filling and contextualizing it. As Lee shifts from the denotative to the connotative, he increasingly attempts to fill the void with structure. However, returning to Doane, that possibility of structure simultaneously signals its opposite, for the structure Lee re-presents is composed of light, as ephemeral as the celluloid upon which his filmic image resides.



Figure 42: 25th Hour.

¹⁸¹ Eisenstein 39.



Figure 43: 25th Hour.



Figure 44: 25th Hour.



Figure 45: 25th Hour.



Figure 46: 25th Hour.



Figure 47: 25th Hour.

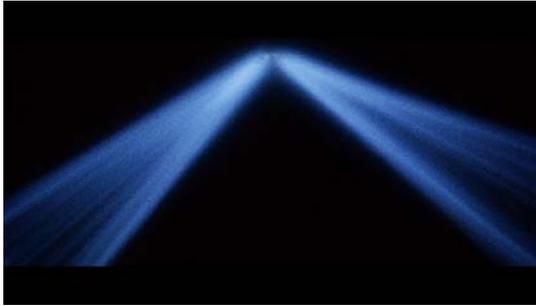


Figure 48: 25th Hour.



Figure 49: 25th Hour.



Figure 50: 25th Hour.



Figure 51: 25th Hour.



Figure 52: 25th Hour.



Figure 53: 25th Hour.



Figure 54: 25th Hour.

While the first shot in this sequence reveals an airplane flying towards the beams of light¹⁸², the final shot shows those beams extinguishing at midnight, dissolving into blackness. Though this sequence and the previous one together construct an Eisensteinian montage, the sequence itself also mirrors that structure, albeit more loosely. The connection between these two shots is thereby implicitly conveyed. Here however, the shots are not separated by a discontinuous cut, but by a series of shots tenuously linking them together. No matter how much Lee's characters struggle to move forward, the blackness lingers.

In occupying and reaching beyond the space where the towers once stood, the beams of light fill the void and gesture towards something resembling the possibility of hope. The beams' lack of material substance ultimately reinforces the void and their dissolution suggests that that which is abject/ abjected can never be truly banished (and certainly not with light – whether of the literal or metaphorical variety). In the end the emptiness and darkness which constitute the void must be encountered if they are to be transcended.

GROUND ZERO AND THE ABJECT

The void, which informs the previous sequence, is made manifest in the next major sequence to incorporate 9/11. Prior to meeting with Monty for his final night of freedom, his oldest friends, Frank Slattery (Barry Pepper) and Jacob Elinsky (Philip Seymour Hoffman) meet at Frank's apartment. Much of this scene is lifted directly from Benioff's novel and initial screenplay. However, Lee gives the scene a twist by placing Frank's apartment in TriBeCa, overlooking Ground Zero. As Frank and Jacob discuss Monty's future, they look out the window

¹⁸² Lee has said of this shot: "The plane flying through the shot, that was luck; we were just pointing a camera when it happened. The good stuff, the magical stuff you can't control. But half of filmmaking is luck. You just make your own luck. The cameras were rolling; we weren't fucking around holding our dicks, we were working." (Lee, That's My Story and I'm Sticking to It 356.)

of Frank's apartment and see "Ground Zero," – the discussion about Monty's bleak future unfolding in a single, continuous, shot, set against the soft focus of a gaping void, where the Twin Towers once stood.

In Lee's conception, "Ground Zero" is a void, an abyss, which overwhelms not just the fictional world of the characters, but the viewers' consciousness as well. Here, Lee returns us, and the characters, to the abject, which is not merely a corpse, but a hole in the ground in which the corpses have been ground to a dust. That return is quite literal, as he sates: "At the end of the scene, you see some workers, with rakes in their hands, looking for human remains. [...] A stupid journalist asked me, were those actors? Not actors, with everything we shot, it was real."¹⁸³ Despite the characters' best efforts to move forward, to free themselves of the "anchor" of a "past holding them back," they will never inhabit or even glimpse Carrie's Bradshaw's New York. Instead, time and again, they find themselves returning to the traumatic encounter. Once infected by death, the characters can not, and the film will not, shake its grip.

The void thus permeates and collides with the fictional world of the characters to remind us of the city's recent traumatic past:¹⁸⁴

JACOB: Jesus Christ.

SLATTERY: Yeah.

JACOB: *The New York Times* says the air is bad down here.

SLATTERY: Oh yeah? Well, fuck *The Times*. I read the *Post*. EPA says it's fine.

JACOB: Somebody's lying.

SLATTERY: Yeah.

¹⁸³ Lee, "Director's Commentary."

¹⁸⁴ Among the bonus material on the DVD, Lee includes a segment called "Ground Zero," consisting of raw, unprocessed footage of the site. Like Sauret's footage, there is no soundtrack beyond ambient noise.

JACOB: You gonna move?

SLATTERY: Fuck that, man. As much good money as I pay for this place? Hell, no. Tell you what. Bin Laden can drop another one right next door. I ain't moving.¹⁸⁵

Here, Frank's defiance is not just his own, but that of so many post-9/11 New Yorkers, refusing to allow terrorism to scare them into leaving. As the conversation switches to Monty, Jacob asks, "What are we gonna say to him?" "Say nothing," Frank tells him, "He's going to hell for seven years. All we can do is wish him luck. Just get him drunk. Make sure he has one last good night. That's it."¹⁸⁶



Figure 55: 25th Hour.

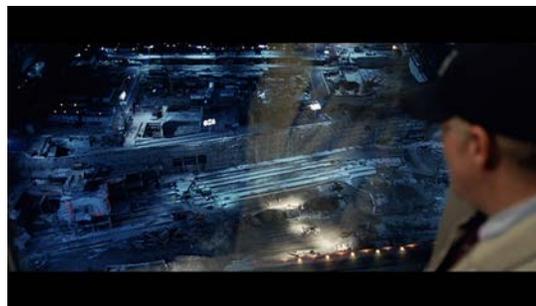


Figure 56: 25th Hour.

For much of this conversation, Frank's back is turned to the window, while Jacob stares ahead, transfixed by the Nietzschean abyss of the "pit," pulled back by Kristeva's abject. Both men are

¹⁸⁵ 25th Hour. Dir. Spike Lee. Buena Vista Pictures, 2002.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

reflected in the window, which frames them within a shot within a shot, overlaid by Blanchard's musical theme. They are simultaneously face to face with the abject, finding themselves reflected back, and, unlike Monty, separate from it. For them, distance is still possible.

As Kristeva writes, "discourse will seem tenable only if it confronts that otherness, a burden both repellent and repelled, a deep well of memory that is unapproachable and intimate: the abject."¹⁸⁷ Therefore, the spatial orientation of the characters constitutes not merely a visually compelling blocking choice by Lee, but also opposing means by which to make sense of the trauma: to face it or to turn away from it. "It's over after tonight, Jake," Frank tells him, "Wake the fuck up."¹⁸⁸ Though the conversation ends here, the sequence does not.

The silence, which had previously punctured their dialogue intermittently, now consumes the scene before being itself subsumed by Blanchard's theme as the camera, in a dolly shot, comes up between them, zooming over Jacob's shoulder to look over the ledge of the window, showing us a sequence of now clearly focused shots of "the pit."



Figure 57: 25th Hour.

¹⁸⁷ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 67.

¹⁸⁸ *25th Hour*, Lee.



Figure 58: 25th Hour.



Figure 59: 25th Hour.



Figure 60: 25th Hour.

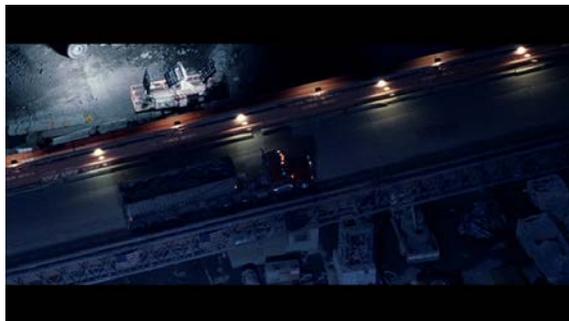


Figure 61: 25th Hour.



Figure 62: 25th Hour.



Figure 63: 25th Hour.

The shift in focus functions analogously to Lee's shift from the abstract to the real in the previously described opening sequence. While appearing to attempt to impose structure by bringing the "pit" evermore into focus, Lee again points to the elusiveness of that structure, as that which he focuses on ultimately can only represent the absence.

By any measure, the cleanup and recovery efforts at "Ground Zero" were massive: "2,700 vertical feet of structural materials had been compressed into a mountainous, smoldering pile of scraps of steel, splinters of concrete, tangled rebar, and unrecognizable material."¹⁸⁹ The fires, which reached 2000°F, and continued to burn for months, were not fully extinguished until December 19, 2001. At the height of these efforts, 5,000 individuals worked on the pile, including firefighters, police officers, engineers, construction workers, ironworkers, the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army, medical personnel, massage therapists and podiatrists.

¹⁸⁹ Blais and Rasic 70.

In Lee's film, that moment of urgency has passed and the "pile" now appears indistinguishable from any other construction site, albeit in scale.

However, whereas the opening sequence depicting "Tribute in Light" constituted an attempt to fill the void of the pit, Lee, in the parallel sequence depicted here not only unmask the futility of that attempt, but also, brings the characters, and the viewer, ever closer to a direct confrontation with the abject that the void represents. Here, the succession of shots moves in ever closer beginning with a crane and building to workers raking for human remains. Kristeva writes that "as in true theater, without makeup or masks, refuse and corpses *show me* what I permanently thrust aside in order to live."¹⁹⁰ And yet, it is not Kristeva's corpse that Lee brings us face to face with, but only the repetitive motion of a rake, hoping to catch some small fragment of human remains between its crude claws.

On the one hand, the inclusion of these images is not merely a stylistic choice, but a political one on the part of Lee, who sought to counteract the Hollywood policy of omitting and removing the Twin Towers from images of the New York City skyline in the wake of the attacks, which I have outlined above.¹⁹¹ On the other hand, our perspective as viewers, at this point, is identical with that of the fictional character. As Prince states, in this scene, as well as in the other inclusions of 9/11, "elements of the real [are] placed within the fictional story, as markers describing coordinates in time and the emotional resonances attaching to them."¹⁹² We see what Jacob sees and, as we do so, Blanchard's musical theme builds, amplifying the emotional content of the images. As Lee states, "There is you might say, an Arabic voice here, that you also heard in the opening credits, and I told Terrence early on that I want to add this voice, that's [...]"

¹⁹⁰ Kristeva, Powers of Horror 3.

¹⁹¹ Prince 82.

¹⁹² Ibid.

looming over New York City and that would be the voice of [...] “The Taliban [...] and you hear it throughout this scene.”¹⁹³

The voice, a metonym for the terrorists, pervades the film’s narrative framework. As Kristeva writes, “Any crime, because it draws attention to the fragility of the law is abject.” Here, that crime, the violent and premeditated murder of 2,996 men, women and children, is so heinous that it refuses to be banished – haunting the film’s images and characters, and ultimately, the viewer.

“IT ALL CAME SO CLOSE TO NEVER HAPPENING”

For Lee, the issue of how to confront the abject is formulated not merely in the manner in which his characters relate to it, but is incorporated structurally as well, in the juxtaposition of two very different visions of America: one fueled by hate, the other, a utopia which may never be realized. Like the dog, whose life is dependant upon Monty’s mercy, and by how Monty chooses to encounter the abject it represents, Lee appears to suggest that our own encounter with the abject is structured similarly, descending into hate if we turn left, or propelling us toward a utopian alternative if we turn right. Of course, Lee does not suggest these two possibilites for their own sakes. Rather, in pressing them into the structure of montage, he appears to suggest that they constitute the extremes of the scale upon which an encounter with the abject may be formulated.

The first of these extremes is dramatized in a scene at Brogan’s, a bar belonging to Monty’s father (Brian Cox), which is populated by real New York firefighters. As in the book, Monty’s father is a former firefighter and many of his patrons are likewise firefighters. In Lee’s

¹⁹³ Lee, “Director’s Commentary.”

post-9/11 expansion of the story however, these men occupy a vastly different world than the one originally conceived by Benioff, as evidenced by the previously described sequence depicting a makeshift shrine for the fallen firefighters. It is against this backdrop that Monty has a final dinner with his father, a man who has previously lost his wife to cancer, many of his former colleagues to a terrorist act, and now will lose his son to prison. The scene is informed by denial, as each character attempts to put on a brave face for the other, neither expressing his barely suppressed grief and rage. However, Lee depicts both of these emotions with explosive violence in the following sequence.



Figure 64: 25th Hour.

Monty goes to the bathroom, where he sees “Fuck You” scrawled into the bathroom mirror. “Fuck you too,” Monty says to his mirror image. Unlike the previous scene, in which the mirror simultaneously reveals and separates the abject, here that separation erodes. Monty does not find himself merely confronting the abject, which is, here, ultimately within himself, but briefly becoming indistinguishable from it as he launches into a hate-filled, vitriolic tirade. As Kristeva writes, “abjection is above all ambiguity [...] it does not really cut off the subject from what threatens it.”¹⁹⁴ Though structured as a monologue, the scene is, in reality a dialogue: The superego having been muted through Monty’s encounter with the abject, his id and ego are now locked in violent battle with one another. “Fuck you and this whole city and everyone in it,”

¹⁹⁴ Kristeva, Powers of Horror 9.

Monty declares. What Benioff refers to as Monty’s “profane valentine to the city”¹⁹⁵ spares no one: “panhandlers grubbing for money,” “the squeegee men,” “Sikhs and Pakistanis,” “the Chelsea boys,” “the Korean grocers,” “the Russians in Brighton Beach,” “the black-hatted Hassidim,” “the Wall Street brokers,” “those Enron assholes,” “Bush and Cheney,” “the Puerto Ricans,” “the Dominicans,” “the Bensonhurst Italians,” “the Upper East Side wives,” “the Uptown brothers,” “the corrupt cops,” “the priests,” “the church,” and “J.C.”¹⁹⁶



Figure 65: 25th Hour.



Figure 66: 25th Hour.

Each of Monty’s “fuck you’s” is visually illustrated, showing the viewer each respective group. The climax of Monty’s rage however, is reserved for Osama Bin Laden and Al Qaeda:

Fuck Osama bin Laden, Al Qaeda, and backward-ass cave-dwelling
fundamentalist assholes everywhere.

¹⁹⁵ David Benioff, “One More Hour: David Benioff tells how he turned the manuscript that nobody wanted into a Hollywood hit,” [theguardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/may/03/featuresreviews.guardianreview6) 2 May 2003, 10 Oct. 2014 <<http://www.theguardian.com/books/2003/may/03/featuresreviews.guardianreview6>>.

¹⁹⁶ 25th Hour, Lee.

On the names of innocent thousands murdered, I pray you spend the rest of eternity with your 72 whores roasting in a jet-fuel fire in hell.

You towel-headed camel-jockeys can kiss my royal Irish ass.¹⁹⁷

From there, his rage crescendos and is directed ever closer: at his friends, Frank and Jacob, at his girlfriend, Naturelle (Rosario Dawson), and at his father. Finally, with nowhere left to turn his rage, the pharmakos having failed to excise Monty's demons, Monty turns his rage directly at its source: "No. Fuck you, Montgomery Brogan. You had it all and you threw it away, you dumb fuck!"¹⁹⁸ In the end, Monty pulls himself free after all.

Kristeva writes, "There is nothing like the abjection of self to show that all abjection is in fact recognition of the want on which any being, meaning, language, or desire is founded."¹⁹⁹ The objects of Monty's hatred equally represent abjected parts of himself. It is therefore only logical that that hatred – the means of his abjection – would therefore turn full circle onto itself. Nonetheless, the damage is done, if not to Monty then certainly the viewer, for the mirror, as a metaphor, asks us to also turn our gaze away from Monty and within. Are we free of all of the prejudices catalogued by Lee? Is anyone? Can the abject really be contained within the celluloid image, or, are we not likewise compelled to look inside the mirror, bringing us face to face with our own abjections, albeit from a distance similar to that of Jacob and Slattery. As this scene reveals, that distance is illusory, at best.

Lee's use of reflections as part of his visual vocabulary – both in this scene and the previous one between Jacob and Slattery – only enhances the sense of the abject as the mirror stage features prominently in the works of both Lacan and Kristeva. However, whereas in Lacan,

¹⁹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹⁹ Kristeva, Powers of Horror 5.

the child begins the process of separation from the mother in the mirror stage itself, in Kristeva, the process of abjection begins prior to that stage. That the characters here are, time and again, forced to look into the mirror so to speak, suggests that the encounter with the abject is one which continues to haunt them.

The scene is remarkable by virtue of its sheer inclusion. Benioff, in writing the screenplay, had initially omitted this scene, which had been included in his novel. Lee, however, convinced him to re-insert the scene, and subsequently fought Disney to keep it in the final cut. As Benioff explains:

A lot of what he was saying was, ‘I really liked your book and I don’t understand why you weren’t more faithful to it in the script.’ Then he said, ‘You cut one of my favorite scenes! [...] Why did you cut that?’ I said I couldn’t figure out how anyone could shoot it and make it dramatic. He basically said, ‘Why don’t you let me worry about that? You just write it.’ And I did.²⁰⁰

Ironically, Lee had filmed a similar scene in *Do the Right Thing* (Lee, 1989), a film dramatizing the racial tensions between the African-American and Italian-American communities in the Bed-Stuy section of Brooklyn. It is unclear whether the striking similarity between Lee’s earlier scene and the one in Benioff’s novel is coincidental or not.²⁰¹ As Lee

²⁰⁰ Lee, *That’s My Story and I’m Sticking to It* 350-351.

²⁰¹ The sequence is self-referential in another regard. The hate-filled vitriol of Edward Norton’s character here offers a glimpse of another character portrayed by Norton, namely Derek Vinyard in *American History X* (Kaye, 1998). After murdering an African-American man, Norton is sent to jail, where he reforms. Upon release, he seeks to prevent his brother (Edward Norton) from following down a similar path. Furlong however, his killed and concludes the story in voiceover: “So, I guess this is where I tell you what I learned. My conclusion, right? Well, my conclusion is: hate is baggage. Life’s too short to be pissed off all of the time. It’s just not worth it. Derek says it’s good to always end a paper with a quote. He says someone else has already said it best, so if you can’t top it, steal from them and go out strong. So, I picked a guy I thought you’d like: We are not enemies, but friends. We must not be enemies Though passion may have strained, it must not break our bonds of affection. The mystic chords of memory will swell when again touched, as surely they will be, by the better angels of our nature.” (*American History X*, dir. Tony Kaye, New Line Cinema, 1998.)

explains, “Even though it’s similar to what we did in *Do the Right Thing*, it’s in the novel, so what we wanted to do was just expand it and not leave anybody out.”²⁰² In *Do the Right Thing* (Lee, 1989), the scene functions as a precursor to the film’s violent climax. In *25th Hour* however, the scene functions inversely. Here, the violence has already occurred and the magnified hatred it inspires has nowhere to turn but inward. If the abject is death infecting life, then here, that death has consumed life entirely.

Monty, concerned about sexual violence in prison, asks Frank to make him “ugly.” Unable to hurt his friend, Frank is provoked by Monty, until the former loses control, beating his friend senselessly. After the beating, as dawn spreads across the horizon, Frank is shown to be sitting on a park bench, taking stock, while Jacob, who has been given custody of Doyle, walks his new dog. “Cool dog,” a jogger tells him. “Cool dog,” he repeats to the dog, smiling.

The effects of the previous night are visible on all of their faces; all of their lives apply the lessons learned to enact changes in their lives, for Monty that moment has irretrievably passed. He has seen too much in his confrontation with the abject. This sequence is important because it constitutes a reversal of the film’s beginning, with Monty and the dog having switched roles. In Kristeva, “The abject confronts us [...] with those fragile states where man strays on the territories of *animal*.²⁰³” However, in his encounter with the abject, Monty has himself become abject, animal, as beaten and wounded as the animal he saved. Death infecting life.

He stumbles home, through a post-9/11 landscape, scored by the musical theme, returning us to the opening credits. Monty is now as battered as the city, which he must leave behind. All of his choices and agency have been stripped away, and all that remains is for him to fall into the arms of his girlfriend, Naturelle (Rosario Dawson). At home, he spends a few final

²⁰² Lee, “Director’s Commentary.”

²⁰³ Kristeva, *Powers of Horror* 12.

moments with Naturelle before his father arrives to drive him to prison. Though he attempts to resist both Naturelle's care and his father's help, he is powerless to resist either, his defenses now completely stripped. While he asks Naturelle to not visit him in prison, to move on, it remains unclear whether she will comply.

It is in Monty's drive to prison with his father that Lee depicts a utopian alternative to the previous hate-filled monologue. Looking out the window through his one good eye, Monty, in a montage similar to that of the earlier monologue, observes a diverse patchwork of New Yorkers. Now however, their faces are filled with warm smiles. As the car is stopped at a light, Monty spots a young African-American boy on his bus. Smiling, the boy spells out his name, Tom, on the steamed-up windows. Monty likewise spells out his name, and, as the car continues on, the two wave at one another. Utterly broken, Monty has, at least in this instant, transcended his rage and forged a genuine connection, however fleeting.

Kristeva writes:

Abjection then wavers between the fading away of all meaning and all humanity, burnt as by the flames of a conflagration, and the ecstasy of an ego that, having lost its Other and its objects, reaches, at the precise moment of this suicide, the height of harmony with the promised land.²⁰⁴

It is precisely this transformation that Monty undergoes throughout the movie. Phoenix-like, he rises from the flames which burn away all that he has abjected and it is only in this final moment, when he has been beaten like the animal he once rescued, that he catches a glimpse of "the promise land."

²⁰⁴ Kristeva, Powers of Horror 18.

It is no coincidence that the film begins and ends with the abject, as Lee appears to suggest that the only means out of the traumatic encounter is, to use terminology I will use more extensively in the following chapter, by “working through.” Lee therefore soon integrates this moment within a larger utopian alternative, as Monty’s father offers, “Say the word and I’ll keep going.” Their imagined journey, away from jail, and through the mythological landscape of the American West, is narrated by Monty’s father and fully illustrated by Lee, as a counterpoint to the previous monologue. Here, Monty’s father paints an alternative reality for his son, one in which he leaves the past behind and forms “a new life the way it should have been” with Naturelle in a distant town. He concludes by telling Monty:

And maybe one day, years from now, long after I’m dead and gone, reunited with your dear mother, you gather your whole family together and you tell the truth. Who you are and where you come from. You tell them the whole story. And then you ask them if they know how lucky they are to be there. All of you... It all came so close to never happening.²⁰⁵



Figure 67: *25th Hour*.

²⁰⁵ *25th Hour*, Lee.



Figure 68: 25th Hour.

These scenes serve as mirror images of one another, the one laying out a journey into darkness, the other a journey into light. Their connection is not merely thematic however. Rather, Lee establishes a visual connection by changing the film stock from the one he relies on throughout the majority of the movie, thereby making the images appear brighter and harsher, a visual highlighting of sorts, emphasizing the relation of these extremes to one another.

Throughout the film, the Irish and Middle Eastern elements of the musical theme conflict, each struggling for dominance. In this final sequence however, they function harmoniously. As Blanchard explains of the music generally, “In the music, I think Spike was trying to make a statement about America – all too often Islamic music and Irish music have been associated with just certain sections of American life, and I guess he was trying to say, ‘All of this is America,’”²⁰⁶ Lee likewise explains, “I told Terrence, I wanted to combine the Irish music with the Arabic thing. Historically, [the] New York City Fire Department has been Irish, so they took the biggest hit, the firemen. So, I wanted to have several times in the music where we would have [...] Irish themes playing counterpart to the Arabic voice.” Here, “Ground Zero,” then, constitutes not just the ultimate consequence of a violent clash of civilizations, but also a mirror through which the notion of violent conflict may be elucidated and transcended. In *Do the Right Thing*, (Lee, 1989) that conflict was rooted racially, with the themes of “love” and “hate” woven

²⁰⁶ Lee, *That’s My Story and I’m Sticking to It* 358.

throughout. Here, Lee paints a broader and more nuanced canvas, inherently connecting the personal to the political. Just as Monty must honestly take stock of his life and of the decisions that have led him here, Lee appears to suggest that we, as a society, must, like Jacob and Monty, gaze into the abject of “Ground Zero.”

OVERLAP EDITING AND “THE ABYSS OF THE FUTURE”

What makes Lee so sophisticated (and so misunderstood) as a filmmaker is that while he revels in mapping out these sorts of juxtapositions, he ultimately leaves their navigation to the viewer. Nonetheless, *25th Hour* does not leave the viewer without a compass. Throughout, the director makes use of instances of jarring overlap editing or, as Lee refers to it, “double cutting,”²⁰⁷ a technique which repeats plot time, often, as in this case, from essentially similar angles, within an otherwise fluid visual continuity, a means by which to wrest some life from the encounter with the abject.

The first instance of this is located in the beginning of the film, when Monty – pre-9/11 – slams the car trunk, effectively ending that period before transitioning into the post-9/11 narrative. The remaining instances however, scattered throughout the film, serve as a collective response to this closure. Though the technique dates back to Edwin S. Porter’s *The Life of an American Fireman* and was used by Eisenstein in *Battleship Potemkin* (1925), overlap editing is now more commonly known due to the manner in which it was frequently featured in Hong Kong action films of the 1980s and 1990s, and the subsequent influence of those works on Hollywood mainstream films including *Terminator 2: Judgment Day* (Cameron, 1991), *Mission Impossible 2* (Woo, 2000), *Gone in Sixty Seconds* (Sena, 2000), *The Last Samurai* (Zwick,

²⁰⁷ Lee, “Director’s Commentary.”

2003), and *Death Proof* (Tarantino, 2007). While the technique now, more than a decade after Lee's film, is used largely in the context of spectacle, here, Lee and his editor, Barry Alexander Brown, apply it primarily in intimate instances of connection and embrace. In other words, a shot of two individuals, e.g. Monty and Naturelle, is overlapped with an immediate repetition of an essentially identical shot, thereby repeating the image and extending the temporal space it occupies. On one level, these instances anticipate Monty's loss of intimate human contact once he enters prison. On another level, these instances provide a counterpoint to the violence woven throughout the film. Here, the antidote to hatred is not so much love, as it is dialogue, honest examination, and personal responsibility.

In a prophetic *New York Times* article entitled, "Aftermath: Peering into the Abyss of the Future,"²⁰⁸ journalist John Rockwell examines the role the arts can play in responding to the attacks of September 11, 2001:

Artists, especially, whom we presume to be particularly sensitive to our dilemmas and our dreams, are peering apprehensively into the abyss of the future. What do they, and we who love the arts and believe they are important, see there? What is the role of the arts in the present crisis, and how will the arts change in response to the new circumstances in which we live?

He adds:

But art has its own importance; it stakes its own claim. We are told that in times of crisis, we need to rely on faith. Art can be a faith, too, from which some of us draw the deepest solace. A terrible consequence of this new climate of fear and

²⁰⁸ John Rockwell, "Peering into the Abyss of the Future," *New York Times on the Web* 23 Sept. 2001, 20 March 2012 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/23/arts/23ROCK.html?pagewanted=all>>. The article subsequently served as a jumping-off point for Noam Chomsky, in a talk held in Palo Alto, CA on March 22, 2002.

revenge would be for our enemies, blind and intolerant, to turn us into them. We must retain our values, and those values very much embrace the sometimes messy creativity of the arts.²⁰⁹

25th Hour is located within this divide – between what the artistic responses to 9/11 are and what they can be, between how they perpetuate the narratives of 9/11 and how they challenge them.

Lee's film, structured as an encounter with the abject, is, I argue, a resistance of sorts, a demand that we "retain our values." In the words of Shakespeare, the arts can "hold the mirror up to nature" as it were, but they also carry within them the capacity to change reality itself. As Kristeva atates, "The various means of *purifying* the abject – the various catharses – make up the history of religions, and end up with that catharsis par excellence called art, both on the far and near side of religion."²¹⁰ It is therefore only through art that the abject can truly be encountered. If 9/11 constituted a discursive and epistemological rupture, one which has since been sloppily mended, *25th Hour* asks us to examine the instances in which the mending doesn't quite hold, providing us with an opportunity to encounter the abject for ourselves.

²⁰⁹ Ibid.

²¹⁰ Kristeva, Powers of Horror 9.

4.0 CHAPTER THREE: “THE FALLING MAN,” NARRATIVE COHESION AND THE AVERTED GAZE

The structural engineers of the trade center had anticipated that the towers would be able to respond to the stress of an impact from the airplane. No one had designs, however, for the people inside.²¹¹

(Jim Dwyer + Kevin Flynn, *102 Minutes*)

Nobody heard him, the dead man,
But still he lay moaning;
I was much further out than you thought
And not waving but drowning.²¹²

(Stevie Smith, *Not Waving but Drowning*)

Make no mistake about people who leap from burning windows. Their terror of falling from a great height is still just as great as it would be for you or me standing speculatively at the same window just checking out the view; i.e. the fear of falling remains a constant. The variable here is the other terror, the fire’s flames: when the flames get close enough, falling to death becomes the slightly less terrible of two terrors. It’s not desiring the fall; it’s terror of the flames. And yet nobody down on the sidewalk, looking up and yelling ‘Don’t!’ and ‘Hang on!’, can understand the jump. Not really. You’d have to have personally been trapped and felt flames to really understand a terror way beyond falling.²¹³

(David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest*)

BETWEEN TWO TOWERS

Though the towers now loom as icons within our collective and cultural imagination, this was not always the case. In fact, the stature and meaning of the towers proved to be as controversial and contested in their birth as it would later, in their death. Initially conceived in

²¹¹ Jim Dwyer and Kevin Flynn, *102 Minutes: The Untold Story of the Fight to Survive Inside the Twin Towers* (NY: Times Books. Henry Holt and Company, 2005) 40.

²¹² Stevie Smith, *The Collected Poems* (NY: Penguin Books, 1975) 303.

²¹³ David Foster Wallace, *Infinite Jest* (New York: Back Bay Books, 2006) 696.

1961 and opened in 1973, the buildings would eventually come to serve as synecdoches for the Manhattan skyline.²¹⁴ However, architectural critics of the time dismissed “the Twin Towers as square, steel shafts clad in aluminum rising from a low cluster of steel-and glass buildings...They were seen as symbols of monumental ego, corporate extravagance, and terrible waste.”^{215 216}

Much of that changed however, on the morning of August 7, 1974, when French high-wire artist Philippe Petit, with the help of a number of accomplices, secretly strung a 450-pound, 3/4" 6×19 IWRC (independent wire rope core) steel cable between the North and South Towers and, shortly after 7:15 am, over the course of forty-five minutes, made eight crossings between them.²¹⁷ He walked, sat, and even laid down on the wire, assisted only by a twenty-six-foot long, fifty-five pound balancing pole. He used neither a safety harness nor a net.^{218 219}

Though Petit was arrested immediately after his wirewalk and charged with criminal trespassing and disorderly conduct, the New York district attorney dismissed both charges under the condition that Petit provide a public performance for children in Central Park. Additionally,

²¹⁴ In fact, the Twin Towers constituted the single most photographed subject found on souvenir postcards of New York City.

²¹⁵ Angus Kress Gillespie, Twin Towers. The Life of New York's World Trade Center (New Brunswick + London: Rutgers University Press, 1999) 4, 10.

²¹⁶ Ironically, it was these very same characteristics, which added to the towers' target attractiveness for terrorists.

²¹⁷ Petit had previously wirewalked the Notre Dame, in 1971, and the Sydney Harbor Bridge, in 1973.

²¹⁸ To offer some perspective, when Nik Wallenda became the first person to traverse Niagara Falls on a high wire on June 15, 2012, he did not have to resort to the years of planning Petit did, as his walk was officially sanctioned by the Niagara Parks Commission after a two-year legal battle involving both Canada and the United States. As a condition of ABC TV's airing of the walk, Wallenda, for the first time in his career, agreed to wear a safety harness. Despite concerns that he would remove the harness mid-walk, Wallenda did not do so.

²¹⁹ Petit is not the only daredevil to have been drawn in by the towers. However, he was the first. Roughly two and a half years later, on May 26, 1977, George Willig (also known as “the human fly” or “the spiderman”) climbed the South Tower using specially constructed clamps, which fit into the window washing tracks. The climb took three and a half hours. As in the instance of Petit, police (as well as a suicide expert) were sent, but Willig was subsequently asked to sign a piece of metal on the observation deck. Though Willig expressed regret about his climb in the immediate aftermath of 9/11, believing that it may have contributed to the towers' target attractiveness, he later recanted those statements. On May 30, 1983 Willig's efforts were replicated by Dan Goodwin, who climbed the North Tower using a series of suction cups and a camming device. On July 22, 1975, Owen Quinn became the first person to jump from the North Tower using a parachute. He was subsequently arrested by the Port Authority Police, but after 19 court appearances, the case was finally dropped.

Petit was asked to meet with security officials of the World Trade Center to provide them with details of how he had managed his “coup.” While Petit’s actions exposed significant flaws in the security protocol of the World Trade Center, his plot – in stark contrast to that of the nineteen men who would simultaneously hijack four commercial jetliners decades later – did not constitute a threat to the buildings or to the lives of those inside and he was subsequently granted a lifetime pass to the observation deck and asked to sign a beam on the rooftop of the south tower. Considered eyesores prior to that morning, the towers gained iconic stature within the Manhattan skyline following Petit’s walk.

Petit’s hubris, in cheating death, spilled over onto the towers themselves. Atop his wire, Petit focused the gaze of spectators upwards, away from the corporate greed and political wrangling, which had erected the towers, and towards the sky for which the towers appeared to reach. For a brief time, in fact, between 1972 (the year of their completion) and 1974 (the year in which the Sears Tower in Chicago was erected), the Twin Towers stood as the tallest buildings in the world, reaching higher than any other human made structure.²²⁰

Petit’s focus, though, was more personal. Throughout *To Reach the Clouds*²²¹, his memoir of his walk between the towers, he conceptualizes the buildings anthropomorphically. In his conception, the towers function simultaneously as opponents to be conquered and as beings, with which Petit seeks, through his wire and his body, to forge a harmonious symbiosis. This symbiosis is made even more explicit in *Man on Wire* – the 2008 documentary chronicling Petit’s wirewalk and the preparations leading up to it – in which a split screen couples the

²²⁰ As of this writing, the newly erected 1 World Trade Center once again stands as the world’s tallest skyscraper, at 1776 feet.

²²¹ *To Reach the Clouds* was originally published in 2004. Following the release of the documentary film *Man on Wire* (Marsh, 2008), the award-winning documentary based on Petit’s memoir, the book was re-released as *Man on Wire*. The two editions of the book are essentially the same. Because I will reference both the memoir and the documentary in this passage, to avoid confusion, I will refer to the memoir by its previous title.

building of the Twin Towers with footage from Petit's childhood. As Annie Allix, Petit's girlfriend at the time of the wirewalk, states in *Man on Wire*, "He could no longer carry on living without having at least tried to... to conquer these towers. Because it felt like these towers belonged to him. It was as if they had been built especially for him." Petit's wirewalk between the towers, I argue, both anticipates and re-narrativizes the "Falling Man" photograph, which will be the focus of this chapter.



Figure 69: *Man on Wire*.



Figure 70: *Man on Wire*.

On the one hand, Petit's oft stated sense of fatalism foreshadows the deaths of those who would jump from the towers decades later, as alone in their deaths as Petit atop the wire:²²² "The fact that the wirewalking activity is framed by death is great because then you have to take it seriously. It's a little half a centimeter of mistake or a quarter second of inattention and you lose your life." Only the wire and Petit's daring ability to navigate it – acquired throughout years of

²²² Prior to 9/11, there are no known reports of suicides from the Twin Towers.

planning, research, and training – separated him from what he repeatedly describes as the “void,” the line between life and death thus reduced to a wire fraught with metaphorical implications. On the other hand, Petit’s very ability to navigate the wire, to remain firmly on the other side of the “void,” restructures the traumatic event of the 9/11 jumpers’ deaths foreshadowed by his performance – particularly as it is re-presented in the 2008 documentary *Man on Wire*. In traversing the towers, Petit formulates a psychologically more tenable alternative to the finality of the jumpers’ deaths. That is, by straddling the literal and metaphorical line between life and death – a line that is further blurred by the fact that the ephemeral moment is frozen on film – Petit enacts a momentary resurrection, if not of those who died, then certainly of the towers themselves.²²³ This chapter seeks to examine the “Falling Man” photograph at this Petitian intersection: between the mortality of which it reminds the viewer and the attempts in literature, film, and performance to restructure the traumatic moment represented by the image.

Psychologist Nigel C. Hunt writes, “If a person is going to resolve traumatic problems that have arisen because of the fundamental rift that occurs because of a traumatic event, then they need, if they are not going to use an effective avoidant strategy, to develop a narrative of the event.”²²⁴ Narrativization, then, constitutes a means by which to not only engage the traumatic event, but also by which to fill the “fundamental rift” left in its wake with meaning. Theatre scholar Joseph Roach terms this process “surrogation:”

In the life of a community, the process of surrogation does not begin or end but constitutes the social fabric. Into the cavities created by loss through death or

²²³ This resurrection extends to the spectators of the wirewalk as well. As Annie Allix explains in the documentary, “Our eyes were absolutely glued to the towers. I was looking out for the slightest movement, but we couldn’t see a thing. It was absolutely terrifying.” Allix’s words could apply equally to those, who 27 years later, witnessed streams of people falling from those same towers. However, in Allix’s case the terror is transmuted into wonder. (*The Falling Man*, dir. Henry Singer, Channel 4 Television Corporation, 2006.)

²²⁴ Hunt 89.

other forms of departure, I hypothesize, survivors attempt to fit satisfactory alternatives.²²⁵

Roach's work is useful insofar as it links narrativization to performance; however, it is problematic in that he conceives narrativization as engagement and avoidance simultaneously. On the one hand, according to Roach, narrativization serves as a means by which to confront and imaginatively restructure the traumatic event. On the other hand, this restructuring necessarily excises and omits alternative discourses – those components of the traumatic event, which can no longer be reconciled with the newly formulated narrative. I am interested, in this chapter, in instances of narrativization, which, rather than omitting alternative or forgotten discourses, seek to reintegrate them.

In this regard, I am informed by a 2009 study by psychologists Jonathan M. Adler and Michael J. Poulin titled, "The Political Is Personal: Narrating 9/11 and Psychological Well-Being." Drawing from a sampling of 395 adult participants, Adler and Poulin identified three different narrative mechanisms in response to the traumatic events of 9/11: contamination, redemption, and closure. Contamination occurs when "a good or positive event or state becomes bad or negative. That which was good becomes contaminated, ruined, undermined, undone, or spoiled."²²⁶ Redemption occurs when "the account moves from a demonstrably negative scene to a related and demonstrably positive scene."²²⁷ Closure is defined as "coherent resolution."²²⁸ Not surprisingly, Adler and Poulin found that psychological well-being in participants two months after 9/11 was highest in instances in which narrative redemption or closure had been achieved.

²²⁵ Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1996) 2.

²²⁶ Jonathan M. Adler and Michael J. Poulin, "The Political Is Personal: Narrating 9/11 and Psychological Well-Being," *Journal of Personality* Vol. 77, No. 4 (August 2009) 914.

²²⁷ *Ibid* 913.

²²⁸ *Ibid* 915.

“The Falling Man” photograph and the controversy surrounding it mark a seminal moment in the discourse of 9/11, not only in how the attacks were experienced, but also, more importantly, in how their aftermath was subsequently narrativized. By examining “The Falling Man” and the moment and circumstances of its conception, publishing and subsequent censorship more closely, we may begin to locate and identify the mechanisms by which we formulate avoidant narratives, thereby allowing us to ask and address the very questions which these narratives prevent us from asking. We may, through such a process, address the tragedy more directly. A narrative of 9/11, I argue, which omits the deaths of the “jumpers” specifically and the horror of that day more generally, will ultimately fail in its attempts to provide anything resembling meaningful and lasting closure. It is also a narrative easily subsumed within the context of the “war on terror.”

My chapter seeks to examine the multiple ways in which the “Falling Man” photograph functions (or fails to function) in its ability to confront the trauma it seeks to represent. Journalist Tom Junod, in his own discussion of the photograph, posits:

What that day needed more than anything else was, essentially, what a lot of other wars had, which was a tomb for the unknown. What makes the Tomb for the Unknown Soldier so poignant is the fact that he is unknown. It’s not the fact that he is identified, it’s the fact that one has been made to stand for many. When Richard [Drew] took that picture, I believe that he took a picture that stood as a Tomb for the Unknown Soldier for that day.²²⁹

Tombs for the Unknown Soldier first emerged as a commemorative practice after World War I, and are now common throughout the world. These tombs typically contain the remains of a

²²⁹ Singer.

single, unidentified soldier in order to commemorate the lives of all the soldiers killed in the same violent conflict, but whose remains could likewise not be identified. In the United States alone there are four such tombs: two in Arlington National Cemetery (the Tomb of the Unknowns and the Civil War Unknowns Monument), one in Washington Square in Philadelphia (Tomb of the Unknown Revolutionary War Soldier), and one at Beauvoir in Biloxi, Mississippi (Tomb of the Unknown Confederate Soldier) While the anonymity of the remains is essential to the symbolism of the tomb, numerous efforts have been made in recent years to identify remains, particularly by soldiers' families who seek certainty about their loved ones. At the Tomb for the Unknowns in Arlington for example, in 1998, the buried remains were identified as those of Lt. Michael Blassie, who had been killed during the Vietnam War. His remains were removed and subsequently reburied, with full military honors, in Jefferson National Cemetery, Mississippi, near his hometown.²³⁰

While Junod seeks to evoke the symbolic anonymity and potentialities associated with the Tomb for the Unknown, i.e. that “one has been made to stand for many,” he inadvertently points to the difficulties inherent in abstracting a human life. Whether the unknown is a fallen soldier or a civilian, who took his or her own life by jumping from the burning towers of the World Trade Center on 9/11, surviving family members and loved ones often seek closure and certainty. However that “coherent resolution” identified by Adler and Poulin, as I will demonstrate in this chapter, can only function on an individual level, not collectively.

Yet, as Adler and Poulin posit, “social and political events are also narrated in individuals' personal stories, and often they draw on cultural templates for how to narrate

²³⁰ US National Library of Medicine, “Michael Blassie Unknown No More,” Visible Proofs. Forensic Views of the Body, 16 Feb. 2006, 18, Nov. 2012 <<https://www.nlm.nih.gov/visibleproofs/galleries/cases/blassie.html>>.

them.”²³¹ Consequently, while I will be discussing the photograph and the reality it depicts, my discussion will focus on a number of these “cultural templates” – i.e. films, novels, and performances – to examine how they re-present the image of “The Falling Man” and how these representations may be understood narratively.

“THE EYES WERE EVERYWHERE”

To date, the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, specifically those on the twin towers of the WTC, constitute the single most photographed moment in history. As David Friend, the former director of photography for *Life*, writes in the beginning of *Watching the World Change: The Stories Behind the Images of 9/11*, “The eyes were everywhere.”²³² Friend cites Nielsen Media Research in stating, ““80 million prime-time households tuned in to the main national TV news outlets that Tuesday.”²³³ Further, ABC, NBC, and CBS and their affiliated networks ran live coverage for the duration of the day and “CNN’s domestic coverage was beamed throughout the world that day, available in 170 million households in more than two hundred countries.”²³⁴

Occurring at a time when the visual landscape was itself undergoing a profound transformation due to the rise of new technologies such as digital cameras and cell phone cameras, 9/11 was not only documented to a greater degree than had been previously possible, but the event was also directly *transmitted* as it was happening.²³⁵ These images – both

²³¹ Adler and Poulin 904.

²³² David Friend, *Watching the World Change: The Stories Behind the Images of 9/11* (NY: Farrar Straus and Giroux, 2006) ix.

²³³ Friend 32.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ In fact, the only two historical events comparable in scope as televised trauma are the 1963 assassination of President John F. Kennedy and the 1986 space shuttle Challenger explosion. However, in the case of the Kennedy assassination, the public was first informed of the shooting ten minutes after it had occurred – by which point Kennedy was likely already dead (though he was not declared as such until a half hour after the shooting so that – at Jacqueline Kennedy’s insistence – last rites could be administered). The death itself was not announced until more

collectively and individually – constitute a vast historical record of the events. Film scholar Stephen Prince explains, “One hundred and two minutes elapsed between the time that American Airlines Flight 11 hit the North Tower and it collapsed (the South Tower fell first), providing New Yorkers and media news crews with ample time to film and photograph the crisis.”²³⁶ Within those one hundred and two minutes – ironically, the duration of a typical feature film – television news media not only almost continuously replayed shots of the planes hitting the towers and of the subsequent collapse of the buildings, but also increasingly structured and narrated that traumatic repetition as a spectacle presented to viewers at home.

The reality of the events thus indistinguishable from their representation, I argue that it is only in a return to the abject, as discussed in the previous chapter, that what Domick LaCapra, borrowing from Freud, terms a “working through” of the event may be possible: “Here one has a work on memory that is crucial for the constitution of agency.”²³⁷ In other words, agency can only be acquired in the individual encounter with the abject, i.e. those very aspects of the trauma which threaten to shatter the self, not in its avoidance or surrogation. However, as Carolyn Brothers writes in *War and Photography: A Cultural History*, “Meaning heres not in the

than an hour after the shooting. The Zapruder film of the JFK assassination was not developed until after the event. Stills of the film were published by *Life* magazine a week after the assassination and the footage itself was made public later still, in 1969, at the trial of Clay Shaw, and not broadcast until 1975 on ABC. Instead, most newscasts in the assassination’s aftermath featured journalists discussing the events or interviewing eyewitnesses. Further, while it may be argued that the murder of Lee Harvey Oswald, Kennedy’s assassin, *was* televised live, its impact, though shocking, did not constitute a comparable trauma. The Challenger disaster, though widely publicized by NASA in the months prior to the launch, and broadcast live by CNN and in schools via NASA television, wasn’t seen live by nearly as many people as 9/11. Unlike the events in the twin towers, which unfolded over an expanded period of time, allowing more and more people to tune in as the news spread, the Challenger shuttle exploded less than two minutes after takeoff. Further, in 1986, cable television was still in its infancy, with far less subscribers than today. Most people saw footage of the Challenger disaster in reruns. Apart from the official footage, only two amateur films – discovered in 2010 and 2012 – are known to exist. With regard to the Kennedy assassination, a total of thirty-two photographers (one of whom was a professional) and only a handful of individuals with moving picture cameras were present in Dealey Plaza.

²³⁶ Prince 8.

²³⁷ Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1994) 201.

photograph itself, but in the relationship between the photograph and the matrix of culturally specific beliefs and assumptions to which it refers.”²³⁸ In the instance of “The Falling Man,” those “culturally specific beliefs and assumptions” inform and structure the “artifacts” I have selected as case studies. Though worthy of significant analysis in their own right, I am interested here in how the case studies operate as a “matrix” in which a “working through” is possible. It is therefore precisely at that intersection that I wish to position my attempt at “working-through.”

As I have suggested above, the most iconic, yet simultaneously controversial images, which emerged from the morning of September 11, 2001, (and which I therefore choose to focus on) were those of people falling from the towers.²³⁹ Their escape routes blocked by heat and smoke, these individuals chose to leap out of windows and thereby – in the simultaneously briefest and longest of ten-second liminal moments between the abstract death that awaits us all in some distant future and the imminent reality of their own deaths – exchange one certain form of that death with another. How conscious this exchange may have been in individual cases may be debatable, but that it occurred – not only once, but in hundreds of instances – is an undeniable certainty.

Of the multitude of images of people falling from the towers, one in particular stood out and came to represent the others. “The Falling Man” is the title of a photograph of a man falling

²³⁸ Caroline Brothers, *War and Photography: A Cultural History* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997) 23.

²³⁹ September 11, 2001 marked the first time that anyone, let alone hundreds of people, is known to have jumped from the Twin Towers to commit suicide. By contrast, the Empire State Building has seen more than thirty suicide attempts – the majority of which have been successful – since it was first opened in 1931. The first of these, a laid off worker, occurred prior to the building’s completion and the most recent attempt – this one unsuccessful – occurred on April 25, 2013. The most notable of these suicides is perhaps that of Evelyn McHale in 1947. Her corpse was photographed by Robert Wiles and the image was subsequently published by *Life* magazine on May 12, 1947. Andy Warhol later made use of the image in a work entitled *Suicide (Fallen Body.)* These suicides have continued despite the erection of a fence around the observation terrace in 1947. In the case of the World Trade Center, the viewing deck was elevated and set back from the roof, on which the anti-suicide fence was placed. This difference in design likely accounts for the lack of suicide attempts from the Twin Towers prior to 9/11, when the “jumpers” had to break windows in order to jump. It is uncertain if windows were broken with this explicit purpose as there are numerous reports of people breaking windows to counteract the heat and smoke.

head-first from one of the towers.²⁴⁰ The man in the image is dark-skinned, of average build. He wears a white top with (as revealed in subsequent frames) an orange shirt underneath, black pants and black shoes. His arms are at his sides, with his left leg bent back at the knee and his right leg also tilted back, though at a significantly smaller angle than the left.

What is remarkable about the image – and what likely accounts for its iconicity – is the near perfect symmetry of its composition. The man’s body is situated at the exact point in the image where the two towers seem to meet, forming a perfect parallel to the verticality of the buildings themselves. However, the sense of beauty and of the sublime evoked by the composition itself stand in violent contrast to the horror of the man’s death. As Henry Singer, director of *The Falling Man*, a documentary film based on Junod’s article states, “It’s the most horrific moment but there is a calmness to the image, And I think this is one of the reasons why it is so memorable. It captures the last moments of a person’s life but it does so in a way that is peaceful and beautiful at the same time.”²⁴¹ The image is both horrific and sublime. Its force is derived from the collision of these two facets.

In order to make sense of the photograph, it is useful to first briefly contextualize the reality it depicts, not only of the “falling man” himself, but also of the countless other individuals who died that day. There are no definitive numbers to suggest how many individuals died in this manner. According to a 2002 “USA Today” estimate, “at least 200 people jumped to their deaths that morning...”²⁴² To be sure, those who jumped did not survive, nor did most others on the floors from which people jumped. In most instances, simply being on one of the floors above the

²⁴⁰ As previously mentioned, the title is derived from an October 2003 Esquire magazine article by Tom Junod about the image. The article was subsequently nominated for a National Magazine Award.

²⁴¹ Adam Harrison Levy, “The Falling Man: An Interview with Henry Singer,” *Observatory* 9 Sept. 2011, 9 Sept. 2011 <<http://observatory.designobserver.com/feature/the-falling-man-an-interview-with-henry-singer/30048/>>.

²⁴² Dennis Cauchon and Martha Moore, “Desperation Forced a Horrific Decision,” *USA Today* 2 Sept. 2002. 1 Dec. 2011 <http://usatoday30.usatoday.com/news/sept11/2002-09-02-jumper_x.htm>.

impact zone meant certain death. Whether these individuals jumped, fell, were blown out by the force of impact, incinerated, or crushed in the buildings' collapse, in one way or another, death found them all. The choice to jump marked one of the few – perhaps the only – remaining moment(s) of agency left in a world that had, upon the impact of American Airlines Flight 11 and United Airlines Flight 175²⁴³ with the North and South Towers respectively, instantaneously transported its inhabitants to its final chamber.

The first “jumpers,” as they were soon labeled, appeared only two minutes after the impact of American Airlines 11 at 8:48 a.m.²⁴⁴ and continued to fall in a steady stream until 10:28 a.m. – literally the final seconds before the North tower's collapse.²⁴⁵ Yet, despite their numbers, people jumped from only a handful of locations.²⁴⁶ While all of these 10-second trajectories ended in the same manner, there were significant nuances. Some people did not jump at all, but were literally pushed out of the towers – either by the force of the initial impact of one of the airplanes, or as an inadvertent consequence of the growing crush of people who clamored for air as the heat and smoke became unbearable.²⁴⁷ Others, disoriented, are said to have

²⁴³ Following the terrorist attacks of 9/11, both American Airlines and United Airlines changed the flight numbers for future flights on the same route.

²⁴⁴ Dwyer and Flynn 18.: “Then they saw the people coming out the windows, driven toward air, and into air. The plane had struck not two minutes earlier.”

²⁴⁵ Cauchon and Moore.

²⁴⁶ “Most came from the north tower's 101st to 105th floors, where the Cantor Fitzgerald bond firm had offices, and the 106th and 107th floors where a conference was underway at the Windows on the World restaurant. Others leaped from the 93rd to 100th floor offices of Marsh & McLennan insurance company. [...] There were several reasons more people jumped from the north tower than from the south. The fire was more intense and compact in the north tower. The jet hit higher, so the smoke was concentrated in 15 floors compared with 30 floors in the south tower, which was hit on the 78th through the 84th floors [in contrast to the 94th through 98th floors of the north tower]. The north tower also stood longer: 102 minutes vs. 56 minutes. And twice as many people were trapped on the north tower's upper floors than in the south tower, where occupants had 16 ½ minutes to evacuate before the second jet hit.” – Ibid.

²⁴⁷ Conventional wisdom in a fire disaster suggests that windows should, in fact, be broken in case of an emergency. However, this action should occur concurrently with holes being smashed in the roof, for proper ventilation to take place. In the case of the Twin Towers therefore, the breaking of the windows, while providing short-term relief to those trapped, actually exacerbated the fire. Further, the phenomenon of jumping from windows to escape fire is, unfortunately, a common one, referred to as “fire or flight.” As M. Amico, V. Geraci, A. Mosca and M. Masellis write in “Psychological reactions in fire disaster emergencies: hypotheses and operational guidelines: “When fire

stumbled backwards accidentally, while some appeared to face their deaths with a sort of grim determination. For instance, at least one pair – a man and a woman – jumped together, holding hands. Another man jumped as though he were cannon-balling into a pool. One woman clutched her handbag.²⁴⁸ Finally, a handful of people – perhaps due to denial, perhaps in desperation – attempted to extend the boundary between life and death by using tablecloths or drapes as makeshift parachutes. At least one firefighter is said to have been killed when he was hit by a falling body²⁴⁹ and the fire department had to move its command post and alter the escape route for those exiting the buildings in order to avoid the falling debris and bodies.

The remains of the “jumpers” were subsequently discovered on the roof of the adjacent Marriott hotel, atop the awning covering the circular VIP driveway and in the plaza – where the people exiting the buildings were given a first-hand glimpse of the gruesome spectacle.²⁵⁰ The actual sight of people jumping proved so unreal that countless bystanders did not at first realize that these were not in fact birds flying, but human bodies falling. One witness, James Logozzo,

breaks out in a closed environment [...], people’s immediate reaction is to escape, a desire to get away from the danger as fast as possible.” In M. Masellis, M. S.W.A. Gunn, The Management of Mass Burn Casualties and Fire Disasters: Proceedings of the First International Conference on Burns and Fire Disasters (Dordrecht, Boston and London: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 1992) 279.

²⁴⁸ One possible explanation may be that the woman wished to facilitate the subsequent identification of her remains. Ironically, the remains of the jumpers were more easily identified than those of their colleagues who remained in the buildings as their bodies were not subject to the same type of trauma associated with the buildings’ collapse, nor were their remains, in many cases, subject to the same levels of decomposition of DNA. At least in a handful of instances, the remains of jumpers were removed from the site before the collapse of the towers.

²⁴⁹ Tony Sanseviro of Engine 216 recalls the death of his colleague, Danny Suhr, the first firefighter killed on 9/11: “So, as we’re walking [...] I just hear this whistle combing, like a bomb 9... I see a body come flying by and it tags him in the head. I think just the foot caught him and I remember watching Danny fall back and I remember [...] as this person came in and hit they crashed into a volkswagon. It exploded.” (*9/11: The Firemen’s Story*, dir. Joseph Maxwell, Zodiak, 2011.)

²⁵⁰ The Marriott Hotel, also referred to as 3 WTC, was itself destroyed as a consequence of the towers’ collapse. Upon its impact with the North Tower, debris from AA 11 (as well as from the tower itself), including the landing gear, fell onto the roof of the hotel. The collapse of the South Tower split the hotel in two while the subsequent collapse of the North Tower destroyed what remained. While it is impossible to determine a precise number of casualties, the *New York Times* on September 11, 2002 estimated that “no fewer than 50 people inside the hotel were killed. At least 41 of those were firefighters, and the number could be much higher.”

explained, “It took three or four to realize: They were people.”²⁵¹ LogoZZo’s response, as well as those shared by others that day, may be attributed to the manner in which the site of the jumpers functioned as collective trauma. In *History and Memory after Auschwitz*, Dominick LaCapra suggests that: “The traumatic event has its greatest and most clearly unjustifiable effect on the victim, but in different ways it also affects everyone who comes in contact with it: perpetrator, collaborator, bystander, resister, those born later.”²⁵² In the instance of those falling from the towers, therefore, this impact is not limited to the “jumpers” themselves, but also, to a lesser degree, the bystanders below, as well as those witnessing the event through its mediatization, either on television, on the internet, or in the print media – whether concurrent with the events or subsequently.

“The Falling Man” is not the only “jumper” to have been photographed that morning. Numerous other photographs of “jumpers” and their remains exist and can be easily located on the internet. What distinguishes these images from Drew’s however is that, like Kristeva’s corpse, their undeniable materiality threatens the tenuous distinction between self and other, between life and death. They are all therefore truly “abject” in Kristeva’s sense of the word. The contorted bodies mid-air, the exposed bone fragments, the torn off limbs, the ripped off flesh exposing mutilated organs underneath – all of these leave absolutely nothing to the imagination and remind the viewer of his or her own materiality and mortality. These people died horribly, their lives cut off in a final moment of excruciating pain and terror as they collided with the ground. Drew’s photograph, however, is a step removed from that cold democracy of death, presenting not the abject itself, but merely pointing towards it in a moment of sublime transcendence, pushing death a moment further away – a moment sufficiently long to

²⁵¹ Cauchon and Moore.

²⁵² Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998) 8-9.

encapsulate the hope that, as in Petit's wirewalk, the void may be conquered after all. It is a moment that maintains the illusion of American exceptionalism at the cost of working-through. For Susan Sontag, writing in "In Plato's Cave," "All photographs are *memento mori*. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or things') mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt."²⁵³ The hope hinted at is illusory at best and the death so nakedly exposed in all of these photographs – and merely hinted at in "The Falling Man" – is one, which, as I will argue later in this chapter, stands in stark contrast to the notion of American exceptionalism. Cloaking the dead depicted in these images in the abstracted rhetoric of 9/11 is impossible, for they are too undeniably real. As Baudrillard points out, "It is the tactic of the terrorist model to bring about an excess of reality, and have the system collapse beneath that excess of reality."²⁵⁴ He adds, "[...] the new rules are not ours to determine. So any argument is used to discredit [the terrorists'] acts."²⁵⁵ While the "jumpers'" deaths can not be sanctified as heroic – a process outlined in my first chapter – they can nonetheless, be stripped of their horror. Instead of therefore signifying an "excess of reality," these victims are instead relegated to a second death of abstraction.

The classification of these deaths is problematic and the notion of labeling them as "suicides" has met with considerable resistance from victims' families. For the immediate family of Norberto Hernandez, whom journalist Peter Cheney identified as "the falling man," the notion that their loved one may have been the "jumper" depicted in the photograph not only contradicted their belief system, but proved personally traumatizing as well.²⁵⁶ The youngest

²⁵³ Susan Sontag, "In Plato's Cave" in *On Photography* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1977) 15.

²⁵⁴ Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism* (London, New York: Verso 2003) 18.

²⁵⁵ Ibid 23.

²⁵⁶ Cheney did so in an article for "The Globe and Mail" entitled "The Life and Death of Norberto Hernandez." Tom Junod, in his article, "The Falling Man," for which he was aided by a researcher and had access to the entire

daughter, Tatiana had nightmares and saw visions of her father. As Norberto Hernandez' widow, Eulogia, explains, "We were together for thirty years and I can put myself in his situation. There's a fire. I'm on the 107th floor. I'm not going to jump through the window, because I'm thinking – and I know what he was thinking: he was thinking of me, his daughters, his grandchildren, and his mother–'I'm not going to jump. I'm going to try to escape, any way possible...'”²⁵⁷ Others, like Richard Picorella, whose wife Karen is believed to have been among those who jumped, saw the context more broadly: "There was no other way out. It was either burn alive, or go quickly.... Do you suffocate to death or do you jump? I think it was brave to do that.”²⁵⁸ Hernandez, understandably overwhelmed by grief, fails to account for the fact that, for her husband, as for anyone else who jumped, there simply was no escape. For Picorella, knowing the manner of his wife's death does not exacerbate his grief, but rather provides comfort and closure. The differing responses of these family members is indicative of a wide range of responses among victims' families.

In addition to the personal and religious questions surrounding the labeling of the "jumpers," Ellen Borakove, a spokeswoman for the Medical Examiner's Office believes the term to be factually incorrect: "A 'jumper' is somebody who goes to the office in the morning knowing that they will commit suicide. These people were forced out by the smoke and flames or blown out.”²⁵⁹ In a general sense, Borakove, focusing on questions of causality, rightly attributes the cause of death to the terrorist attacks, not to the actions of those who jumped. However, in broadly stating that "these people were forced out.... or blown out," Borakove fails

sequence of Drew's photographs, later disproved this. Following interviews with "Windows on the World" staff members, who were not at the WTC that day, Junod subsequently identified the man as likely being Jonathan Briley, a sound engineer. As Junod explains in the documentary film, *The Falling Man*, however, the identification of the person in the image is secondary to that which the image represents.

²⁵⁷ *The Falling Man*, Singer.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁹ Cauchon and Moore.

to address the differing reasons which led people to fall from the towers. While correcting the *cause* of death, Borakove's statement fails to address the *manner* – and therefore the reality – of the jumper's deaths. Being forced out of a window by crushes of people clamoring for air is, for example, a different death than that of someone who falls consciously and, to a highly limited degree, willingly.

Though the inherent chaos of that morning's events may have made a more accurate determination ultimately impossible, no discernible attempts were ever made to obtain more precise numbers. The Medical Examiner's office refused to distinguish those who jumped or fell out of the windows as a category separate from those who died by other means in the World Trade Center towers. In fact, all World Trade Center fatalities that day (as well as those who subsequently died as a result of their injuries) were classified as "homicide." As legal terminology, "homicide" is certainly an accurate description. Yet, the term obfuscates the more complicated narratives surrounding the events of that day including those of the "jumpers," the failures to implement changes recommended in the wake of the 1993 bombing, the failures of the intelligence community prior to 9/11, and the geo-political context of 9/11. By contrast, the cultural representations of "The Falling Man," which I will examine in the following section enable a more complex and nuanced understanding of and engagement with the events of that day.

"LOOKING FOR THE FRAME"

The morning of September 11, Richard Drew, an AP photographer, and a number of his colleagues were covering a maternity fashion show in Bryant Park. Having arrived early, Drew was taking pictures of the models in hair and makeup. He was getting ready to select a location

from which to set up his equipment when he heard news of the disaster from two separate sources – from his boss and from a CNN camera operator, also working the show.

Having worked for the AP for more than two decades, Drew had seen and captured traumatic historical moments before. Most notably, on June 6, 1968, he was one of only four photographers standing in the kitchen of the Roosevelt Hotel in Los Angeles when presidential candidate Robert Kennedy was assassinated: “I was so close that his blood splattered onto my jacket. I saw the life bleed out of him, and I heard Ethel’s screams.”²⁶⁰ On 9/11, once again sensing the significance of the unfolding historical moment, Drew immediately left the show and – as the sole passenger – took an express subway to Chambers Street, arriving around a quarter after nine. Peter Howe, in his article for *The Digital Journalist*, describes Drew’s experience as follows:

Upon his arrival at the scene he did not immediately notice that by this time both towers were on fire. Instead he mingled with the crowd, deliberately not wearing his press pass, while he concentrated on photographing the debris on the ground from the impact and explosion of the planes, and stunned people, many of who (sic) had been cut by flying glass.²⁶¹

At 10:28 am, the North Tower collapsed and Drew and countless others were forced to evacuate. However, prior to the collapse, Drew was able to capture a number of quintessential images with his Nikon DCS620, including ones of the collapse itself and, at 9:41, one of a man in a white shirt clinging to the girders on the outside of the building.

²⁶⁰ Richard Drew, “The Horror of 9/11 That’s all Too Familiar,” *The Los Angeles Times* 10 Sept. 2003, B13.

²⁶¹ Peter Howe, “Richard Drew,” *The Digital Journalist* 2001, 10 May 2008 <<http://www.digitaljournalist.org/issue0110/drew.htm>>.

Following his own narrow escape, Drew returned to the Associated Press newsroom at Rockefeller Center, and set to work: “He didn’t look at any of the other pictures in the sequence; he didn’t have to. ‘You learn in photo editing to look for the frame,’ he says, “you have to recognize it. That picture just jumped off the screen because of its verticality and symmetry. It just had that look.”²⁶² By examining the photo in conjunction with the others in the sequence, we can infer that the picture is, at least to some degree, cropped; that in some sense, this is what Drew is referring to when he speaks of “look[ing] for the frame.” In other words, something occurs spatially beyond the image itself that is excluded, first, by the focus of Drew’s gaze and second, by his cropping of the image.

In discussing “framing,” it is useful to draw on Susan Sontag’s analysis in “In Plato’s Crave:”

In a world ruled by photographic images, all borders (‘framing’) seem arbitrary. Anything can be separated, can be made discontinuous from anything else: all that is necessary is to frame the subject differently. (Conversely, anything can be made adjacent to anything else.) Photography reinforces a nominalist view of social reality as consisting of small units of an apparently infinite number – as the number of photographs that could be taken of anything is unlimited. Through photographs, the world becomes a series of unrelated freestanding particles; and history, past and present, a set of anecdotes and *faits divers*. The camera makes reality atomic, manageable, and opaque. It is a view of the world which denies interconnectedness, continuity, but which confers on each moment the character of a mystery. Any photograph has multiple meanings; indeed, to see something in

²⁶² Tom Junod, “The Falling Man,” *Esquire* Sept. 2003, 178.

the form of a photograph is to encounter a potential object of fascination: ‘There is the surface. Now think – or rather feel, intuit – what is beyond it, what the reality must be like if it looks this way.’ Photographs, which cannot themselves explain anything, are inexhaustible invitations to deduction, speculation, and fantasy.²⁶³

There are bystanders below, others trapped up above, helicopters circling the buildings, smoke billowing, etc. – all pregnant with “multiple meanings,” but all we see occurring at this moment is the “atomic, manageable, opaque” fall of a single man. Temporally, there exists a reality “beyond” the image as well. There are eleven other frames in the sequence, capturing various stages of the man’s fall. In none of these images does his descent appear as calm or as determined as it does in this one; in none are all of the elements lined up as symmetrically as they are here. Viewed in sequence, the photographs reveal nothing graceful about the man’s fall. In fact, were the quantity of still photographs large enough to construct a moving image, there would likely be nothing to distinguish this man’s fall from the countless others that day. As Junod so eloquently states: “He fell like everyone else, like all the other jumpers – trying to hold on to the life he was leaving, which is to say that he fell desperately, inelegantly.”²⁶⁴

For Drew, the framing of the camera serves a psychological function as well; he states, “I think the camera is sort of a filter for me, between me and what I’m photographing and I’m only seeing what’s coming through my lens, and that helps me sort of separate it, I guess.”²⁶⁵ In a sense, Drew’s photograph serves an analogous function for those who view it; its selection and cropping likewise serve as a sort of “filter” through which to engage the event from a

²⁶³ Sontag, On Photography 22-23.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid*, 180.

²⁶⁵ The Falling Man, Singer.

psychological distance. In the words of Sontag, “Aesthetic distance seems built into the very experience of looking at photographs, if not right away, then certainly with the passage of time.”²⁶⁶ On the one hand, the photograph enables an encounter with the abject, on the other it is itself a means of distancing.

For David Friend, the former director of photography for *Life* magazine, however, the image itself is already a sort of deconstruction: “A photograph can leave the viewer open to speculation [...] A photograph can be consumed at one’s own pace, then accepted or rejected or rationalized on one’s own terms’ largely because the experience has been decontextualized: terror, compartmentalized into pixels.”²⁶⁷ What is intriguing about the image then, is not its ability to capture reality – something the other eleven frames do all too bluntly – but its construction of a more easily acceptable alternative; i.e. the man is not subject to the constraints of gravity, but has instead found a way to transcend its hold; he has thus gained some sort of mastery over his fate. In truth, however, it is impossible for the viewer to understand what went through this man’s mind as he was falling, or in any of the minds of those who fell, for that matter. The constructedness of the picture thus serves an analogous function to that of filling in the word “homicide” on the death certificate. At best, we can imaginatively project ourselves into his reality, but we cannot access it experientially. The picture provides us with permission to avert our eyes and look instead at something more stable. In fact, the closer we look, the less we see.

Psychological healing from a traumatic event, both on an individual and on a collective level, ultimately requires the removal of that filter and a direct engagement with that event –

²⁶⁶ Sontag, *On Photography* 21.

²⁶⁷ Friend 134.

what trauma scholar Dominick LaCapra describes as a transition from “acting-out” to “working through:”

In “acting-out,” the past is compulsively repeated as if it were fully present, resistances are not confronted, and memory as well as judgment is undercut. The therapeutic goal is to further the movement from denial and “acting-out” to “working-through” – a recurrently renewed and easily impaired movement that may never be totally or definitively accomplished.²⁶⁸

LaCapra posits “acting-out” as a necessary component of “working-through” as he later explains: “[...] the nonfetishistic narrative that resists ideology would involve an active acknowledgement and to some extent an acting out of trauma with the irredeemable losses it brings and it would indicate its own implication in repetitive processes it cannot entirely transcend.”²⁶⁹ The tendency of trauma survivors to compulsively repeat the event – whether subconsciously via flashbacks or consciously as engagement – is therefore a necessary component within the healing process. “Acting out” and “working through” are therefore, as LaCapra reminds his readers time and again, not to be understood as merely dialectical processes, but rather as varying facets of the same process. LaCapra thus does not posit “working out” as the preferable modality, but as a path which can only be embarked upon after having first travelled down the path of “acting out” – a path which has no final destination of closure, only a lessening of traumatic suffering.

The case studies I examine in the following pages – Erik Fischl’s *Tumbling Woman*, Kerry Skarbaka’s *The Struggle to Right Oneself*, Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* and Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* – manifest this progression from “acting out” to “working through,” from acknowledgement and compulsive repetition to engagement and

²⁶⁸ LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust* 48.

²⁶⁹ *Ibid* 199.

healing, if not closure. In interrogating these varying cultural artifacts I therefore seek to engage, rather than accept the erasure of their deaths, within the national narrative of 9/11.

“TUMBLING WOMAN”



Figure 71: "Tumbling Woman."



Figure 72: "Tumbling Woman."



Figure 73: "Tumbling Woman."



Figure 74: "Tumbling Woman."

On September 19, 2002, the *New York Times* ran an article titled “After Complaints, Rockefeller Center Drapes Sept. 11 Statue:” “A bronze statue in Rockefeller Center, meant to commemorate those who jumped or fell to their deaths from the World Trade Center, was abruptly draped in cloth and surrounded by a curtain wall yesterday.”²⁷⁰ The statue in question, Eric Fischl’s “Tumbling Woman” depicts a slightly larger than life-sized naked woman, flailing and tumbling midflight. To Fischl, who lost a friend in the attacks, the need to respond to the events artistically emerged almost immediately, “I had a clear feeling that if the country ever needed its artists, now was the time. There was such a profound confusion about what had

²⁷⁰ Unknown Author, “After Complaints, Rockefeller Center Drapes Sept. 11 Statue,” *New York Times on the Web* 19 September 2002, 10 May 2012 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/19/nyregion/after-complaints-rockefeller-center-drapes-sept-11-statue.html>>.

happened. I felt we needed art to help us understand, to help us mourn.”²⁷¹ Originally, Fischl, an artist who works in the media of both painting and sculpture, considered creating a memorial to the responders. However, he found the trope of heroism which was applied to the responders troubling, stating, “The focus of the media made everyone a hero at Ground Zero that day, and I wasn’t buying it. I knew that what we’d experienced was not a resolved event.” His focus instead centered around the notion of “vulnerability,” and to Fischl, that notion was made manifest in the “jumpers.” He specifically chose a female figure to heighten the figure’s vulnerability and to offer a contrast to the masculinity of the towers, but also to counter the rapidly forming “hero” narrative. Because all of New York was affected by the tragedy, Fischl believed that “from the point of view of appropriateness, I didn’t think it mattered where you put my statue. I chose Rockefeller Center because I wanted to address the widest public possible in the most direct, unmediated way.”²⁷² Though the statue was originally intended to remain in Rockefeller Plaza for several more days, it was abruptly removed following the publication of an article by Andrea Peyser titled “Shameful Art Attack” in the *New York Post* the previous day.

The controversy her writing so swiftly engendered eerily foreshadowed the controversy regarding the “Ground Zero Mosque,” discussed in my first chapter. What is troubling in both instances, more so than the controversy itself, is the manner in which these individuals representing a vocal minority were able to influence public discourse and shift that discourse away from a nuanced engagement with trauma. Filled with emotionally charged adjectives such as “desperate,” (to describe those who jumped from the towers), “brutal” (to describe the imagery associated with 9/11), and “moronic” (to describe Fischl’s own words) Peyser’s piece is formulated largely as an invective and appears to be structured around two main criticisms. The

²⁷¹ Eric Fischl and Michael Stone, *Bad Boy* (New York: Crown Publishing Group, 2012) 316.

²⁷² *Ibid* 318.

first criticism is that having been in the Hamptons on the morning of 9/11, Fischl “did not witness the scene his work exploits.” This criticism implies that Fischl’s work is irrelevant as it is produced from a place of privilege – one that leaves him physically removed from the events, but also as a member of specific socio-economic class. (What, to her, would have been sufficiently close? Being in Manhattan that day? Lower Manhattan? Standing at the foot of the towers? Inside the towers?) Her second criticism suggests that the sculpture might re-traumatize those who encounter it. To support her claims, she cites a single security guard, who is never directly quoted.²⁷³ The lack of sophistication in Peyser’s writing notwithstanding, her account is troubling not only because it fails to engage Fischl’s endeavor, but because it seeks to reconceptualize the work in a manner which directly undermines the work’s purpose – to facilitate a safe, healing encounter with the trauma of 9/11.

Similarly to Drew’s, Fischl’s intention was not to provoke controversy, but rather to encourage viewers to engage the liminal moment his work sought to represent. As he stated in an interview with *The New York Times*, “The kind of response that I was wanting to get was one in which people would allow me to share in the experience, the holding up, the sitting with...”²⁷⁴ Fischl suggested that in engaging the piece, viewers might move beyond the “graphic moment” represented and see it as “a dream in which somebody is floating. There’s no weight there that is sending this crushing, rippling current back through the body as it hits a solid mass. It feels more like a tumbleweed, even though it’s a massive sculpture.”²⁷⁵ Like Drew’s photograph, Fischl’s sculpture suspends a particular moment in time. On the one hand, his work differs from that of

²⁷³ Andrea Peyser, “Shameful Art Attack,” *New York Post* 18 Sept. 2002, 10 May 2012 <<http://nypost.com/2002/09/18/shameful-art-attack-rock-center-showcases-wtc-leaper/>>.

²⁷⁴ David Rakoff, “Questions for Eric Fischl: Post 9/11 Modernism,” *New York Times on the Web* 27 October 2002, 10 May 2011 < <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/10/27/magazine/the-way-we-live-now-10-27-02-questions-for-eric-fischl-post-9-11-modernism.html>>.

²⁷⁵ Ibid.

Drew in that it represents a fictionalized rendering of reality that is not anchored to a specific individual. While Drew's photograph makes claims to universality, Fischl's sculpture, in fact, fulfills those claims. On the other hand, that universality stands in contrast to the three dimensional plasticity of the sculpture. A photograph in a newspaper can be more easily ignored than a life size sculpture one walks past in Rockefeller Center and it is perhaps that plasticity, which argues for engagement, that makes the sculpture so offensive to those who share Peyser's point of view. Of course, it is the very encounter with the traumatic event, repeated time and time again within the memory fractured by that trauma, which is necessary from the perspective of LaCapra, who posits "the nonfetishistic narrative that resists ideology would involve an active acknowledgement and to some extent an acting out of trauma with the irredeemable losses it brings, and it would indicate its own implication in repetitive processes it cannot entirely transcend."²⁷⁶

For Fischl, that encounter is designed to counteract the "disappearance of the bodies and their transmutation into steel"²⁷⁷ and is made manifest in the woman's outstretched hand – an interactive feature with which viewers might experience a tactile moment of connection in which the living reach out to the dead. For LaCapra, the traumatic encounter "also attempt[s] to conjoin trauma with the possibility of retrieval of desirable aspects of the past that might be of some use in counteracting trauma's extreme effects and in rebuilding individual and social life."²⁷⁸ As someone who has touched and held the hand, I can attest to the profundity of the experience. Touching the hand provides the opportunity to not only encounter the memory of that day, but to enact a transcendent reaching out that gives physical expression to the feelings associated with

²⁷⁶ LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust* 199.

²⁷⁷ Ryan Frank, *Conversation with the Author*, 25 Feb. 2014.

²⁷⁸ La Capra, *Representing the Holocaust* 199.

that memory in a manner that is ultimately cathartic. That experience, however, was entirely lost on Peyser, who never saw the statue in person. “Tumbling Woman” was subsequently purchased by Melva Bucksbaum and Raymond Leary and can now be viewed by appointment (along with a number of further 9/11 related artwork by other artists) at their private gallery, The Granary, in Connecticut. Unfortunately, it never did – due to Peyser’s efforts – reach the majority of its intended audience.

“THE FALLING MAN” AND “THE STRUGGLE TO RIGHT ONESELF”

Performance artist Kerry Skarbaka likewise sought to forge an encounter between the “jumpers” and a wide audience. Whereas Fischl’s sculpture lends the “jumpers” material dimension, Skarbaka’s performance add a further element in his embodiment of the “jumpers:” “The dimensions are important to establish a direct relationship between the image and viewer.”²⁷⁹ On June 14, 2005, Skarbaka, wearing various outfits, including a business suit, staged and photographed a series of falls from the roof of Chicago’s Museum of Contemporary Art. Borrowing from Heidegger, who conceives human existence as a process of perpetual falling, Skarbaka has drawn on sculpture, painting and cinema to craft his performance art, which is likewise concerned with vulnerability. Of the piece, Skarbaka explained, “The images stand as ominous messages and reminders that we are all vulnerable to losing our footing and grasp. Moreover, they convey the primal qualities of the human condition as a precarious balancing act between the struggle against our desire to survive and our fantasy to transcend our humanness.”²⁸⁰

²⁷⁹ Kerry Skarbaka, “The Struggle to Right Oneself,” [Skarbaka.com](http://www.skarbakka.com/portfolios/struggle_statement.htm) 2011, 10 May 2012, <http://www.skarbakka.com/portfolios/struggle_statement.htm>.

²⁸⁰ Ibid.

Though Skarbaka largely views his work in more universal terms, he himself has admitted to being partially inspired by the 9/11 jumpers, stating, “I wanted to be able to respond intelligently, conceptually, responsibly to what was going on.”²⁸¹ His response is one, which in its embodiment, is structured as a traumatic reenactment, extending the moment created by Fischl’s outstretched hand into an entire fall. The aspects of the traumatic encounter described by LaCapra above are therefore heightened.

Don DeLillo’s 2007, “The Falling Man,” draws on and fictionalizes Skarbaka’s performance, examining its effects on the viewer. Throughout the novel, DeLillo references a performance artist, loosely modeled on Skarbaka, who stages a series of falls, and whose performances are witnessed by a number of characters. However, in DeLillo’s rendering, those performances are not isolated incidents, but rather woven throughout the novel – not merely a reenactment of trauma, but intrusive and inescapable, much like traumatic memory itself. For LaCapra, “[...] trauma is effected belatedly through repetition, for the numbingly traumatic event does not register at the time of its occurrence but only after a temporal gap or period of latency, at which time it is immediately repressed, split off, or disavowed. Trauma then in some way may return compulsively as the repressed.”²⁸² Peyser’s response to Fischl’s sculpture and that of critics to Skarbaka’s performance may be understood in this context: as repression, splitting off, and disavowal. DeLillo, by contrast, compulsively repeats the traumatic memory embodied in the performance artist’s falls and points to it, time and again. He does so within a narrative, which restructures the traumatic event itself.

²⁸¹ Fred Camper, “Life Goes On: Is Art Defaming 9/11 Deaths?” [skarbakka.com](http://www.skarbakka.com) 10 July 2005. 10 May 2012. <http://www.skarbakka.com/portfolios/lifegoeson_statement.htm>.

²⁸² LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust* 174.

Centered around the experiences of Keith, a businessman, in the immediate aftermath of the attacks, the novel is structured as a fragmentation of time and perspective, moving forward and backward, and told not just through Keith's eyes, but also through his wife's, and, even one of the terrorists – the implication being that trauma ruptures not only the narrative of the individual directly affected, but also, to borrow from LaCapra, of those in the vicinity of the traumatic event, from bystanders to perpetrators. The novel then, is an attempt to restructure the narrative of the traumatic event, to lend it, in the words of Hunt, “narrative cohesion.” That cohesion is achieved when, towards the end of the novel, the performance artist dies by his own hand. By continuously returning to the performance artist and the traumatic memory he represents, Delillo models a sort of “acting out.” However, in confronting that trauma, he forges a path towards “working through” which is cemented in the death of the performance artist. That death and the closure it represents allow Keith and the reader to confront the traumatic memory, which has been haunting him throughout the narrative: “Then he saw a shirt come down out of the sky. He walked and saw it fall, arms waving, like nothing in his life.”²⁸³

EXTREMELY LOUD AND INCREDIBLY CLOSE

Jonathan Safran Foer is likewise invested in confronting and restructuring traumatic memory. Like Delillo, Safran Foer, in his 2005 novel, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, conceives the trauma of “The Falling Man” as an attempt to formulate narrative cohesion. Following the death of his father in the WTC on 9/11, Oskar, a young boy, discovers a key among his father's belongings. The only clue as to the key's purpose is the name “Black” written on the envelope holding the key. The novel and the film are structured by Oskar's quest –

²⁸³ Don Delillo, *The Falling Man* (NY: Scribner, 2007) 246.

referred to throughout as an “expedition” – to locate the key’s owner. It is a quest foreshadowed by one undertaken previously with his father to locate the “sixth borough,” a fictional foreshadowing of all that Oskar loses through the death of his father. The latter expedition, this time without his father to guide him, represents Oskar’s attempt to restructure his trauma. However, the methodical nature of Oskar’s expedition stands in direct contrast to the seeming chaos of the various threads competing for narrative dominance, particularly in the 2010 film adaptation, directed by David Hare: Oskar’s memories and flashbacks, his mother’s flashbacks and memories, Oskar’s ongoing lies. The film jumps backwards and forwards and sideways through time, mirroring the experience of trauma itself. The viewer therefore, like Oskar, experiences these temporal shifts in the present tense, unable to discern between past and present, between imagined and real.



Figure 75: *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close.*

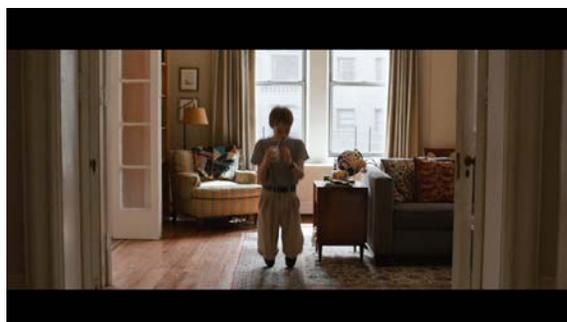


Figure 76: *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close.*

A series of voicemails left by Oskar's father on the morning of 9/11 further structure the narrative. Returning from school early, it is the last message that Oskar hears as it is being recorded. As Oskar hears his father leaving the final message, he is paralyzed, unable to pick up the phone, as he witnesses the towers collapse on the television. In that moment, Oskar simultaneously experiences the trauma of losing his father while witnessing its representation on television –the semiotic and the real forcefully colliding, causing Oskar to collapse like the tower, and tearing apart his sanity in the process. It is a moment he can only gradually approach and untangle from his memories as his expedition progresses. The key he seeks is therefore not merely a physical one, but also a metaphorical one enabling him to unlock his memories.



Figure 77: *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close.*

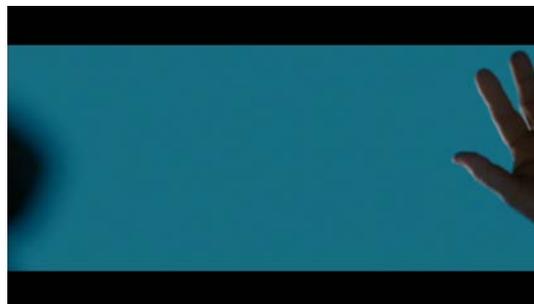


Figure 78: *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close.*



Figure 79: *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close.*



Figure 80: *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close.*

The greatest obstacle to doing so is the recurring image of the falling man and therefore of the instance of his father's death. The film thus begins with a shot of a man falling, inelegantly, in slow motion. The desperation of the fall is contrasted against the impossibly blue sky through which he is flailing. These images fade into a series of blinds, which in turn fade into a shot of Oskar. The image of the falling man, fragmented and within his own mind, is one which continues to haunt him.



Figure 81: *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close.*



Figure 82: *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close.*

The image is later evoked in a scene in the film in which Oskar and his father are at a swingset. Oskar, afraid to get on the swing, is encouraged by his father who tells him: “I would go as high as I could until I couldn’t go any higher and then I would jump. For a moment I would feel free as a bird. You should give it a whirl, it might change the way you look at things.” Oskar’s mind recovers this moment as a substitution for that of his father falling, the upward trajectory and freedom of the swingset replacing the downward trajectory toward death. It is only in returning to that swing later, in seeking his own upward trajectory, that Oskar can finally uncover a note left for him by his father and begin the journey from trauma to healing.

At the end of the novel Oskar discovers a series of photographs of a body falling from one of the towers:

Was it dad?

Maybe.

Whoever it was, it was somebody.

I ripped the pages out of the book.

I reversed the order, so the last one was first, and the first was last.

When I flipped through them, it looked like the man was floating up through the sky.²⁸⁴

Oskar continues by listing a series of actions from that day, all reversed, until he concludes by stating, “We would have been safe.”²⁸⁵ The book concludes with a replica of the flipbook and therefore of Oskar’s reversal. It is unclear whether or not the flipbook incorporated by Safran Foer is an image of an actual individual from that morning or a photo-shopped rendering. By narratively and visually wrestling with, and eventually restructuring the events of 9/11 and of his father’s death, Oskar gradually undergoes the transition from victimhood to agency. For Safran Foer, the question of “The Falling Man” then, is not formulated in an encounter with the image, but in its reversal and deconstruction. For LaCapra, one aspect of “working-through” is the “reconstruction of larger contexts that help to inform and perhaps to transform experience.”²⁸⁶ Nigel C. Hunt, relying on the concept of “working through” adds that some survivors of trauma “cognitively process their responses, change their narratives of the time, and perhaps even learn from what happened...”²⁸⁷ Oskar’s reconstruction of the events, both physically and psychologically, allows him to “work through” and transform the events.

CENSORSHIP AND WITNESSING

Though approaching the traumatic events of 9/11 from differing perspectives, Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and Delillo’s *The Falling Man* both engage and wrestle with that trauma in an effort to achieve a sort of catharsis. However, the controversy

²⁸⁴ Jonathan Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (NY: Penguin Books, 2005) 325. Ann Nelson’s play (and subsequent film), *The Guys* – which I will discuss for separate reasons later in this chapter – includes a similar moment of reversal: a video image of firefighters departing their firehouse on the morning of September 11, 2001. The image is shown twice: first in its proper order, then in reverse.

²⁸⁵ Ibid 326.

²⁸⁶ LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust* 200.

²⁸⁷ Hunt 9.

which largely defined Drew's photograph and the subsequent censorship of the image overshadowed such nuanced efforts. Given its own construction of an alternative narrative, in which the "falling man" is formulated not as one who is tumbling helplessly through the air, but as one who is symmetrically composed against the background of the towers (thereby suggesting a sort of agency), it is perhaps surprising that the picture met with the level of controversy with which it ultimately did. As the events continued to unfold that morning, footage of the jumpers appeared live on a number of television stations including CNN and CBS. As the day progressed, notably, the figures shown falling from the towers were broadcast less and less.

The Morning Call, a Pennsylvania newspaper, which ran the image over half of the back cover of its first section the following day, did not shy away from the possible controversy. The editorial staff, similarly to Drew, felt that as with Eddie Adams' Pulitzer Prize winning 1968 photo of South Vietnamese police chief General Nguyễn Ngọc Loan executing Vietcong prisoner Nguyễn Văn Lémabout, the image showed not an image of an individual's death so much as the last moments of his life.²⁸⁸ Though the imminence of the individuals' deaths is unmistakable in both photographs, it is not directly shown. For David Erdman, *The Morning Call's* morning editor, the photo "got to the humanity in a way that other photos, even that might be more graphic would not."²⁸⁹ By relying and depending on the audience's imaginative resources to fill in the gaps, Drew relies on the viewer's imaginative resources to conclude the image's narrative, thereby accessing its "humanity." The shift in visual focus to the instant prior to death rather than on the death itself, does enable a degree of encounter with the traumatic moment represented by "The Falling Man." However, the shift also enables a Roachian surrogation providing a sort of

²⁸⁸ It is possible that the photos share some stylistic components as well, ones which are only perceptible decades later.

²⁸⁹ The Falling Man, Singer.

psychological distance. Roach proposes that “memories torture themselves into forgetting”²⁹⁰ and that their performance “means to bring forth, to make manifest, and to transmit,”²⁹¹ but also “more secretly, to reinvent.”²⁹² In this regard, the photograph may be understood as a sort of performance, albeit one that freezes a particular moment in time wherein the final moment in the life of the falling man serves as a surrogate for his death – a moment of aesthetically pleasing symmetry to replace the flailing helplessness and the abjection of his remains.

Lacking a previous context for handling footage of such a wide-reaching scope with such personal implications, magazines, newspapers, and television networks opted to err on the side of self-censorship. David Friend however suggests that this self-censorship is deeply problematic:

Self-censorship is a double-edged sword. By declining to run potentially alarming sequences – videotapes presented at war crimes tribunals, for example, or images of POW abuse – news executives run the risk of watering down painful truths that demand the glare of the public eye. On the other hand, some would argue, TV viewers (unlike Internet browsers, who can simply click to another site) are a comparatively captive audience and therefore have the right to assume they will not be visually “assaulted,” at least not without some verbal or visual warning.²⁹³

Noam Chomsky, in his book *9-11*, further contextualizes this self-censorship in stating “Impediments to free flow of information in countries like the U.S. are rarely traceable to government; rather to self-censorship of the familiar kind.”²⁹⁴ Whether through government intervention or self-censorship, then, the result is the same, namely what Chomsky refers to as

²⁹⁰ Roach xi.

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Ibid.

²⁹³ Friend 130.

²⁹⁴ Noam Chomsky, *9-11* (NY: Seven Stories Press, 2001) 113.

“impediments to free flow of information.” These impediments are detrimental not only politically, but also psychologically, preventing a “working through” of the events. That work on traumatic memory is here undercut, not only by a failure to examine the trauma itself, but also by an administration that sought to capitalize on the events of 9/11 within the context of a “war on terrorism.” Unfortunately, the self-censorship of the networks not only prevented viewers from truthfully engaging the images, but it also inadvertently relegated the images to a realm in which they became susceptible to precisely the sort of voyeurism the networks sought to prevent. In the words of Sontag, “The sense of taboo which makes us indignant and sorrowful is not much sturdier than the sense of taboo that regulates the definition of what is obscene.”²⁹⁵ The line between the traumatic encounter and voyeurism is permeable and malleable, ever-shifting according to its context. As Junod writes of 9/11:

In a nation of voyeurs, the desire to face the most disturbing aspects of our most disturbing day was somehow ascribed to voyeurism, as though the jumpers’ experience, instead of being central to the horror was tangential to it, a sideshow best forgotten [...] we have somehow taken it upon ourselves to deem their deaths unworthy of witness – because we have somehow deemed the act of witness, in this one regard, unworthy of us.²⁹⁶

Junod formulates the role of witness broadly here, including not only those who experience direct exposure to the traumatic event, but also those who experience the event through its mediatized and artistic re-presentations. While research regarding PTSD following 9/11 has focused largely on those who were directly exposed to the events, a handful of studies have concluded that exposure to the attacks on television contributed to and increased post-traumatic

²⁹⁵ Sontag, *On Photography* 20.

²⁹⁶ Junod 180-181

stress in individuals not otherwise connected with the events. As Roxane Cohen Silver, a psychologist at UC Irvine, who oversaw a recent special issue of *American Psychologist* reassessing psychological responses to 9/11, states, “The distress spilled over to the outside communities, mostly to people who saw the images and had pre-existing psychological problems. The numbers are low, but I think the data is convincing.”²⁹⁷ This vicarious traumatization is due not only to the extended representation of the images, but also to, as Jean Baudrillard has argued, the symbolic nature of the attacks themselves.²⁹⁸ By this, I do not intend to deny the reality of the events or the suffering associated with them, but rather to suggest that that suffering was compounded by the manner in which 9/11 tapped into a collective consciousness.

Yet, witnessing is a crucial component in the confrontation with trauma. Anette Wieviorka, in *The Era of the Witness*, explains:

Testimonies, particularly when they are produced as part of a larger cultural movement, express the discourse or discourses valued by society at the moment the witnesses tell their stories as much as they render an individual experience [...] despite their uniqueness, testimonies come to participate in a collective memory – or collective memories – that vary in their form, function, and in the implicit or explicit aims they set for themselves.²⁹⁹

²⁹⁷ Benedict Carey, “Sept. 11 Revealed Psychology’s Limits, Review Finds,” *New York Times on the Web* 28 July 2011, 1 Dec. 2011 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/07/29/health/research/29psych.html>>.

²⁹⁸ Baudrillard writes: “Among the other weapons of the system which they turned around against it, the terrorists exploited the ‘real time’ of images, their instantaneous worldwide transmission, just as they exploited stock-market speculation, electronic information and air traffic. The role of images is highly ambiguous. For, at the same time as they exalt the event, they also take it hostage. They serve to multiply it to infinity and, at the same time, they are a diversion and neutralization.” (Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism* 27.)

²⁹⁹ Anette Wieviorka, *The Era of the Witness* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University, 2006) xii.

Denying the act of witnessing is thus a disruption in the process of the formation of collective memory. Further, placing the images in the realm of the voyeuristic inscribes them with a new set of – largely negative – meanings and connotations, directly affecting the way that the images are processed and engaged. On the one hand, the image is branded with the appeal of the taboo. On the other, the new context allows viewers to become desensitized to what they are actually viewing.³⁰⁰ In neither case is the image engaged on its own terms. The images were frequently described as “pornographic,”³⁰¹ yet, ironically, it was the act of censoring itself, which prevented the images from being viewed in another context.

In Europe, the footage was distributed and received differently:

On French television in those forty-eight hours, in contrast to the more sanitized stateside coverage, videotaped scenes of plummeting people had been shown “repeatedly, constantly,” one of them told me. [...] Americans, in contrast, had watched fireballs, cyclones of debris, the valiant rescuers, but had been largely left to imagine the massacres at a remove – inside planes, within buildings, hidden beneath giant balls of dust and smoke, always beyond the range of the eyes and the camera.³⁰²

What was it about this image in particular which proved so difficult to face? What, exactly, constitutes its abjection? There seem to be two possible answers in response to this

³⁰⁰ Salladay, Robert, “Where Every Day is Sept. 11. Falling Victim: Ghouls Rush In,” [sfgate.com](http://www.sfgate.com/opinion/article/INTERNET-Where-Every-Day-is-Sept-11-Falling-2845262.php) 28 April 2002, 10 May 2012 <<http://www.sfgate.com/opinion/article/INTERNET-Where-Every-Day-is-Sept-11-Falling-2845262.php>>.

³⁰¹ An argument may be made that the photographs, capturing unwilling subjects facing their imminent deaths, constitute a violation of privacy. However, as I argue later with other facets of the photograph, that argument is rarely extended to victims who constitute the “other.”

³⁰² Friend 134. Similarly, Henry Singer has stated: “I remember going to see the president of NBC news to see if he would be a contributor in [The Falling Man.] I was in the UK on 9/11, where I live, and I watched the BBC coverage. On the BBC you did see people falling before the towers came down. American networks didn’t show this. And I was curious to ask the NBC executive why not? And he said he didn’t want to subject their audience to that.” (Levy)

question. The first of these contends that the scope and the magnitude of the event are somehow unique; that the sight of tens of people jumping from the windows of New York City skyscrapers is a historic anomaly. The second claims that publishing the photo a day after the attacks was simply too early and that people could not reasonably be expected to view depictions of something, which they were still in fact processing. Neither of these arguments offers a satisfactory explanation.

To address the issue of uniqueness, it is important to note that in 1911, ninety years before the World Trade Center attacks, a fire at the Triangle Shirt Waist factory killed one-hundred and forty-six people.³⁰³ Though exact statistics proved elusive here as well, one reporter “counted fifty-four victims who had leaped or fallen to the sidewalks.”³⁰⁴ Recent estimates place this figure as high as upwards of ninety people.³⁰⁵ In his 2003 book on the disaster, David von Drehle offers descriptions of a number of these falls, making it all but impossible not to draw parallels as he writes: “This then was their universe: panic and fire behind them, horror and helplessness on the faces far, far below—and something cool, something beautiful just out of reach beyond the heat waves and the blinding smoke.”³⁰⁶ Drehle’s words eerily echo those of Jack Gentul, a 9/11 widower discussing the likely manner in which his wife, Elaine, died that morning: “In some ways, it just might be the last element of control that you have. Everything around you is happening and you can’t stop it, but this is something that you can do; and to be out of the smoke and the heat, and to be out in the air, it must have felt like flying.”³⁰⁷

³⁰³ While there are numerous photographs of remains and corpses, no photographs of “jumpers” are known to exist in the instance of the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory. This is likely attributable to the fact that contemporary cameras allow significantly faster frame and capture rates and that the Shirtwaist Factory was a comparatively small ten stories high, thereby constituting a shorter fall.

³⁰⁴ David von Drehle, *Triangle: The Fire That Changed America* (NY: Grove Press, 2003) 167.

³⁰⁵ *Triangle: Remembering the Fire*, dir. Daphne Pinkerson, HBO, 2011.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid* 155.

³⁰⁷ *The Falling Man*, Singer.

While von Drehle is careful to ground his telling of the Triangle disaster within its own historical context, he is also aware of the contemporary reality in which he is writing as he states, “The Triangle fire of March 25, 1911, was for ninety years the deadliest workplace disaster in New York history – and the most important.”³⁰⁸ Though this remains von Drehle’s only explicit reference to 9/11 in the book, the latter disaster clearly serves as a subtextual lens through which he intends the reader to make sense of the 1911 disaster. And vice versa. In the prologue, von Drehle explains, “This book is one attempt to open up the horror of the Triangle fire, to gaze intently and unflinchingly at it, and to settle on the facts and their meaning.”³⁰⁹

A 2011 HBO documentary, *Triangle: Remembering the Fire*, describes these falls even more closely and draws the parallels to 9/11 even more explicitly. As photographic images of the corpses are shown, narrator Tovah Feldshuh states:

Thousands of New Yorkers had gathered on the street ninety feet below the burning factory. Many of them remembered seeing what appeared to be large bundles of cloth from the building’s upper floors. ‘The owners were protecting their goods,’ they thought, but when one of the bundles opened to reveal a woman’s legs, the full horror became apparent. They were jumping. The girls were jumping.³¹⁰

Feldshuh’s narration is followed by the account of Stacy Silverstein, whose great-grandmother, Sylvia Riegler survived the fire. According to Silverstein, “Sylvia remembered not being allowed to cross the street because the bodies were falling. She watched her friends and coworkers falling from the windows, some of them holding hands, some of them hugging. That’s not something

³⁰⁸ von Drehle 3.

³⁰⁹ Ibid 3.

³¹⁰ Pinkerson.

you can ever, ever forget.” However, the documentary’s most poignant moment occurs in its interview with Ray Ott, a New York City fire marshall and great grandson of Andrew Ott, one of the first responders to the fire. Lamotte states, again over images of the bodies,

My great grandfather told me, women were jumping out the window, holding onto their pocketbooks. People were yelling, ‘Don’t jump! Wait!’ He was in part of the recovery. They had to take the bodies and move them. He saw people melted together. I was at 9/11 and I was watching the people jump. It would be like 1-2-3, people would jump out. It must have been very similar to what my grandfather saw that day.

Again, these words are overlaid with images of the corpses.

Unable to turn our gaze to more recent tragic events, von Drehle gives us the opportunity to do so at a distance, utilizing history as a means by which to approach understanding, the Triangle Fire thus serving as a – to return to Roach – “surrogate” for the events of 9/11, until a more direct encounter with the traumatic event can be formulated. To be sure, traumatic events take time to be narratively and culturally absorbed. In the instance of Vietnam, for example, the first significant feature films, *The Deer Hunter* (Cimino, 1978) and *Apocalypse Now* (Coppola, 1979), did not appear until three and four years, respectively, after the official end of U.S. operations in Vietnam, with the next wave – beginning with *Platoon* (Stone, 1986) and *Full Metal Jacket* (Kubrick, 1987) – not appearing until the mid- to late eighties. Until such events can be processed – a process, which is ongoing, even decades or a century after the events – allegory frequently serves to fill the narrative gap. Carolyn Brothers writes, “The evidence of greatest historical interest lies less in what the photograph literally depicts than in the way it

relates to and makes visible the culture of which it is a part.”³¹¹ If “The Falling Man” thus sheds light upon contemporary culture, von Drehle’s account of a historical event, which preceded 9/11 by almost a century, may serve equally to shed light upon that culture.

The second issue – the question of the propriety of publishing sensitive photos so shortly after the events which they depict – is as tenuous as the notion of historical singularity. In the modern past, as in the present, we have – time and again – proven willing and eager to examine depictions of the human casualties of violence from Hiroshima and Nagasaki to the liberation of the concentration camps after World War II to the wars in Vietnam and Iraq to the 2003 tsunami in Southeast Asia to the 2014 crash of MH17 – in short: of the “other.”³¹²

What is problematic to viewers is neither the singularity of the events, nor their temporal proximity, but the images’ recognizability and familiarity. These events were not occurring to an “other” safely confined to the television or to the newsstand, but to people who bore an uncomfortable similarity to ourselves. This was one tragedy which could not be dismissed to the realm of the theoretical because it was too undeniably real. As Wieviorka states, “Knowledge will thus come from a confrontation with the real, the “true.”³¹³ However, it was precisely this “real” that was denied in the censorship of the images, thus preventing a “working-through,” which according to LaCapra is “bound up with the role of problematic but significant distinctions, including that between accurate reconstruction of the past and committed exchange

³¹¹ Brothers 22.

³¹² Conversely, self-censorship and official censorship regarding the depiction of U.S. war casualties abroad (as well as of the human cost of US actions abroad) abroad largely ensures that these images are not seen by the general public.

³¹³ Wieviorka 136.

with it. These distinctions should be neither reified into binary oppositions and separate spheres nor collapsed into an indiscriminate will to rewrite the past.”³¹⁴

While I will examine these binary oppositions further in the following chapter, I wish to point out here that the very abstraction of “The Falling Man” is what enables the formulation of these binary oppositions in the first place, that what makes the death of “The Falling Man” so very hard to consider is its undeniable reality. Less aestheticized (and anaesthetized) images of mangled remains –similarly to the imagery of the planes crashing into the towers – may be understood as producing a Baudillardian “excess of the real.” While the anonymity and the aestheticization of the image appear to abstract that reality, the potential to expose the abject lurking beneath its surface remains encrypted in its pixels.

“A CRISIS OF FAITH”

Drew himself has come to believe that a significant source of the controversy is this recognizability and familiarity of the images: “I think that we just identify too much with this [...] We might have to face that similar situation some time. It could be us.” While Drew correctly points out that the picture forces people to think “about what comes at the end,” it is a bit of a leap to say “it could be us” – at least in any literal sense. It is highly improbable that the average American citizen will be a direct victim of terrorism, let alone be forced to make this sort of a decision.³¹⁵ Rather, what is troubling is the road down which that recognizeability, in our encounter with the abject, will ultimately lead us, namely to the truth of our own mortality.

³¹⁴ LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust* 64.

³¹⁵ Admittedly, it is the very function of terrorism to make us believe that this is the case: that we are in fact significantly more vulnerable than we really are.

One of the consequences of the impact of “The Falling Man” and other controversial 9/11 images is that newsrooms have altered their policies on the dissemination of information. Following “The Falling Man” controversy, Naomi Halperin, editor of *The Morning Call*, which first ran the photograph, has for instance suggested that reader responses now play a greater role in selecting what to publish: “Before it was: you show the story, you’ll show the truth. Now it comes down to what can the reader bear?”³¹⁶ However well-intentioned, this self-censorship is problematic in that the question of what the reader “can bear” is, as I have explained above, only applied to tragedies in which the victims are in some sense recognizable.

In his September 2002 *Harper’s Magazine* article “A Year Later: Notes on America’s Intimations of Mortality,” Mark Slouka argues that September 11th was unlike other tragedies the world had experienced – in part because it upended the notion of American exceptionalism by bringing onto US soil the sort of violence other countries had experienced for decades and centuries, in many instances as a direct consequence of U.S. foreign policy: “It was a bit of a shock. Here in America, under the protective eye of Jesus, we could die. Now that was worth a crisis of faith.”³¹⁷ It is only in this context that the constructedness and the censoring of the “Falling Man” image can be understood. If “The Falling Man” brings us to the doorstep of our individual and national mortality, then more explicit images bring us face to face with it. These more explicit images, such as the ones referenced by federal prosecutors in subsequent 9/11 trials, destroy any notion of personhood. In fact, that which is most disturbing about those photos’ appearance is simultaneously that which makes them so effective as exhibit pieces in a

³¹⁶ LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust* 129.

³¹⁷ Mark Slouka, “One Year Later,” in *Essays from the Nick of Time: Reflections and Refutations* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2010) 123.

trial. The human body is reduced to its most basic components, from which all traces of singularity or identity have been erased. The photos are, like Kristeva's corpse, "abject"

How then, does one construct an edifying narrative through which to process these events at precisely the point at which language fails? As Elaine Scarry writes in *The Body in Pain*, "Whatever pain achieves, it achieves in part through its unshareability, and it ensures this unshareability through its resistance to language."³¹⁸ Subsequently, she labels this a "shattering of language."³¹⁹ Likewise, Roland Barthes, writes in *Image–Music–Text*, "The trauma is a suspension of language, a blocking of meaning."³²⁰ As in the example of Delillo's *The Falling Man* protagonist, the struggle towards narrative cohesion is itself a means through which to confront the traumatic event.

"RAH RAH AMERICA"

Unable to locate meaning within the events themselves, the media not only censored "The Falling Man" and other images like it, but also literally began to replace them in public consciousness with images reflecting the more comfortable tropes of hope and patriotism, such as those of flags or firefighters – thereby preventing a "working through of the events." The most notable of these images is Thomas E. Franklin's "New York Firefighters Raising Flag 9/11 NYC," which features three firefighters raising an American flag amidst the rubble of the Twin Towers. Due to the composition of the photograph, it has frequently been compared to Joe

³¹⁸ Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987) 4.

³¹⁹ Interestingly, as Scarry points out, it is this "shattering of language" caused by pain, which in turn makes its perpetuation through violence possible. See: Scarry 5.

³²⁰ Barthes 34-35.

Rosenthal's equally iconic 1945 photograph, "Raising the Flag on Iwo Jima."³²¹ In fact, the photo is now prominently featured at the 9/11 Museum, above a tattered American flag.³²² However, the inclusion of the photograph was not without controversy. According to Elizabeth Greenspan, in *The Battle for Ground Zero*, Michael Shulan, the former creative director who left the museum within a month of its opening,³²³ felt that the photograph was too "rah rah America." Upon the publication of Greenspan's book, a number of tabloids and rightwing bloggers seized upon Shulan's comments and, rather predictably, accused him of not being "patriotic." Chief curator Jan Ramirez proposed that three photographs depicting the flag raising from three different angles replace the one photograph – a solution Shulan accepted but did not agree with: "My concern, as it always was, is that we not reduce [9/11] down to something that was too simple, and in its simplicity would actually distort the complexity of the event, the meaning of the event."³²⁴ Shulan's desire for a more nuanced depiction of the events directly contradicts the hero trope discussed in my first chapter – a trope, in this instance centered around the figure of the firefighter.³²⁵

³²¹ It should be noted that Rosenthal's photograph was itself surrounded by controversy. Part of the reason for the controversy was that a second flag raising had occurred nearby earlier that same day and the other part is due to the fact Rosenthal was falsely accused of staging the photograph. However, Rosenthal's, like Franklin's photograph has proven highly iconic. Franklin's photograph proved so iconic that it was later published as postage by the United States Post Office.

³²² The initial implication is that the flag below the photograph is the flag in the photograph. In fact, it is not. Viewers must read a longer description on a wall that is perpendicular to learn that it is only one of many flags recovered at the site.

³²³ Shulan is perhaps most well known for organizing the "Here is New York" exhibit of photographs in the wake of 9/11. The photographs are both by professional and amateur photographers and prints were all sold for the same price of \$25 each, regardless of the photographer. The photographs were eventually collected in a book, also titled *Here is New York*.

³²⁴ Melissa Klein, "Iconic Ground Zero photo was nearly excluded from museum for being too 'rah-rah-America,'" [nypost.com](http://nypost.com/2013/07/28/iconic-ground-zero-photo-was-nearly-excluded-from-museum-for-being-too-rah-rah-american/) 28 July 2013, 10 October 2014. <<http://nypost.com/2013/07/28/iconic-ground-zero-photo-was-nearly-excluded-from-museum-for-being-too-rah-rah-american/>>.

³²⁵ This trope is further reiterated in 9/11 Memorial Stair Climbs. On September 11, 2005 in Colorado, five firefighters climbed 110 stairs of a high-rise building in downtown Denver. Since then, Memorial Stair Climbs, now organized by the National Fallen Firefighters Foundation, have been repeated annually and spread to other states. Conceived as living memorials, each of the climbers carries a photograph of one of the victims killed on 9/11.

As I have suggested previously, it is a trope heavily referenced by politicians, who frequently fail to address the human aspect lingering behind the words dotting their teleprompters. Again, it is not my intention to suggest that firefighters did not act heroically on 9/11 or in its aftermath, but rather to suggest that the trope of the “hero” disguises the material reality of these individuals. Studies have shown that firefighters and rescue workers exposed to the collapse of the twin towers and/or to “Ground Zero” in the immediate aftermath are at increased risk for PTSD, depression, anxiety, substance abuse disorders, respiratory symptoms, sinus problems, asthma, lung problems, and cancer. Further, at least some deaths in the years since 9/11 have been attributed to exposure at “Ground Zero.”³²⁶ Worse, many, if not all of these conditions could have been prevented had the Environmental Protection Agency not falsely declared the air at “Ground Zero” safe a mere two days after the attacks. According to the Union of Concerned Scientists, “The EPA’s press releases and public statements after 9/11 were vetted by then-National Security Advisor Condoleezza Rice, suggesting that the White House placed politics over science when communicating about ground zero’s air quality.”³²⁷ Describing the firefighters as “heroes” not only aids in the previously described process of sanctification, but also prevents debate over these significantly more complicated issues.

Anne Nelson’s stage play and subsequent film, *The Guys*, initially performed in December 2001, significantly complicates the trope of the hero firefighter. Twelve days after the attacks, Nelson (and one other person) assisted a local fire captain by ghost writing five eulogies for men he had lost. Three months later, with the captain’s blessing, that experience was

³²⁶ Unknown Author “A Message from the Commissioner of the New York City Department of Health and Mental Hygiene,” nyc.gov 2014, 10 Oct. 2014 <<http://www.nyc.gov/html/doh/wtc/html/know/know.shtml>>.

³²⁷ Union of Concerned Scientists, “World Trade Center Rescue Workers Believed EPA, Ended Up Sick,” [ucusa.org](http://www.ucsusa.org/scientific_integrity/abuses_of_science/ground-zero-air-pollution.html) Unknown Date, 10 Oct. 2014. <http://www.ucsusa.org/scientific_integrity/abuses_of_science/ground-zero-air-pollution.html>.

transformed into the play, *The Guys*. The play opened with a minimalistic production at the Flea Theatre, a 75-seat theatre at 41 White Street in TriBeCa (several blocks from Ground Zero), which was closed for two weeks following the attacks. The show originally ran as a workshop production under the direction of artistic director Jim Simpson³²⁸, opening on December 4, 2001 (exactly twelve weeks after the attacks), but continued to be extended until December 20, 2001. A special performance was held on the one-year anniversary of the attacks at the Vivian Beaumont Theatre at Lincoln Center. The cast originally consisted of Sigourney Weaver (Simpson's wife) as Joan, the journalist (and a surrogate for Nelson), and Bill Murray as Nick, the fire captain³²⁹, but new cast members were rotated in as the production was extended. The part of Joan was subsequently played by Susan Sarandon, Swoosie Kurtz, Amy Irving and Marlo Thomas³³⁰. The part of Nick was subsequently played by Anthony LaPaglia, Bill Irwin, Tim Robbins, Tom Wopat and Stephen Lang. Within its first year, the play was also presented in Los Angeles, Edinburgh and Dublin and was subsequently adapted by Simpson and Nelson for the screen (starring Sigourney Weaver and Anthony LaPaglia) and was presented at the Toronto Film Festival in 2002, receiving a wide release in April 2003. Not surprisingly, both the stage production and the film sought to draw in the community of New York firefighters in a number of ways. For example, the Flea offered heavily discounted, though limited, \$15¹ to firefighters, police officers, and port authority workers. Additionally, the film donated some of its proceeds to 9/11-centered charities.¹ In 2011, around the tenth anniversary of 9/11, the Flea briefly revived the play with Sigourney Weaver and Tom Wopat for a small number of performances throughout

³²⁸ Jim Simpson serves as head of the Flea Theatre Company, which rents its space to a number of theatre and dance companies. However, the theatre also serves as home to the 35-member Bat Company of which Jim Simpson is the head.

³²⁹ Sigourney Weaver and Bill Murray had previously worked together on the *Ghostbuster* films.

³³⁰ However, Sigourney Weaver did reprise her role for the anniversary performance.

the city. One of these occurred at Goldman Sachs, another at the Museum of Jewish Heritage, the latter specifically for the FDNY.

Overall, the film examines Nick's trauma in a number of ways the stage production cannot. The film begins with the heavily pixilated image of the firehouse on the morning of 9/11. As a fireman stands inside the garage door entrance, a piece of paper falls from the sky, gently towards the ground. Like the beginning of a snowfall, the paper is followed by others, gradually increasing in number. On the one hand, the paper is to be understood literally, as numerous accounts from bystanders that day attest to the fact of seeing falling paper. On the other, the paper functions as a metaphor, foreshadowing the loss of lives. In the play, this sequence is conveyed by Nick, who has seen this video. The audience is not actually privy to it. In the film, the video is brought front and center, returned to at various points throughout. The film, in its function as memory machine, therefore does something that the play cannot: it resurrects the fallen firefighters, returning us to a moment when they were still alive. However, this resurrection, like that of the eulogies is temporary, lasting only a moment. As the firemen gather, climb aboard the truck, the soundtrack is that of a funeral dirge³³¹, reminding us that this resurrection is, at best, illusory. Central to both the play and the film is the fact that Joan is helping Nick restructure his traumatic memories into eulogies celebrating the lives of the friends he lost on 9/11. By "working through" the events in this manner, he is gradually able to restructure his narrative of that day. Nelson likewise restructures her trauma in the act of converting these events into a play and, in its staging, encourages the audience to do the same.

³³¹ The song, *Dawning of the Day*, is a traditional Irish song, here with new lyrics by Mary Fahl, the singer performing it. The same song was subsequently performed by Ronan Tynan at the 2007 reopening dedication of 7 World Trade Center.

While the play was deemed a commercial success, it was generally considered a critical failure. Though the play has often been derided for its lack of literary and theatrical sophistication, its desire to not only humanize the individuals lost but also to provide comfort for grieving firefighters is significant. As Nick tells Joan, “I keep hearing these speeches from the politicians on tv. The pictures in the paper. Hero this, hero that. I don’t even recognize them.” “So that’s why it’s good you’re doing this. You can give the families something they can recognize,” she responds.³³² This allows Nick to replace the abstract hero archetype he finds represented on the television set with the memory of his flesh-and-blood friends. The narratives Nick and Joan formulate, therefore memorialize the dead not through the formulation of archetypes, but through a celebration of the individuals’ differences and flaws. In doing so, Nick gradually learns to replace the traumatic memory of his friends’ deaths with a series of anecdotes from their lives.

To do so, he requires Joan’s help. Literally at a loss for words, he requires the help of a person whose profession is centered around them. In helping Nick craft the eulogies, Joan serves as both editor and confidante. After having read one particular eulogy, he states, “Yeah you got it. You got it. That’s him.” “No, she replies, they’re your words, I just put them in order.”³³³ Joan therefore helps Nick not only in restructuring his words and his language, but also the narrative itself.

Through the eulogies, Nick and Joan recover the lives lost, wresting them from the sort of abstraction of the “snapshots” of the *Portraits in Grief* described in my first chapter. Judith Butler writes, “A hierarchy of grief could no doubt be enumerated. We have seen it already in the genre of the obituary, where lives are quickly tidied up and summarized, humanized, usually

³³² Ann Nelson, *The Guys* (New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks, 2002) 12.

³³³ *Ibid* 17.

married, or on the way to be, heterosexual, happy, monogamous.”³³⁴ While the eulogies in the play sometimes operate within these parameters, in exposing the writing process they also shed light on the complexity of the individuals they seek to memorialize. Above all, the play reminds audiences that the eulogies represent actual lives cut short.

MAKING MEANING OUT OF CONTROVERSY

More than a decade later, the image of the “falling man” remains as controversial as it was in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. On February 28, 2012, the *New York Times* published a blog by David W. Dunlap titled “A Season Premiere, a Falling Man and Memories of 9/11:”

In the visual vortex around Seventh Avenue and 34th Street, it takes a lot to stand out, but a rooftop billboard at 30th Street stands out. It shows a lone human figure seemingly tumbling from the windows above. And not everyone who sees it thinks, ‘Oh, that’s Don Draper, which means the season premiere of ‘Mad Men’ must be approaching.’³³⁵

While *Mad Men* had made use of the image of a tumbling man in its opening credits since its July 19, 2007 premiere, it was not until this particular marketing campaign that it incited controversy. As Dunlap points out, “[...] there is a difference between seeing the advertisement on a telephone enclosure and finding it overhead, where it is hard to read ‘March 25,’ the single line of text at the bottom.”³³⁶

³³⁴ Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (New York: Verso, 2004) 32.

³³⁵ David W. Dunlap, “A Season Premiere, a Falling Man and Memories of 9/11,” *New York Times on the Web* 28 February 2012, 14 March 2012 <http://cityroom.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/02/28/a-season-premiere-a-falling-man-and-memories-of-911/?_r=0>.

³³⁶ *Ibid.*

Both Jon Hamm, the show's star, and Matthew Wiener, the showrunner professed ignorance. As Jon Hamm stated in an interview following the controversy, "People got up in arms, apparently because of 9/11, but I didn't understand that. That image has been in our show since the beginning, so I don't understand why all of a sudden now people are focusing on it."³³⁷ Matthew Weiner took Hamm's indifference several steps further stating, "To suggest that I'm not reverent to the tragedy is ridiculous."³³⁸ While Weiner makes a valid point in going on to criticize journalists for seeking out survivors and victims' loved ones as interview subjects, both he and Hamm ignore the manner in which their marketing campaign potentially operates as a psychological trigger. Unlike Fischl or Skarbaka who actively seek to engage 9/11, to take part in the processes of "acting out" and "working through," the *Mad Men* ad campaign serves no such purpose. It is its very lack of intentionality which lends it its force as a trigger and which proves problematic – an indicator, if nothing else, that the processes outlined by LaCapra remains ongoing.

Drew, citing his colleagues, has repeatedly referred to his photograph as "the most famous photograph nobody's ever seen."³³⁹ As I have argued however, a "working through" is only possible through an encounter with the abject, inherent in the image, not through the surrogation of other images. What, then, would have been revealed by a closer look at jumpers' deaths? While hundreds in the towers died instantly, as a direct consequence of the airplanes' impact, many more died as a consequence of the failure to implement changes after the 1993

³³⁷ Maureen Ryan, "Mad Men': Jon Hamm On Season 5's Controversial Poster, Peggy And Don's Worst Moment," *The Huffington Post* 12 March 2012, 27 May 2012 <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/03/12/mad-men-jon-hamm_n_1334786.html>.

³³⁸ Willa Paskin, "Matt Weiner: 'Mad Men' is about today. Matt Weiner discusses the new season, the 9/11 ad controversy – and what the show says about America, now," *salon.com* 18 March 2012, 4 December 2013 <http://www.salon.com/2012/03/18/matt_weiner_mad_men_is_about_today/>.

³³⁹ Friend 136. To be sure, the photograph has been more widely disseminated since its initial release, due largely to Junod's article and Singer's film. However, the photo, and the issue of the "jumpers" remains controversial.

bombing of the WTC, not as a consequence of some vast conspiracy, but rather due to the minutiae of bureaucracy. Jim Dwyer and Kevin Flynn carefully outline these problems in their book *102 Minutes: The Untold Story of the Fight to Survive inside the Twin Towers*. For example, as of September 11th, only thirty of the two-hundred twenty floors of both towers had been properly fireproofed. Further, while the city spent thousands of dollars on state of the art radios, without a proper booster system, the radios were unusable, preventing effective communication between those on the ground and those in the towers, between the fire department and police. Thus, though an evacuation order was given in the North Tower, there was no way to relay it, since the building's only public address system had been destroyed by the plane. Additionally, large numbers of people in the South Tower learned of the incident in the North Tower only from friends and family who had, in turn, learned of the plane crash on television. The matter was further complicated by the conflicting information provided by 911 operators, who themselves lacked a comprehensive overview of the morning's events. Some 911 operators told people to exit the building, while others told people to remain where they were. Additionally, because the potential of a full evacuation had not been considered, the stairwells were narrower than required by some codes, limiting the number of people who could escape in time. Further, the stairwells were placed together, in the form of a triangle in the center of the building. This meant that, particularly in the North Tower, where the crash site was limited to only a few floors, the stairwells were not accessible for those above the impact zone. Though some of these issues are being addressed in the wake of the 9/11 Commission Report, far too many still remain to be examined. Therefore, in turning the question of causality strictly outward, the classification of "homicide" ignores the fact that many of these deaths, if not all, were largely preventable.

Additionally, these deaths were not simply “homicides.” Each of the victims of 9/11 died not an abstract death, but a painful, terrifying death that came far too suddenly. Those deaths, I argue, deserve to be individually acknowledged and seen and mourned so that they might be “worked-through,” a process that is necessary if we are to break the chain of violence. As Tom Junod states, “One of the reasons why I became so determined to plumb the meaning of ‘The Falling Man’ was that we can’t hope to understand these incredible times unless we look at these images and accept the witness of these images.”³⁴⁰ If memory in the aftermath of traumatic events is constructed collectively, it is the individual who must bear witness, staring into Nietzsche’s abyss, but more importantly, allowing the abyss to stare back.

³⁴⁰ The Falling Man, Singer.

5.0 CHAPTER FOUR: US VERSUS THEM – THE SELF THAT IS NOT “OTHER”

More than any other subaltern or national culture, it is Islam that has been fixed as the universal Other, and it is the Muslim who is now embodying the whole array of negative stereotypes typically assigned to all non-whites with equal measure.

(Anouar Majid, “The Postcolonial Bubble”)³⁴¹

So I picked up a respectable magazine
It told me about the new post 9/11 categories –
Israeli fighters are soldiers, Irish are paramilitary
And darkie ones are terrorists – how simple can it be?

(Riz MC, *Post-9/11 Blues*)³⁴²

They cannot imagine the Other, nor therefore personally make war upon it. What they make war upon is the alterity of the other, and what they want is to reduce that alterity, to convert it, or failing that to annihilate it if it proves irreducible.

(Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*)³⁴³

This chapter will explore the binary construction of “us” and “them” (as well as analogous, related binarisms) through the mechanisms of “othering” and scapegoating within the material, political, and social context of 9/11 and in relation to U.S. national narratives of 9/11. A thorough examination of the Muslim “other” in the context of 9/11 would span thousands of years of history and is outside the purview of both this chapter and my dissertation. While I will allude to those histories, the scope of my project is limited to the ten-year time span immediately following September 11, 2001. My analysis is bookended by the attacks of 9/11 (and President George W. Bush’s address to a joint session of Congress nine days later) and the killing of

³⁴¹ Anouar Majid, “The Postcolonial Bubble,” in *The Postcolonial and the Global*, Revathi Krishnaswamy and John C. Hawley (eds.) (Minneapolis and London: University of Minnesota Press, 2008) 135.

³⁴² Riz MC, *Post-9/11 Blues* HMV and iTunes, 2006.

³⁴³ Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* Paul Patton (trans.) (Sydney: Power Publications, 2006) 37.

Osama Bin Laden on May 2, 2011. I will examine filmic, performative and theatrical representations of 9/11 which challenge binary constructions of “us” and “them” in both expected and unexpected ways. My analyses offer a broader, more complex picture of U.S. national, political and cultural identity than mainstream representations have allowed. I ask: how are binaries of self and other constructed in relation to 9/11 in the U.S.? How might performance disrupt and challenge these binaries? To interrogate how these tropes function in the construction of post-9/11 American identity, I will look at the films *United 93* (Greengrass, 2006), *Flight 93* (Markle 2006), and *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (Nair, 2013), as well as the 2003 musical *Wicked*. For structural reasons, I will not be examining these works in strictly chronological order. Rather, I intend to demonstrate that, taken as a whole, these dramatic works function as a bricolage, a rhizomatic representation of the Muslim “Other:” from scapegoating to “othering” and finally, to self-representation.

I begin my chapter with an analysis of the films *Flight 93* (Markle, 2006) and *United 93* (Greengrass, 2006). Both films, released in 2006, focus on the same premise, namely the events aboard flight United Airlines 93, one of four planes hijacked on the morning of September 11, 2001, which subsequently crashed in a field in Shanksville, PA. The films’ claims to ‘truth’ notwithstanding, I argue that these films ultimately eschew a documentary analysis of the events, favoring instead distinct, though analogous, acts of interpretive “othering.” I will examine not only the respective agendas of both films. I will also explore how, despite and because of these agendas, the position of the terrorist is defined and represented. I examine why and how the narrative of the terrorist “other” is integral to reinforcing the abstractly defined terms of the “war on terror”.

To show how that newly formulated “other” has been / is scapegoated, I turn to the musical *Wicked*, by Gregory Maguire, Winnie Holzman, and Stephen Schwartz, which was first staged in 2003 and is based on Gregory Maguire’s 1995 novel of the same name. The story serves as a prequel to *The Wizard of Oz*, both in the form of L. Frank Baum’s 1900 novel and the 1939 film adaptation. Rather than focusing on the character of Dorothy, the musical’s reimagining focuses on the relationship between the two witches: Glinda, the “good” witch of the North, and Elphaba, the “wicked” witch of the West. The development of the relationship between these two characters parallels the increasing political corruption of Oz – events which polarize both characters and cause them to inhabit seemingly opposite ends of the ideological spectrum. Throughout, as the political climate in Oz becomes more hostile and ultimately fascist, the animals of Oz are increasingly scapegoated. This scapegoating, I argue, parallels the plight of American Muslims post 9/11 and represents a heretofore un-examined facet of the musical’s success in the United States.

The Reluctant Fundamentalist (Nair, 2013) provides a multi-faceted portrayal of the Muslim “other,” which stands in stark contrast to the one-dimensional portrayal of the terrorists in *United 93* and *Flight 93* and resists the scapegoating endured by the animals in *Wicked*. The film allows us to examine the events of 9/11 outside the context of the so-called “clash of civilizations” – a theory first proposed by political scientist Samuel P. Huntington in 1992 and later cemented by Bernard Lewis, and widely applied to the “war on terror” by the second Bush administration to further the economic agenda of the United States’ neoconservative movement in the Middle East between 2000 and 2008. I propose that *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* displaces the binarisms constructed by othering and scapegoating and replaces them with a rhizomatic conception of positionality in the “war on terror.” As Baudrillard states, “This is not a

clash of civilizations or religions, and it reaches far beyond Islam and America, on which efforts are being made to focus the conflict in order to create the delusion of a visible confrontation and a solution based upon force.”³⁴⁴ My project then, in examining all of these works, is to re-focus the conflict beyond the formulations of “Islam” and “America” to not only complicate these terms and their relation to one another, but also to gain a fuller understanding of the event of 9/11 and its narrativization’s contexts and ramifications, historically, socially, and politically.

“IF YOU ARE NOT WITH US, YOU ARE WITH THE TERRORISTS”

The notion of “othering” has, throughout modernity, been applied to various discourses. Michel Foucault for instance, in *Madness and Civilization* framed othering within a historical discourse of madness, whereas Simone DeBeauvoir, in *The Second Sex*, applied the notion of othering to the discourse of feminism. In his influential 1978 book, *Orientalism*, Edward Said challenged prevailing methodologies within the field of Orientalist Studies, positing that however well-intentioned, the field was limited by its own imperialist perspective, stating, ““Orientalism is – and does not simply represent a considerable dimension of modern political-intellectual culture, and as such has less to do with the Orient than it does with ‘our’ world.”³⁴⁵ Said sought to question formulations of the self and other and how power and knowledge are constructed around these terms – concerns which in turn led to the establishment of post-colonialism as an academic discipline.

In his article “Representing the Colonized: Anthropology’s Interlocutors” Said pointed to the material ramifications of othering within the East/West binary:

³⁴⁴ Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism* Chris Turner (trans.) (New York: Verso, 2002) 11.

³⁴⁵ Said, *Orientalism* 12.

The material interests at stake in our culture are very large, and very costly. They involve not only questions of war and peace – for, if in general you have reduced the non-European world to the status of a subsidiary or inferior region, it becomes easier to invade and pacify it – but also questions of economic allocation, political priorities, and, centrally, relationships of dominance and inequality.³⁴⁶

While post-colonialism has now come to dominate Middle Eastern studies, the acceptance of Said's theories is not universal. Despite a well-crafted anti-intellectual media image, the foreign (and by extension, domestic) policies of the second Bush administration were deeply and profoundly rooted in the world of academic discourse. That discourse however, was not the scholarship of Said and his post-colonial colleagues, but rather that of Bernard Lewis, Said's most notable detractor who, as I have mentioned above, contributed significantly to coining the now familiar term "clash of civilizations."

Lewis' theories regarding Islam are most notably articulated in his book *What Went Wrong?*. Written prior to 9/11 and published shortly thereafter,³⁴⁷ the book proposes the notion that Muslims can be categorized as "good" or "bad," a binarism which can be found throughout much of President George W. Bush's public rhetoric surrounding the events of 9/11. In *State of Denial: Bush at War Part III*, journalist Bob Woodward, reveals the extent of Lewis' influence on the Bush administration. Woodward states: "Well into the Afghanistan bombing campaign, Paul Wolfowitz, the deputy secretary of defense, called an old friend, Christopher Demuth, the longtime president of the American Enterprise institute, the conservative Washington Think

³⁴⁶ Edward Said, "Representing the Colonized: Anthropology's Interlocutors" in *Critical Inquiry* Vol. 15, No. 2 (Winter 1989) 215.

³⁴⁷ Mahmood Mamdani, *Good Muslim, Bad Muslim: America, The Cold War, and the Roots of Terror* (New York, Pantheon Books, 2004) 23.

Tank.”³⁴⁸ Woodward adds: “The U.S. government, especially the Pentagon, is incapable of producing the kinds of ideas and strategies needed to deal with a crisis of the magnitude of 9/11, Wolfowitz told DeMuth. He needed to reach outside to tackle the bigger questions.”³⁴⁹ At Wolfowitz’s insistence, “Demuth recruited a dozen people,”³⁵⁰ including Lewis, a friend of Vice President Dick Cheney’s. So strong was Lewis’ influence, in fact, that Cheney referenced him both in an appearance on *Meet the Press* and in his own memoir.

In the years since, Lewis has sought to minimize the public perception of his influence on the Bush administration and made repeated claims that he opposed the invasion of Iraq. Given his previous scholarship, which suggests that extensive outside intervention within the Islamic world is ill-advised, these claims are certainly credible. What is more troubling however, and what is of significance to my project, is his opposition to the work of Said. Their feud is well documented, beginning with Lewis’ 1982 response to *Orientalism* in *The New York Review of Books* and peaking with a 1986 debate at the Middle East Studies association. Despite Said’s death in 2003, Lewis’ contempt for Said remains unabated: “The situation is very bad. Saidianism has become an orthodoxy that is enforced with a rigor unknown in the Western world since the Middle Ages.”³⁵¹

Given the degree to which Said’s research made Lewis’ work obsolete, the latter’s resistance is perhaps understandable. However, given the degree to which Lewis’ misguided thinking informed the manner in which the Bush administration conceptualized the events of 9/11 geo-politically and historically, it can not be ignored. More specifically, the binarisms of

³⁴⁸ Bob Woodward, *State of Denial: Bush at War, Part III* (New York:Simon & Schuster, 2006) 83.

³⁴⁹ Ibid.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ Evan R. Goldstein, “‘Osama bin Laden Made Me Famous’ Bernard Lewis Looks Back,” chronicle.com 22 April 2012, 10 October 2014 <<http://chronicle.com/article/Osama-bin-Laden-Made-Me/131584/>>.

“us” and “them,” of “good” and “bad” Muslims must be understood within this context: as outmoded academic discourse which had profound consequences, both with regard to the invasion of Iraq and with regard to the othering of Muslims within the United States and abroad.

Nine days after the attacks of 9/11, President Bush addressed a joint session of Congress and the United States as a whole. It was in the course of this speech that the President first publicly made use of the rhetoric of “us and them” in the newly proclaimed “war on terror:”

Americans are asking, why do they hate us? They hate what we see right here in this chamber – a democratically elected government. Their leaders are self-appointed. They hate our freedoms – our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other. [...]

They stand against us, because we stand in their way.³⁵²

In dichotomizing the world into the categories of “us” and “them,” the President cast the roles of hero and villain within the newly minted “war on terror” and “othered” those who could not be unequivocally encompassed by the category of “us”, famously stating, “If you are not with us, you are with the terrorists.” None of these terms (“us,” “them,” “good,” “evil,” “war on terror”) are adequate to make sense of the geopolitical context of 9/11 and its aftermath. Rather, these dichotomous formulations perpetuate Lewis’ deeply flawed notion of a “clash of civilizations,” suggesting that the post-9/11 world can easily be sliced into homogenous units of “us” and “them.” These terms each structure what Said referred to as an “enclosed space,” where representation of the other can be likened to a theatrical performance that is iterated and reiterated in subsequent performances.³⁵³

³⁵² Unknown Author, “Address by the President to a Joint Session of Congress,” [whitehouse.gov](http://www.whitehouse.gov), 8 Sept. 2011, 10 Oct. 2014, <<http://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2011/09/08/address-president-joint-session-congress>>.

³⁵³ Said, *Orientalism* 63.

The consequence of framing this discourse in terms of “us” and “them” is therefore not only a widening of the gap between “our” position and “theirs”, but a total negation of any position but “ours”. By extension, it is in this “enclosed space” lacking moral, political, social, and historical nuance that the war crimes committed at Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib can be dismissed as necessary tactics of war. The answer to the often-asked question of “Why do ‘they’ hate us?” (facile to begin with) is thus transformed from one based in a series of political and historical complexities into a more unilateral one. Ergo, the United States’ backing of the Mujahideen through the CIA’s Operation Cyclone within the context of a proxy war against the Soviet Union, the training of Osama Bin Laden within this context, the subsequent failure of the United States’ government to assist Afghanistan in its rebuilding and recovery, and the manner in which that failure may have been a contributing factor in the events of 9/11 no longer need to be addressed. Rather, these are deemed the acts of a singular “evil” force. My purpose in questioning the terminology of “us” and “them” is therefore not a matter of semantics, but one which substantially impacts the material reality these terms represent. As Said writes, “it needs to be made clear about cultural discourse and exchange within a culture that what is commonly circulated by it is not ‘truth’ but representations.”³⁵⁴ “Us” and “them” are not merely misleading terms, but representations which have profound geo-political repercussions.

One way in which to conceptualize these essentialist discourses is as melodrama, which likewise offers the illusion of clear-cut heroes and villains, of good and evil. Of course, as has been pointed out by numerous commentators and scholars before, the melodramatic formulation is not unique to the Bush regime and the war on terrorism, but has been utilized throughout the twentieth century in framing any number of conflicts, ranging from World War II to the Cold

³⁵⁴ Ibid 21.

War. However, the problem in this instance, is the melodramatic framework itself. As Gregory Desilet points out in *Our Faith in Evil. Melodrama and the Effects of Entertainment Violence*, even a case as morally extreme as that of Hitler is problematic in this context:

But viewing Hitler as an evil of world historical proportions conceals an unsettling irony. Hitler becomes a figure of great evil precisely by way of attempting – with a thoroughgoing sense of righteousness – to rid Europe, if not the world, of what he perceived to be a great evil [...] The notion of evil as pollution, as that which is in its essence worthy of elimination, is the real evil because it is precisely through the introduction of this notion that the possibility of finding something to be inessential to the whole emerges [...] Hitler became an “evil” of enormous proportions not through personal actions alone but through nationwide susceptibility to the dangers of scapegoating, conditioned by the prevalence and acceptance of a way of thinking about evil rooted deeply in Western culture.³⁵⁵

In other words, describing the terrorists as “evil” or as “evildoers” prohibits a closer examination of their actual motives and reasons, as well as the fact that they too frame the conflict in similar terms, albeit from a reverse perspective. Further, as I have suggested above, the events of 9/11 did not occur in a political or historical vacuum. The question as to why “they” hate “us” is therefore not one which can simply be answered in melodramatic terms. In fact, the question itself should not be answered at all as it is an inadequate and facile construction. Rather, through my case studies, I will examine why and how these melodramatic formulations are drawn on in the first place and, more importantly, what they ultimately conceal.

³⁵⁵ Gregory Desilet, *Our Faith in Evil: Melodrama and the Effects of Entertainment Violence* (Jefferson and London: McFarland & Company, Inc. Publishers, 2006) 156-161.

In other words, I will attempt to replace the binarisms of the “clash of civilizations” and the “war on terror” with a rhizomatic conception of the Muslim “other” in relation to the events of 9/11.

As Melanie McAlister reminds us in the conclusion of her book *Epic Encounters*, “The attacks of 9/11 were of course immoral acts, but that statement can only be the beginning not the end of analysis.³⁵⁶” The terminology of “us and them” is thus precisely the sort which lends itself to narrativization because of the recognizeability of its language. We are, after all, familiar with the stereotypes of “us and them”, “good and evil”, etc. and though such binarisms fail to stand up to more careful analysis, they are familiar and recognizable. It is for example, as discussed in my previous chapter, easier to imagine a “heroic” firefighter willing to sacrifice his life for others and to construct a narrative around that character, than to look more deeply at the actual causes of his death. Despite the Bush administration’s attempts to demarcate the events surrounding 9/11 in similarly clear cut East-West terms, the morals, ethics, and geopolitics are highly complex. Nobody, save a handful of disturbed radicals, would propose that that the murder of 3,000 civilians is anything but an act worthy of the strictest condemnation. However, to view that act as merely an anomalous immoral act committed by a group of rogue “evildoers,” devoid of its historical context, is myopic.

As I will demonstrate in the following section, the myopia of the public discourse surrounding the events of 9/11 was and continues to be perpetuated in cultural representations of “us and them”, which in turn serve to reify that discourse. As Said points out, “fictions have their own logic and their own dialectic of growth and decline.”³⁵⁷ Due to the manner in which that discourse shattered and shored up notions of American exceptionalism, it is necessary to look

³⁵⁶ Melanie McAlister, *Epic Encounters: Culture, Media and U.S. Interests in the Middle East since 1945* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2001) 278.

³⁵⁷ Said, *Orientalism* 62.

across a variety of cultural productions. I therefore focus on two particular cultural representations of the events aboard United Airlines 93, the films *Flight 93* and *United 93*. I seek not only to expose some of those fictions, but also to examine how the trope of villainy functions within the fiction of the “war on terror.”

“WE HAVE SOME PLANES:” THE TERRORIST “OTHER” IN *UNITED 93* AND *FLIGHT 33*

2006 saw the release of two films, *Flight 93* and *United 93*, depicting the events aboard United Airlines 93 on the morning of September 11, 2001. *Flight 93*, the lesser known of the two films, was produced by the A&E network and distributed for a television audience. By contrast, *United 93*, directed by Paul Greengrass (at that point most notable for his direction of the “Bourne” action franchise starring Matt Damon) received a relatively wide release in movie theatres. Though the exact sequence of the events inside flight United 93 is only known to individuals who are now deceased, there is sufficient evidence to formulate a credible timeline. The start and end times of cell phone calls made from within the airplane³⁵⁸ are known as well as some recollection of their content by the calls’ recipients. Further, flight records documenting the plane’s speed and altitude, the recovered black box (the only one among the four hijacked planes that morning) documenting the final forty-five minutes within the cockpit, and a series of unintentional communications by the hijackers with NORAD all provide clues to the details of the events surrounding that flight.

³⁵⁸ Conspiracy theorists tend to focus on the cell phone calls as evidence of a conspiracy, suggesting that the calls would simply not have been possible at the altitude at which the plane would have been flying. However, this suggestion relies on the presumption that the plane was travelling at its regular cruising altitude throughout its flight, which, in fact, it was not. Instead, records reveal that the plane was flying at a very low altitude for a large portion of its flight.

And yet, there remains sufficient information open to interpretation and speculation to warrant two vastly different films, with unique foci and purposes. Certain key moments in both movies are depicted with distinct differences as we do not know precisely how the events unfolded. For instance, in both films, first class passenger Mark Rothenberg is stabbed, though in *United 93*, he is stabbed in the neck during the takeover and a fellow passenger, who is an EMT attempts to administer first aid, whereas in *Flight 93* he is stabbed in the chest, after attempting to talk to the hijackers, and dies almost instantly.³⁵⁹ Similar discrepancies reign over the murder of a stewardess in the beginning of the hijacking and even over the cause of the crash itself. These liberties are easily taken because both films still function within a certain melodramatic framework of victim and perpetrator, of good and evil, of “us” and “them”. I argue that within the “enclosed space” in which these films operate as mimetic Saidian performances, the accurate depiction of the events of that morning becomes secondary to the staging and reification of the “clash of civilizations.” In other words, despite their claims to “truth,” the films each make due with ‘good enough’ approximations of the events in the interest of keeping the larger narrative framework intact.

Not surprisingly, both films are in agreement over the passengers’ heroism. In both films, the passengers are portrayed as wanting to take their fate into their own hands and succeed in entering the cockpit in the final moments of the flight. What is interesting about this consensus is that there is no hard evidence to support this interpretation of events. That the passengers intended to fight back is certain. Whether they succeeded in their efforts is questionable. In fact, the only remaining evidence, the voice data recorder, is inconclusive at best as to whether or not the passengers entered the cockpit. This moment of agreement thus offers us an insight into the

³⁵⁹ It was never conclusively proven that Rothenberg was in fact the passenger who was stabbed, only assumed because he is the only first-class passenger who did not call his family.

films' relationships with the trope of heroism. In both instances, the "clash of civilizations" is enacted as a conflict between the "heroic" passengers and the "evil" terrorists. The one existentialist formulation cannot stand without the other; i.e. for the passengers to be "heroic" the terrorists must be "evil."

Though I have previously questioned the unilateral application of the term "hero" in earlier chapters, due to this enshrinement of the characterization of the relationship between hero and sacrifice within the context of the "clash of civilizations," it is necessary to take a moment to further trouble the term here. According to the OED a hero is "a person, typically a man, who is admired or idealized for courage, outstanding achievements, or noble qualities."³⁶⁰ Courage, in turn, is defined as "the ability to do something that frightens one."³⁶¹ In other words, a hero is usually a man who either does something that he perceives as frightening or achieves something outstanding. The key protagonists of the national narrative of 9/11 – Todd Beamer, Mark Bingham, Thomas Burnett, Jeremy Glick – are all indeed male. This part of the definition applies. However, whether these individuals did something that frightened them is questionable. If the passengers felt fear it is far more likely that they feared their own imminent deaths if they did not fight back than if they did. Storming the cockpit was a final desperate attempt at survival, no more a sacrifice in the name of the greater good than the firefighters who died in the towers because they did not receive the evacuation order and were unaware the towers would collapse. Though the passengers aboard United 93 had a somewhat greater understanding of the full extent of the morning's events than those within the towers or the Pentagon due to the plane's delayed take-off, I suggest that in the end, it is highly plausible that the passengers did not intend to sacrifice themselves, but fought to live. That they mounted their revolt above a rural area

³⁶⁰ Oxford English Dictionary, [oed.com](http://www.oed.com/) 2014, 10 October 2014 <<http://www.oed.com/>>.

³⁶¹ Ibid.

indicates only that they were aware their efforts might cause the plane to crash, not that the crash was the intended outcome, for it was ultimately the terrorists who steered the plane into the ground. The struggle for control of the cockpit continued right through the final moment. I am not suggesting that the passengers did not die tragically, only that in the end, they fought to live. Without sacrifice, there is no martyr or hero. And yet, the term “hero” is widely applied to the passengers and crew of United 93, in the same way that it is often applied to the firefighters who perished inside the towers.³⁶²

Analogously, it is not my intention to imply that the actions of the terrorists are in any way morally justified or worthy of anything but the harshest condemnation. Terrorism, as politics by other means (to borrow loosely from Clausewitz), should under no circumstances be condoned or sanctioned. However, this condemnation, unto itself, provides no meaningful insight into the events of 9/11, but functions solely as a moral response. Outrage and grief are understandable and necessary responses to trauma, but more nuanced discourse than the binary formulations of “us and them,” of “good and evil” is required if the violent events of 9/11 are to signify something more than a pretext for the so-called “war on terror.”

Rather than being portrayed as complex individuals, the victims soon came to serve as talking points in the Bush administration’s efforts to gain the public’s approval for its wars in Iraq, Afghanistan, and numerous other, smaller operations in the Middle East – all broadly and loosely summarized as the “war on terrorism.” At the same time, Washington frequently disregarded the physical and psychological crises of survivors, family members, and first responders. It is a particularly cruel irony that those same politicians are among those now most

³⁶² As I have noted in my previous chapter, far greater numbers of firefighters than police officers died in the towers as a consequence of the fire department’s inferior radio system. Due to political wrangling, the fire department did not have the budget.

frequently using the term “hero.” As satirist Jon Stewart succinctly put it on December 13, 2010 in a *Daily Show* segment entitled “Lame-as-fuck Congress,” which criticized the GOP’s resistance to the Zadruga bill³⁶³, “You [the GOP] use 9/11 so much, if you don’t owe 9/11 first responders health care, you at least owe them royalties.”³⁶⁴ However, at issue is not simply the manner in which the term “the war on terrorism” is (mis)used, but also, that as a term, it is in and of itself a falsity. The “hero” formulation is essential to the “us” and “them” binary, to the notion that the terrorists are equally one-dimensional “evildoers.”

Flight 93, the first of the two films to be released, was made for television, by the A&E network – one of whose employees, Honor Elizabeth Wainio, was on board the flight – and serves primarily as a memorial to the lives lost. On the DVD commentary, director Peter Markle admitted that “The hardest thing about making the film was making sure that we were providing a memory that justified what the passengers went through, something that spoke the truth and reflected their courage.” In the opening scene of *Flight 93*, co-pilot Leroy Homer, Jr. (Biski Gugushe) finishes his morning preparation before leaving home and kisses his sleeping wife goodbye. The only witness to these final moments is his infant son, also lying in bed. The audience is meant to infer the tragic meaning of this moment, which will be lost to time, as the infant is not yet capable of communicating its meaning and will likely lose access to the memory as he grows older. Of course, the moment is solely a fictional construct and within the realm of conjecture, serving primarily to underscore the tragic loss. What is interesting about this moment

³⁶³ James Zadruga was a NYPD officer, who died on January 5, 2006 as a consequence of respiratory disease acquired while working in rescue and recovery operations at Ground Zero. He was the first post-9/11 victim of the attacks identified as such. On August 14, 2006, then-NY governor George Pataki signed legislation, expanding death benefits for 9/11 workers to include cancer and respiratory illnesses sustained at Ground Zero. On Dec. 22, 2010, President Obama, following a Republican filibuster, signed the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act to federally provide aid and monitoring to 9/11 workers. Jon Stewart is widely credited for bringing awareness to, and thereby contributing to ending, the Republican filibuster.

³⁶⁴ “Lame as Fuck Congress,” *The Daily Show*, Comedy Central, 13 Dec. 2010.

is its desire to emphasize the everyday humanity of the victims at the expense of that authenticity, implying that the focus of this movie, though based in facts, is the emotional truth of its victims.

The scene with Homer is immediately juxtaposed with that of a terrorist shaving his facial and chest hair – a scene which is mirrored in *United 93* – an Islamic ritual in preparation for the Jihad. Again, there is no way to prove the verisimilitude of this moment. Instead, it should be read simply as a contrast to the previous scene: on the one hand we see the humanity of the victims, on the other, the inhumanity of the terrorists.³⁶⁵

The following shots depict the readying and boarding of the plane. Given the historical weight of the subsequent events, these ordinary moments are thus infused with a deeper meaning which they would not otherwise have. For example, one passenger, Lauren Glandacalos (Jacqueline Ann Steuart), is shown reading a book titled *What to Expect When You're Expecting*, a poignant moment telling the viewer that her death was doubly tragic because it also encompassed the fate of her unborn child. A further moment depicts Mark Bingham (Ty Olsson) barely arriving at the gate, where a United employee greets him with the words “Just in time.” The tragic irony, of course, is that Bingham did *not* miss the flight.

All of these scenes, like so much dramatic tragedy, are predicated on the notion that the viewer knows something the characters, who in this case are based on actual people, do not. The

³⁶⁵ Much of what we presume to know about the terrorists' behavior that morning is based on the Spiritual Manual, consulted by the hijackers during the period preceding the events of September 11, 2001. In total, three copies of the Spiritual Manual were subsequently located: in the suitcase of Mohammed Atta, in the vehicle of Nawaf al-Hazimi at the airport in Washington, DC, and at the crash site in Shanksville, PA. Tilman Seidensticker, in his analysis of the manual, estimates that it consists of approximately 1570 words: 67 words “referring to externally visible behavior of a non-religious character,” 59 words of “non-religious instructions that aim at an internal preparation,” 90 words of “instructions for religiously imbued, externally visible behavior,” and the remainder (86%) “internal religious preparation for the different phases of the mission.” Tilman Seidensticker, “The Instructions Given in the *Spiritual Manual* and their Particular Interpretation of Islam” in The 9/11 Handbook Hans G. Kippenberg and Tilman Seidenticker (eds.) (London and Oakville: Equinox Publishing, 2006)18-19.

terrorists on the other hand, *are* depicted as having that knowledge, as proven by their occasional sharing of meaningful glances or looking at their watches. Nonetheless, overall the terrorists blend in and as the passengers board the plane, the terrorists do so as well. As the boarding process continues, we are introduced to the passengers via close-ups of their boarding passes: Mark Rothenberg (Jerry Wasserman), Elizabeth Wainio, Saeed Alghamadi (Shawn Ahmed), etc. What makes these “characters” central is not simply their role in the events of that morning, but the fact that because their roles can in some way be substantiated (via cell phone calls made, etc.), they lend themselves more easily to narrativization and dramatization than other “characters”. Here, as throughout, the gaps in the narrative are not allowed to stand and speak on their own terms, but are forcibly filled in via an expansion of the little that is known. In other words, their stories are worth telling, not simply because they contain some inherent worth as we are led to believe, but because we have enough raw materials around which to construct their stories. Whereas great care is taken to humanize the passengers whose characterizations are constructed based upon the recollections of family members and loved ones, no similar care is taken with the terrorists, who are instead dehumanized within the larger melodramatic framework.

Once Bingham makes his way down the gate, the camera follows him and therefore his fate. As viewers, we will be on the plane with him. In later scenes, family members will be depicted as they have conversations with loved ones on board and various flight centers will serve as witnesses to the events, but by and large the story unfolds on the plane with the passengers. Consequently, we learn little about the terrorists, despite the actors’ attempts to humanize them.

In one particularly moving scene, passenger Tom Bennett speaks with his wife, Deena:

Tom: We're waiting till we're over a rural area. We're going to take back the airplane.

Deena: What? No, no, no! Just sit down. Be still. Don't draw attention to yourself.

Tom: They're going to take us into the ground. We've got to do something. It's up to us to do it. No one else can.

Deena: What do you want me to do?

Tom: Pray, Deena, just pray.³⁶⁶

The scene underscores a number of themes referenced throughout both films. Firstly, there is the selfless courage of the passengers: they realize that no one is going to help them, so they must take it upon themselves to thwart the terrorists. Secondly, the religious faith of the Christian passengers is emphasized throughout, particularly in contrast to the more 'exotic' faith and culture of the terrorists. Thirdly, the transcendent power of love between the American family members on the ground, who will live on, and the Americans on the plane, who will die, is emphasized. In this "enclosed space," those included within the term "us" are marked as the heroes, whereas the terrorists ("them"), who appear largely devoid of emotion, motivation or nuance are assigned the role of villains. Due to the film's melodramatic structure, the notion of "evil" replaces the character development of the terrorists.

A second scene in which Honor Elizabeth Wainio (Laura Mennell) is depicted saying goodbye to her stepmother, Esther Heyman (Gwynyth Walsh), encompasses similar themes:

Elizabeth: Mom, it's me, Elizabeth.

Esther: Hello, darling. Are you ok?

³⁶⁶ Flight 9325th Hour. Dir. Spike Lee. Buena Vista Pictures, 2002.

Elizabeth: Mom, we've been hijacked and I'm calling to say goodbye.

Esther: What? Why would you want to do that?

Elizabeth. Mom, do you know what's going on?

Esther: (lying) No. Elizabeth. I have my arms around you and I am holding you and I love you.

Elizabeth: I feel your arms around me and I love you too. Mom, we're being hijacked and I'm not going to come home.

Esther: Elizabeth, darling, I want you to listen to me, we don't know how things are going to turn out, so let's just be here, in the present. Let's look out the window at the beautiful blue sky and let's just breathe and let's take a few deep breaths.³⁶⁷

Again, I am not suggesting that all of these themes and emotions of love, fear, and determination were not in some manner present on that morning, but rather questioning why they are being emphasized over others. After all, both of these scenes depict only a small fragment of the actual phone conversations. In other words, why focus on this moment rather than another? To say that it is because of Wanio's position at A&E is simplistic, but not inaccurate. If the channel did indeed feel an obligation to tell these people's stories 'truthfully,' it must have felt that obligation moreso in the case of its own employee.

Unlike *Flight 93*, which focuses on memorializing the victims, *United 93* seeks to place its subject matter in a greater historical context, depicting not only events which occurred on the flight itself, but expanding its scope to include sequences at NORAD, and the National, Boston, Cleveland and New York Air Traffic Control Centers. In direct contrast to *Flight 93*, in which

³⁶⁷ Ibid.

the opening shot is of co-pilot Leroy Homer leaving his home, *United 93* commences by introducing the terrorists themselves. The first words we in fact here are of an Arab prayer and the first image is that of the Koran. Though the prayer is briefly interrupted by another terrorist, ominously stating, “It’s time”, it continues to serve as a soundtrack for the following sequence of shots. The first of these is an aerial view of Manhattan in which two streets converge briefly only to then flow apart again. As with a number of visual metaphors throughout the film, this one underlines the contrast between the Arab terrorists and the Western passengers. The film and the moment in history it is depicting, suggests a convergence between the two cultures similar to that of the streets, albeit a violent one which has since been deemed a “clash of civilizations”.

Here again, we see the familiar image of the terrorist shaving his facial and chest hair. Nonetheless, there is a moment of humanity as we see him deeply exhale. Perhaps he too, is capable of fear. As the terrorists drive to Newark Airport along the NJ Turnpike, they pass a series of shipping containers. While the containers are a familiar landmark on that part of the turnpike, the manner in which they are arranged is not. Four of them are painted with an American flag and the Words “God Bless America”, a construct presumably created for the movie or at the very least, highlighted. In fact, God and Allah are referenced throughout. Of course, the implication is that God stands with the American people, rather than the evildoers. The terrorists are not simply driving to the airport, but through an American religious landscape. Their “Eastern-ness” is further contrasted with American commercialism, when one of the terrorists is depicted standing in front of an advertisement featuring two female models.

While waiting to board, the conversations among the passengers cover ordinary topics relatable to viewers. By contrast, the knowing glances exchanged among the terrorists function as markers of their “otherness.” In *Flight 93*, those glances function less melodramatically,

serving primarily to convey the intent of the hijackers. Here however, those glances are so sinister and caricatured that had the terrorists actually communicated in such a manner, they would have risked the discovery of their plot. Again, the focus here is not on verisimilitude or truth, i.e. on how the terrorists actually communicated with one another in the moments preceding their boarding of the flight, but rather on the enshrinement of their otherness. Operating within a melodramatic framework, the terrorists are not committing these acts because of their own personal motivations or convictions, but rather, because they are inherently *different* and therefore “evil”. Unlike in *Flight 93*, these everyday moments among the passengers serve only as a contrast to the terrorists’ lack of humanity. In an ironic act of foreshadowing, one terrorist calls his German girlfriend and repeats the words “Ich liebe dich” three times – the passengers will make similar phone calls to their loved ones. Here, it is not the passengers’ actions, which acquire meaning retroactively, but the terrorists’. In other words, meaning is not attributed to the tragedy via the victims, but rather via the perpetrators. In fact, the only ordinary moment which is infused with additional meaning and serves as a signifier to the audience is the closing of the airplane hatch which also leads into the musical score: The passengers’ fate is now sealed. There is no going back. The events have been set in motion.

True suspense remains absent throughout. Will the plane still take off in time before the passengers and crew learn about the other hijackings? We know how the story will end and are free to focus on the individual moments such as that of the plane on the runway, which is intercut with communications on the ground regarding possible hijackings elsewhere. By this point, ground control had already lost communications with Flight AA 11, declaring it a “possible hijacking.”

It is worth lingering briefly on the elimination of suspense here, recalling as it does the “epic theatre” of Bertolt Brecht. In “A New Technique of Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect” Brecht sought to forego realism and to disrupt the willing suspension of disbelief, to eradicate suspense so that audiences might focus on the nuance of individual moments instead. He wanted to “purge.. [the theatre] of everything ‘magical.... [and] drop the assumption that there is a fourth wall.”³⁶⁸ While Brecht was concerned with historical accuracy up to a point, he undermined this realism through various devices, including placards, and presentational acting. Brecht’s dramaturgy sought to move beyond emotionalism, to stage multiple possibilities, pointing not only to the complexities of his characters like Mother Courage, but also to notions of identity construction. While it is tempting to ascribe similar intentions here, in *United 93*, those possibilities essentially remain rooted in a melodramatic good/evil framework. In other words, in the end, the film’s elimination of suspense is best understood as performing in a manner *opposite* to Brecht’s intentions. Suspense is eliminated not to expose radical possibilities in the construction of character, but to undermine them. The narrative conveyed in the film is one which had been iterated and reiterated within the national discourse countless times prior to the film’s release. The film therefore does not seek to expose viewers to a new understanding of the events aboard the plane, but to reinforce the narrative of a “clash of civilizations” previously disseminated by politicians.

The film’s plot is therefore situated within the larger narrative of 9/11, moving beyond the confines of the plane. In fact, UA 93 is not depicted as one of the blips on the radar at ground control (a visual signifier for the other hijackings) until forty-seven minutes into the one hour and forty-two minute film. Additionally, it does not become clear that the plane is being hijacked

³⁶⁸ John Willett (ed. and trans.), Brecht on Theatre (New York: Hill and Wang, 1964) 136.

until fifty-seven minutes have passed, at which point one of the terrorists goes into the bathroom and straps a fake bomb onto his body – a moment which occurred fourteen minutes into *Flight 93*, a marked contrast. Here, the audience is privy to the tragic irony of the flight's delay.

However, any sense of grief is channeled through and ascribed meaning within the “clash of civilizations.” Even more so than in *Flight 93*, the religion of the terrorists in *United 93* is contrasted with that of the passengers. For example, the terrorists are shown to be praying at various crucial moments throughout the film, though interestingly there is largely no way to confirm this behavior since all of the witnesses are now dead. Why are they depicted in this way and why is the word “Allah” used throughout? The religious conflict is significant because it points to deeper roots: beyond Islam and Christianity and beyond the “war on terror.” As Said writes, “the Orient has helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea personality experience [...] European culture gained in strength by setting itself off against the Orient as a sort of surrogate and even underground self.”³⁶⁹ In other words, the further the terrorists are differentiated and delineated from their Christian counterparts, the more deeply the identity of the latter is reified.

To further highlight the difference between the hijackers and the terrorists, the former are depicted as speaking predominantly in Arabic to one another and to the passengers once the plane has been hijacked, though one of the terrorists is depicted as having a near perfect command of English when he turns down an offer of a drink from one of the stewardesses.³⁷⁰ Nonetheless, once the terrorists take over the plane, their English is broken, ruptured and monosyllabic as one of the terrorists commands the passengers: “Sit, sit. No talk!” In truth, the hijackers’ command of English was likely more sophisticated. The film favors a representation

³⁶⁹ Said, *Orientalism* 2-3.

³⁷⁰ Cockpit transcripts demonstrate that the hijackers likewise spoke in English to the passengers.

consonant with the reification of the us and them binary over a potentially more accurate portrayal.

Further, the terrorists' words are only translated when they are speaking to one another, not when they are speaking to the foreigners, further enhancing the alienation between the two cultures. As if this were not sufficient evidence of their Otherness, even the translations bear a certain degree of brokenness, as for example the following exchange between the two terrorists in the cockpit:

Terrorist 1: The brothers have hit the two targets.

Terrorist 2: Praise be Allah.³⁷¹

At a further point, one of the terrorists states: "We're in control. Thanks be to God." What is remarkable about this dialogue is that the translation itself is conveyed in broken English. Since it is highly unlikely that the hijackers were not in command of their own language, the implication must be another one, namely that there is an inherent foreignness contained in their dialogue which can only be conveyed through the fracturing of the language itself. Again, the otherness of the terrorists is emphasized, this time rupturing the boundaries of their own culture.

Nowhere is the conflict between cultures more apparent than in one of the final scenes of both movies recalling a reported incident in which passenger Todd Beamer recited the Lord's Prayer with Verizon operator Lisa Jefferson. In both films, the recitation of the prayer serves primarily as a juxtaposition to the prayers of the terrorists. The depiction of this juxtaposition in *United 93* is more explicit than that of its filmic counterpart, straying as it does further from the reported 'facts.' Here, the prayer is shown as being spoken neither by Beamer nor by Jefferson,

³⁷¹ United 93.

but instead by numerous other passengers, who are depicted individually and intercut with shots of the terrorists reciting their own prayers – in one instance over the body of a passenger.

In truth, the actual recitation may have served a more opposite purpose. According to Lisa Beamer, his widow, in her book *Let's Roll*:

Although I'd never before heard of Todd reciting the Lord's Prayer in pressure situations, I wasn't surprised to hear he had quoted it. Recently our pastor had taught a 12-week series of lessons on the Lord's Prayer. Todd had known the prayer since childhood, but each line of it had become more special to him as he discovered how fraught with meaning it really was. At the close of the series, the pastor passed out Lord's prayer bookmarks, and Todd had his in the Tom Clancy book he had been reading in Rome the week before. Part of the prayer that intrigued Todd was the line in which Jesus taught us to ask God to forgive our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. When Lisa told me Todd had prayed that particular prayer, I felt certain that, in some way Todd was forgiving the terrorists for what they were doing.³⁷²

Though the prayer is situated differently in both films' chronologies, neither instance allows for the notion of forgiveness. In fact, in *Flight 93*, the prayer is immediately followed by Beamer's now-famous "Let's Roll" declaration, thus situating it within a call-to-action. In Lisa Beamer's description however, the prayer is followed by a recitation of the 23rd psalm by Todd in which he is joined by the other passengers, prior to his famous pronouncement. Confusingly, Jefferson's account³⁷³, is different still.

³⁷² Lisa Beamer and Ken Abraham, *Let's Roll!: Ordinary People, Extraordinary Courage* (Colorado Springs: Tyndale House Publishers, 2002) 213.

³⁷³ Lisa Jefferson's account of what happened that day served as one of the foundational 'texts' upon which the national narrative of 9/11 was formulated and was cited widely by the media. It also served to inform Lisa Beamer's book, which was published in 2003. However, by the time Jefferson published her own book in 2006, the

I focus on this moment for a number of reasons. To be sure, it epitomizes the “clash of civilizations” I believe to be at the heart of both films’ ideologies, proposing that the ideals of the prayer are unique to the Christian protagonists, who must righteously arm themselves with faith against the Islamic “evildoers.” However, this depiction, prevalent in both films and in the national narrative of 9/11, lacks clear source texts. Neither Lisa Jefferson’s nor Lisa Beamer’s accounts are entirely reliable. Both are based on the recollections of Jefferson, after the fact, not on actual transcripts. The conversation is believed to have lasted thirteen minutes and would have been impossible to record in its entirety after the fact. Further, even if Jefferson had been able to record the entirety of her recollections, they would still only represent one person’s perspective. At best, we can guess at Todd Beamer’s intentions and beliefs, but we cannot know what he was truly thinking. Lacking hard evidence upon which to base their narratives, both films rely instead on circumstantial evidence and hearsay, leading to two different versions of the same event, sharing only their juxtaposition between the terrorists and the passengers and little else – a methodology used not just in this instance but throughout.

Though all aboard the plane perished, the film resolves the conflict ideologically in favor of the passengers, one of whom screams “God damn you, god damn it” as he rams a cart into one of the terrorists, who this time is literally colliding with Western culture. This moment is in contradiction to the transcripts, which suggest that the four terrorists were in fact in the cockpit when the passengers attempted to ram it open. However, by beginning the confrontation in the cabin and allowing the passengers to break into the cockpit, the screams of “Allah” by the

chronology she offered not only omitted portions of her account, which had already been widely reported elsewhere, but also significantly altered the timeline and the facts. For instance, Jefferson reported that she offered to patch Beamer through to his wife, but he declined, not wanting to worry her. According to Lisa Beamer’s story however, Todd did try to call her that morning, but was ultimately unsuccessful in his attempts. In her version, the call to Jefferson was not a direct one, but a re-routing from a failed call. The only reliable account we might hope to have of Beamer’s conversation with Jefferson would be that of a recording, which though initially rumored to have been made, has never been proven to exist.

terrorists are recontextualized. The terrorists are not invoking their god at the moment in which they kill themselves and the passengers, but helplessly pleading as they are being killed. In other words, even Allah is transformed here. As Edward Said explains, in this instance in *Orientalism*, “But what becomes evident is not only the advantage of a Western perspective: there is also the triumphant technique for taking the immense fecundity of the Orient and making it systematically, even alphabetically knowable by Western laymen.³⁷⁴” In other words, the problem lies not in the failure to understand the terrorists, but in offering such a reductive reading and interpretation of their actions that they *do* appear knowable.

The screams themselves are somewhat consistent with the final transcript, according to which the terrorists shouted “Allah is the greatest” a total of nine times in the final seconds before the moment of impact. However, what is excluded here is the terrorists’ own deliberate determination to aim the aircraft at the ground. It was not the struggle itself which likely caused the plane to crash, but the terrorists in anticipation and avoidance of the possibility of the confrontation. In reality, what little agency existed in those final moments rested equally with the terrorists and the passengers. In the film however, that agency is transferred from the hijackers to the passengers in a violent struggle – a struggle which likely never took place physically and is therefore being reconstructed ideologically throughout the film.

This sort of revisionism does a disservice not only to the real efforts of those who died that day, but it also prevents those of us inhabiting the world subsequently created by these events from gaining any substantive insight into or understanding of “9/11”. As with the trope of the heroic firefighter, we are once again prevented from any sort of true identification with these individuals because the surface narrative is too compelling and convenient. Rather than utilizing

³⁷⁴ Said, *Orientalism* 65.

the events of 9/11 as an impetus for addressing hard questions as to “why they hate us” in a complex and nuanced manner, we instead submitted to their recontextualization in a new kind of war.

To move beyond the polarizing impact of these events, a more nuanced reading of their impact will be necessary in the future. In her book, *Feminist Film*, Ann Kaplan offers a suggestion for how such an alternative reading may be formulated:

I reject the strong position on the *differend* that Readings takes up, because this leaves people in one culture with no possibility of understanding or having relations with people in a radically different culture. A variant on this rigid position of the *differend* was suggested by Jane Flax (1996) such that, what seem like intractable differences between cultures, and without hoping to close the gaps, people can enter into dialogue, articulate different positions and question one another about implications of their beliefs.³⁷⁵

Kaplan’s proposed reading rejects the sort of surface narrativization I have outlined above, offering instead a more nuanced, possibly contradictory discourse, but also encompassing as many alternative discourses as possible. As I will demonstrate in the following section, that sort of understanding in relation to 9/11 is thwarted through the mechanism of scapegoating, even in the unlikeliest of places.

³⁷⁵ E. Ann Kaplan, *Feminism and Film* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000) 187.

CAN THE SCAPEGOAT SPEAK?: “SOMETHING B-A-A-A-D” IN *WICKED*

The story of Dorothy Gale, Toto, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, the Cowardly Lion, and the Wicked Witch, is one familiar to generations of children throughout the United States. Written by L. Frank Baum, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* was first published by the George M. Hill Company in 1900 and adapted as a Broadway musical in 1902. There have been numerous adaptations since. The most well-known and influential of these adaptations is the 1939 film, *The Wizard of Oz*, directed by Victor Fleming and starring Judy Garland. The film’s plot diverges from the novel in numerous ways, most notably in its use of a framing device, which suggests that Dorothy’s adventures in Oz are a dream rather than the main character’s reality they are presented to be in the novel. Further, in the film, the role of the Wicked Witch is considerably expanded, magnifying the conflict between her and Dorothy. Released against the backdrop of the Second World War, in which the United States would find itself immersed within the next years, the film clearly demarcates notions of good and evil in melodramatic, essentialist terms. As Dorothy, upon arriving in Technicolor Oz, asks Glinda, “Are you a good witch or a bad witch?”

The novel *Wicked*, first published in 1995, challenges this Manichean worldview. Gregory Maguire explains:

I first got the notion for *Wicked* in 1988, as a novel for adults, but at the time, I didn’t think I was a skilled enough writer. Then in 1990, I moved to London with my then-boyfriend when the first Gulf War started. I found myself riveted by how the British press vilified Saddam Hussein to galvanize public opinion in support of the military action against Iraq. I mean, I agreed that Saddam Hussein was a

villain, but my politics were less important than my noticing how the British press used certain words to draw attention to the need for military intervention.³⁷⁶

In the time between Maguire's first conception of the novel and the staging of its musical adaptation, that process of "galvaniz[ing] public opinion" and the reliance of the press on "certain words to draw attention to the need for military intervention" has been repeated twice: first in the instance of Bin Laden and the invasion of Afghanistan and then, in the instance of Hussein and the second invasion of Iraq. These events, in turn, influenced the evolution of the musical adaptation.

Lyricist Winnie Holzman explains, "... in the middle of writing, New York City was attacked on September 11. And you would have to have been living under a rock not to see what was going on around you."³⁷⁷ David Stone, the producer, expands upon Holzman's comments:

What's fascinating to me is that Gregory wrote the novel in 1995, as a response to the ways in which our government lies to us, from Watergate through the Gulf War. Stephen [Schwartz] and Winnie started writing in the late '90s. And then it became more relevant after September 11 and this particular [Bush] administration.³⁷⁸

While Maguire's story has only become more, not less, topical over time, its relationship to current events is one which has, to date, been effectively ignored by scholars and critics.³⁷⁹

³⁷⁶ David Cote, Wicked: The Grimmerie. A Behind-The-Scenes Look at the Hit Broadway Musical (New York: Hyperion, 2005) 19.

³⁷⁶ The Scapegoat Yvonne Freccero (trans.) (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986) 15.

³⁷⁷ Cote 36.

³⁷⁸ Cote, 36.

³⁷⁹ One exception to this is Suzanne Ross' The Wicked Truth: When Good People Do Bad Things, which examines the scapegoat mechanism in Wicked in far greater detail than I can here. However, whereas Ross is focused on the application of Girard's theories, my focus here is on situating that application within the context of 9/11.

However, it is precisely Maguire's allegorical structure, which is relevant to my discussion and which I believe ultimately accounts for the musical's enduring appeal.

The novel is told from the perspective of the Wicked Witch, the villain. Maguire's focus on the villainous character provides an informative contrast to *United 93* and *Flight 93* in that it enables readers to view the story from the perspective of the "other" beyond the "enclosed space" described by Said. That space is further expanded in the 2003 musical, written by Winnie Holzman with lyrics and music by Stephen Schwartz. Schwartz had discovered Maguire's book while on vacation, only to learn that Universal Pictures had previously acquired the rights with the intention of producing a film. However, Schwartz succeeded in convincing both Maguire and Universal that a musical would provide a more suitable framework for the story. To condense Maguire's complex story, Schwartz assigned Holzman to adapt the story for the stage and to focus on the relationship between Galinda and Elphaba. Initially developed in workshops, by 2000, the production had cast both of its lead characters – Idina Menzel as Elphaba and Kristin Chenoweth as Glinda – and began the transition towards a full Broadway production, directed by Joe Mantello. After tryouts at the Curran Theatre in San Francisco where the show officially opened on June 10, 2003, a further three months of revisions were required, before the show opened on Broadway at the Gershwin Theatre on October 30, 2003. To date, the show is the eleventh longest running show on Broadway and has won three Tony Awards and six Drama Desk Awards.

Most significant to my discussion of the Muslim "other" is the musical's heightening of the central conflict. Like *The Wizard of Oz*, which deepens the conflict between Dorothy and the Wicked Witch, here, the conflict between Glinda and the Wicked Witch, between good and evil, is emphasized. As Glinda asks in the opening scene, "Are people born Wicked? Or do they have

Wickedness thrust upon them? After all, she had a childhood. She had a father...” However, the musical rapidly maneuvers beyond its melodramatic entry point, complicating and interrogating not only the question of Elphaba’s wickedness, but also highlighting the “otherness” of the animal characters. While the novel’s portrayal of Elphaba is far more “wicked,” her wickedness in the musical is also far more nuanced and complex. The lines between Glinda’s goodness and Elphaba’s wickedness aren’t nearly as clearly demarcated in the musical as they are in the 1939 film or even in Maguire’s novel.

More so than the musical’s efforts to complicate notions of good and evil through allegory, its representations of the “other” are of particular interest within the context of my discussion. In the musical, the animals of Oz are divided into two groups: those who can speak and those who cannot. Professor Dillamond, a goat who teaches both Elphaba and Glinda is the main animal character in the musical. William Youmans, who first played the role, states:

Of course, the novel is very different from the musical: Doctor Dillamond dies in it. But you could almost argue that what happens to him in *Wicked* is a fate worse than death: He has to go on living, but loses his power of speech and reasoning and becomes just an animal.³⁸⁰

During a lecture to his students about Oz’s political and social history, Dillamond turns around the chalkboard, where someone has written, “Animals should be seen and not heard.” He is shocked and dismisses the class. As the script points out, “Only Elphaba lingers, and offers her sandwich and her sympathy.³⁸¹” Due to her green skin, Elphaba, like Dillamond, is an outsider. Dillamond sings to her of horrible things that have happened to other animals:

I’ve heard of an Ox

³⁸⁰ Cote, 49.

³⁸¹ *Ibid* 147.

A professor from Quox
No longer permitted to teach
Who has lost all powers of speech
And an Owl in Munchkin Rock
A vicar with a thriving flock
Forbidden to preach
Now he can only screech
Only rumors – but still –
Enough to give pause
To anyone with paws
Something bad is happening in Oz...³⁸²

As Dillamond gives increasing voice to the hate crimes being committed against his fellow animals, he increasingly loses his voice. Between Elphaba and Dillamond, the word “bad” is repeated seven times in the song and as those repetitions progress, Dillamond’s clear articulation of the word is gradually transformed, until in the end he is bleating, “baaaaaaad.” The character of Dillamond, who previously referred to himself as the “token goat” on the faculty and asked the class: “What is a scapegoat?” functions, quite literally, as scapegoat.

The concept of the scapegoat can be traced back to the sixteenth chapter of Leviticus, where God instructs Moses in how his brother Aaron is to sacrifice a live goat as a symbol of atonement. Rene Girard, an anthropological philosopher has written extensively on the application of the scapegoat mechanism, which he believes to be a consequence of rivalry bourn out of mimetic desire. Girard writes:

³⁸² Ibid 147.

[Men] are disconcerted by the immensity of the disaster but never look into the natural causes; the concept that they might affect those causes by learning more about them remains embryonic. [...] But rather than blame themselves, people inevitably either blame society as a whole, which costs them nothing, or other people who seem particularly harmful for easily identifiable reasons.³⁸³

In other words, a society that fails to understand how it may have contributed to the cause of its own disaster turns that blame outward. In the instance of 9/11, public discourse largely failed to acknowledge the patterns in foreign policy I have previously outlined that contributed to the attacks. Instead, Osama Bin Laden was portrayed as a one-dimensional homicidal villain, not unlike the manner in which Elphaba is initially portrayed. However, as the musical and novel posit, villainy is usually more complex than the Manichean division of good and evil would suggest. While I have no intention of arguing against the horrific nature of Bin Laden's actions, I do believe that a failure to examine their socio-political and historical context ensures that we as society maintain an "embryonic" understanding of the events.³⁸⁴ Further, by failing to move beyond this level of comprehension, we as a society, like the society in *Wicked*, turn the blame for those events outward – towards all Muslims.

³⁸³ René Girard *The Scapegoat* Yvonne Freccero (trans.) (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986) 15.

³⁸⁴ It is worth noting that the death of Bin Laden further sheds light on how the "us and them" binary is narrativized. While initial reports suggested that Bin Laden was armed and killed by two shots, subsequent reports revealed that he was, in fact, unarmed. Photos of his corpse were not released due to the fact that he had been shot with "over a hundred bullets." (Nick Wing "U.S. Troops Unloaded 'Over A Hundred Bullets' Into Osama Bin Laden's Dead Body, Sources Claim," [huffingtonpost.com](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/03/13/osama-bin-laden-death-shooting_n_4958147.html) 13 March 2014, 10 Oct. 2014 <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/03/13/osama-bin-laden-death-shooting_n_4958147.html>.) Further, the secretive and hasty burial of Bin Laden's body at sea, purportedly for religious reasons and to prevent the creation of a shrine, in fact, broke Sharia law. (Ian Black and Brian Whitaker, "Sea burial of Osama bin Laden breaks Sharia law, say Muslim scholars: US decision to dispose of body in the sea prevents grave site becoming a shrine but clerics warn it may lead to reprisals," [the_guardian.com](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/may/02/sea-burial-osama-bin-laden) 2 May 2011, 10 Oct. 2014 <<http://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/may/02/sea-burial-osama-bin-laden>>.)

In my first chapter, I discussed one instance of this scapegoating in the form of the controversy surrounding Park51. However, the persecution of Muslims extends far beyond this one instance – both within the United States and abroad. According to a 2002 FBI report, while there had been only 28 hate crimes against Muslims in 2001, that number increased to 481 by November 2002 – an increase of 1,600%.³⁸⁵ Civilrights.org points out that “while the number of reported hate crimes against Arab Americans, Muslims, and Sikhs has declined from the peak of 2001, it remains substantially above pre-2001 levels.”³⁸⁶ Of course, these numbers only reflect the crimes that are actually reported. They also do not reflect the legalized persecution of these minorities within the context of the “war on terror” in the form of state surveillance of mosques, targeting at airports and other sites with heightened security, and various forms of discrimination.

These manifestations of scapegoating are not only consequences of a failure to move beyond an “embryonic” understanding of the events of 9/11, but also cemented by the rhetoric associated with the adoption of Lewis’ “clash of civilizations.” It is not coincidental that Dillamont struggles to retain his voice, for it is the act of silencing which enables scapegoating to occur, and, as I have argued, it is precisely this silencing of the “other” which Said’s postcolonialism seeks to counteract. In the following section I will therefore interrogate how *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* functions to counteract the scapegoating enabled by Lewis’ rhetoric to instead formulate a more rhizomatic conception of the Muslim “other.”

THE RELUCTANT FUNDAMENTALIST

³⁸⁵ Richard A. Serrano, “Hate Crimes Against Muslims Soar, Report Says,” [latimes.com](http://articles.latimes.com/2002/nov/26/nation/na-hate26) 26 Nov. 2002, 10 Oct.2014, <<http://articles.latimes.com/2002/nov/26/nation/na-hate26>>.

³⁸⁶ The Leadership Conference, “Hate Crimes Against Arab Americans, Muslims, and Sikhs,” [civilrights.org](http://www.civilrights.org/publications/hatecrimes/arab-americans.html) 2014, 10 Oct. 2014 <<http://www.civilrights.org/publications/hatecrimes/arab-americans.html>>.

The Muslim other, marginalized and voiceless in *Wicked*, dominates and structures the narrative of *The Reluctant Fundamentalist*, which is conceived as a frame story. The frame is that of a conversation between Changez (Riz Ahmed), a Pakistani, and Bobby Lincoln (Live Schreiber), an American, over the course of a single evening in a Lahore café. Changez requests, “I ask only one thing. That you please listen to the whole story. From the very beginning. Not just bits and pieces. Do I have your word?” “You do,” Bobby replies. The 2007 novel by Mohsin Hamid is structured as a monologue and the American with whom Changez speaks is never clearly identified. The 2013 film adaptation by Hamid, Ami Boghani and William Wheeler and directed by Mira Nair gives the American a voice equal to that of Changez. As Nair states, the character “needed to be fleshed out into a living and breathing character. He had to have an equal intelligence, and as much grace and longing and pain as Changez.”³⁸⁷

It is the dialogue between the two characters which forms the film’s core:

Over the last few years we have seen many films about the Iraq and Afghanistan wars, but always told from the American point of view. We have seen the noble films of soldiers who return home in body bags, but we will never know the name of the Iraqi woman who has lost her family and her home in the name of freedom and democracy. In this film, the encounter between the characters of Changez and Bobby mirrors the mutual suspicion with which America and Pakistan (or the Muslim world) look at one another. We learn that, as a result of America’s war on terror, Changez experiences a seismic shift in his own attitude, unearthing allegiances more fundamental than money, power and maybe even love. But other

³⁸⁷ Mira Nair, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist: From Book to Film* (New York: Penguin Studio, 2013) 11.

forms of fundamentalism are revealed along the way, including the kind practiced by Changez's former employer, Underwood Sampson.

The story that Changez tells is one fraught with dichotomies: between war and peace, the Middle East and the United States, tolerance and fundamentalism, and greed and poverty. However, whereas those dichotomies are initially presented as being mutually exclusive, the dialogue between Bobby and Changez enables the characters to bridge the divide between them. The dialogue also allows the audience to move beyond its own preconceived notions. The layers that are gradually peeled away reveal not so much alternate truths as much as further layers, eschewing a clear narrative perspective in favor of a multitude of coexisting and contradictory perspectives, a fact mirrored in the film's opening sequence: a heavily pixilated world map coming into and out of focus.



Figure 83: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist.*



Figure 84: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist.*

In the present tense of the narrative, an American professor has been kidnapped in Pakistan. Bobby, a reporter, conducts an interview with Changez, a presumed terrorist. The story Changez tells is conveyed through extensive flashbacks. Initially, the two characters are depicted as Lewis-esque binaries on opposite ends of an ideological spectrum. However, as the narrative unfolds, those binaries are complicated and replaced with a more rhizomatic conception of these characters and the world they inhabit. That their dialogue unfolds in a writers' café in Lahore is not a coincidence. It is a space in which the power of the word matters, but also where the two men can maneuver beyond the significations of the labels from which they must disentangle themselves.

The narrative Changez conveys forces both Bobby and the viewer to question their preconceptions of the term "terrorist." Born into an upper class family that has lost much of its economic means, but not its social standing, Changez travels to the United States to attend Princeton and pursue the "American Dream," securing a much coveted job at the financial firm Underwood Sampson. Unable to see the connection between his growing ambition and the damage he is inflicting on the lower class workers whose jobs his firm eliminates in the companies it streamlines, he quickly establishes himself as the most brutal and aggressive of his colleagues.



Figure 85: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist.*



Figure 86: *The Reluctant Fundamentalist.*

It is not until he witnesses the collapse of the towers on television that the identity he has forged for himself begins to fracture. His first response is of shock as he gasps, “Oh no!” However, that shock is soon displaced by a sort of awe as he stares on in disbelief. It is these disparate parts which he seeks to reconcile throughout the narrative he conveys to Bobby: his condemnation of violence on the one hand, and his desire for a peaceful Middle East, free of United States’ economic and political intervention on the other. He states: “I can’t hear my own voice anymore.” The narrative he conveys represents Changez’s efforts to not only reassemble his identity, but also to reclaim his own voice.

He conveys this story to Bobby for two reasons. As a reporter, Bobby has the means to share Changez’s words with a wider audience. The dialogue which occurs between the two characters represents the staging of a dialogue which must occur between the United States and the Middle East on a larger scale. The communication which occurs between the two characters represents a microcosmic utopian model for the dialogue which must occur between the nation states they represent. Further, the inciting incident that has brought the two men together is the kidnapping of an American professor in Pakistan. At first glance, the kidnapping appears to be the violent act of extremists. However, as the narrative unfolds, it is revealed that both the professor and Bobby are CIA assets. While Changez has awareness of the kidnapping and the

circumstances surrounding it, he is, in fact, attempting to diffuse the situation to the best of his ability and his meeting with Bobby represents part of his attempt to do so.

Changez's transformation from Wall Street executive, to victim of anti-Muslim discrimination, to seeker, to professor in Pakistan, and to perceived terrorist is the focus of both the conversation and the film. How can he reconcile the Pakistani and American parts of himself? Is there a path to sovereignty without violence? Is it possible to resist discrimination without giving into the very same hatred that breeds discrimination? Can he reconcile the disparate aspects of his identity into a rhizomatic whole? Most importantly can he peel away all of the layers through which he is seen to convey that self to an other?

Changez ultimately refuses to be scapegoated and "othered." After a long journey to discover his own voice, he refuses to have that voice silenced and seeks to share his radical awareness with those who will listen. His insistence that Bobby listen to his story represents not just a desire to be understood, but also the hope that Bobby might be a conduit through which that voice may be amplified, that Bobby will, in turn, convey those words to others with whom Changez can not communicate. In the end, the kidnap victim and one of Changez's students die as the CIA disrupts a protest. However, Bobby does begin to transcribe his interview. Changez's words will live on and move out into the world both within the fictional world of the film and into the world beyond the film itself.

Edward Said died in 2003. Though his opposition to the war in Iraq is well documented, it is the vision of Bernard Lewis that prevailed. It is unclear to what extent Said would have been able to influence public opinion had he lived. Would fewer civilians have died in the Middle East as a consequence of U.S. foreign policy? Would the wars in Iran and Afghanistan have ended sooner? Would Park51 have been erected? Would there have been fewer hate crimes against

Muslims? While it can not be known what impact Said would have had, it is certain that he would have insisted that his voice, like Changez's be heard. However, even without his insistence, Said's words remain:

If you conceive of one type of political movement in Africa or Asia as being "terrorist" you deny it narrative consequence, whereas if you grant it normative status (as in Nicaragua or Afghanistan) you impose on it the legitimacy of a complete narrative. Thus *our* people have been denied freedom, and therefore they organize, arm themselves, and fight and get freedom; *their* people on the other hand, are gratuitous, evil terrorists. Therefore narratives are either politically and ideologically permissible, or not.³⁸⁸

Changez's efforts to convey his story represent a fictionalized effort to gain narrative agency, an effort to be a "self" rather than an "other."

That narrative agency is one which demands that we as a society move beyond our "embryonic" understanding of 9/11. While the murder of civilians should always be met with condemnation, the events of 9/11 did not occur in a historical and socio-political vacuum. The events can not be encapsulated within the binarisms proposed by Lewis. The context of the events must be (as I have sought to throughout my project) illuminated if the cycle of violence in which they are linked is to be broken. The Saidian "enclosed spaces" of the cultural productions I have focused on here, and in previous chapters, provide the ideological space that is required to host such debates. It is in these spaces that we as a society, iterate, reiterate, or resist the terms by which our public discourse is defined. It is in these spaces that we may also gain a more

³⁸⁸ Said, *Orientalism* 222.

rhizomatic understanding of the events, an understanding that might move us towards the potential of utopian alternatives, which I will outline in my conclusion.

6.0 EPILOGUE: *TERMINATOR: THE SARAH CONNOR CHRONICLES*, *FRINGE*, AND *OMNIUM GATHERUM* AS UTOPIAN PERFORMATIVES

You see things; and you say “Why?” But I dream things that never were; and I say “Why not?”

(George Bernard Shaw, *Back to Methuselah*)³⁸⁹

“NEVER FORGET”

Recently, while lecturing on the memorialization of 9/11 to a class of college students, the majority of whom had been between the ages of five and seven at the time of the attacks, a student commented that, for her, the events of 9/11 had merged between her own lived memory and the narrative of those events across various media and in history books. I was reminded of her comments while reading a recent *New York Times* article titled “A 9/11 Shrine Where Families Mourned For Years, Now Open to the Public.”³⁹⁰ The article, written by David Dunlap, describes a recent addition to the 9/11 exhibit at the New York State Museum in Albany, namely artifacts from the former so-called “Family Room:”

³⁸⁹ George Bernard Shaw, “Back to Methuselah” in *Selected Philosophical Plays and Prefaces* J.M. Beach (ed.), (Austin: Southwest Press, 2012) 269. These words were quoted by President John F. Kennedy in his address to the Irish Parliament in Dublin on June 28, 1963. His brother, Senator Robert Kennedy, later used a variation of the quote during his 1968 Presidential campaign. Their brother, Senator Edward M. Kennedy, subsequently used these words to eulogize the youngest Kennedy brother on June 8 that same year.

³⁹⁰ David W. Dunlap, “A 9/11 Shrine Where Families Mourned for Years, Now Open to Others,” *New York Times on the Web* 10 Sept., 2014, 10 Oct. 2014 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/11/nyregion/family-room-for-relatives-of-9-11-victims-is-recreated-in-albany.html>>.

It was spartan office space at a 54-story tower at 1 Liberty Plaza for families to be by themselves, a temporary haven where they could find respite from bad weather and the curious stares of passers-by. Piece by piece, without any planning, it was transformed into an elaborate shrine known only to them.³⁹¹

With the permission of family members, remnants of that room have now been moved to the larger exhibit at Albany. Like the *Saturday Night Live* skit discussed in my first chapter, the exhibit functions as a time capsule into a particular moment in time, serving here to free the dead from the grip of abstraction:

Unconstrained and undesigned, a profusion of intimate expressions of love and loss filled the walls of the room, the tabletops, the floors and, even, the windows, obscuring views of the World Trade Center site below, as if to say: Jim and John and Jonathan and Harvey and Gary and Jean and Welles and Isaias and Katherine and Christian and Judy are all here, with us, not down there in the ruins.

‘What tower? What floor? That was the way other people saw our loved ones,’ said Nikki Stern, whose husband, James E. Potorti, was among those killed on Sept. 11, 2001. ‘It was adamantly not how we wanted to define our loved ones. The Family Room was the beginning of the storytelling that was controlled by the families.’³⁹²

This effort by family members to control the manner in which their loved ones are remembered and their subsequent willingness to share that effort with the public – not coincidentally in a museum geographically and ideologically removed from “Ground Zero” – is one which echoes the concerns motivating my project, namely that the narratives we formulate surrounding 9/11

³⁹¹ Ibid.

³⁹² Ibid.

and the question of who controls and formulates those narratives ultimately define significant questions of nation and identity.

Already, an entire generation has been born in North America in the period we now refer to as “post-9/11” – a generation grown accustomed to living in a country in a perpetual state of war and economic crisis. That the United States finds itself dragging through a long, sluggish recovery from the Great Recession – a recovery that is barely felt by the vast majority of its citizens – while engaged in an open-ended war on terror is not coincidental. According to a September 8, 2011, *New York Times* article, titled “One 9/11: \$3.3 Trillion,” to date the financial impact of 9/11, totaling \$3.3 trillion, could be broken down as follows:

Toll and physical damage: \$55 billion

Economic impact: \$123 billion

Homeland security (related costs): \$589 billion

Future war and veterans’ care: \$867 billion

War funding (related costs): \$1.65 trillion³⁹³

The breakdown does not include black ops and other “confidential” parts of the budget. It is certain that those numbers have only risen in the intervening years.

The ability of the general public (not to mention the media) to connect these two defining facts of our times and to implement and demand change from our elected leadership is inextricably linked to the narratives we, as a society and as a culture, formulate surrounding 9/11. As politicians from both sides of the aisle continue to remind us, we must “never forget.” However, while I agree with the words themselves, my own interpretation is different from the platitude of “never forget” that adorn bumper stickers and other 9/11-themed memorabilia. I

³⁹³ Shan Carter and Amanda Cox, “One 9/11: \$3.3 Trillion,” *New York Times on the Web*, 8 September 2014, 10 October 2014 <<http://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2011/09/08/us/sept-11-reckoning/cost-graphic.html>>.

wonder: what is it that we choose to not forget? What memories do we deem worthy of incorporation in the national narrative of 9/11? The National 9/11 Memorial and Museum, the architectural repository of those memories, conveys the narrative of a nation under attack by religious extremists, a narrative steeped in jingoistic patriotism, simplistic rhetoric, and cheap emotionalism. It is certainly not how I choose to recall the events of 9/11, nor, I argue, is it a comprehensive account. The chapters of the narrative in which the United States commits its own violent actions abroad and at home are erased. “Never Forget” as a bumper sticker platitude cuts the events of 9/11 from the very socio-political and historical contexts I have sought to elucidate throughout this dissertation and pastes them back into a more sanitized version.

“Never forget” can mean that the horror of that day must never be forgotten and that the nation must never again be vulnerable to such a threat. It is certainly an interpretation widely adopted by the second Bush and Obama administrations in justifying extraordinary rendition, the suspension of Habeas Corpus, the crimes at Guantanamo and Abu Ghraib, drone strikes, and the killing of hundreds of thousands of civilians across the Middle East. On the other hand, “never forget,” *can* mean that we must not forget the historical chain of events which led to 9/11: from the “Red Scare” to Vietnam to the Cold War, to the proxy war in Afghanistan, to the training of Bin Laden by the CIA. An understanding and “working through” of the events would perhaps have prevented further links being added to that chain: from Afghanistan to Iraq to Libya to Syria and to Isis and the current moment.

The students I spoke with in my lecture did not understand why, thirteen years later, I am still talking about 9/11. The answer, which I only understood after the class had concluded, is that 9/11 is not a historical event which occurred in the not-so distant past, but rather, an event whose reach extends into our present moment and into the foreseeable future. While the past

thirteen years cannot be undone, the future remains unwritten and it is in the realm of the performative, where we enact our imaginations, that I seek alternative futures. Theatre scholar Jill Dolan has termed these possibilities “utopian performatives:”

small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking, and intersubjectively intense.³⁹⁴

In the following pages I will therefore examine three examples of “utopian performatives” of 9/11 – the television shows *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles* and *Fringe* and the play *Omnium Gatherum* – to reveal how these works transport viewers and audiences from a post-9/11 reality to an imagined utopian future. While Dolan’s work on utopian performatives is focused largely on live performances (which I will engage more explicitly in my discussion of *Omnium Gatherum*), I extend her theorization across forms – both in keeping with the scope of my project and because the narrative construction of 9/11 (itself across forms) demands such an approach.

“THE MIRACULOUS AND THE TERRIBLE”

Following two seasons, *The Sarah Connor Chronicles* was cancelled in 2009. Despite its largely critical success, the show failed to generate sufficient ratings for FOX television.³⁹⁵ Over

³⁹⁴ Jill Dolan, *Utopia in Performance: Finding Hope at the Theatre* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2005) 5.

³⁹⁵ At the time, FOX was faced with the decision of renewing either Joss Whedon’s *Dollhouse* or *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles*, ultimately choosing the former. Whedon admitted, “If they had put a gun to my head and told me to choose, I would say renew ‘Sarah Connor.’ I wasn’t trying to imitate it but it’s definitely in my

the course of those two seasons, the character of Sarah Connor was wounded, tortured, and kidnapped. As an FBI agent (Joshua Malina) tells Sarah in *Born to Run*, the final episode, “I believe there's a world that I've not yet seen but you have, and John... I believe you have participated in the miraculous and the terrible, and through it all you have maintained a moral and good soul.”³⁹⁶ Unlike so many television shows, viewers are made to witness both the increasing scars – both physical and emotional – inflicted upon Sarah throughout the duration of the show and her struggles to heal.

Sarah’s trauma is structurally intertwined with the events and imagery of 9/11, which bookend the show. If “Gnothi Seauton,” the episode discussed in my introduction, marks Sarah’s initial exposure to trauma, then “Born to Run,” the series’ final episode, marks the utopian alternative once that trauma is worked through. To be sure, the show does not reference 9/11 beyond these two moments – the latter of which I will expand upon shortly – but as bookends they function as a means through which viewers might engage the multiple traumas which permeate the show as it unfolds between these two markers. While the characters may be able to travel through time and bypass the events of 9/11, the viewer cannot. In other words, while the show’s narrative is a science fiction construct, it transports viewers from and returns them to their own post-9/11 reality.

That the beginning and ending are linked in this manner is reinforced by the fact that multiple plot points are mirrored. In the show’s very first scene for example, Sarah experiences a

vocabulary.” (Michael Hinman, “Studio Fought Hard to Bring ‘Dollhouse’ Back, Joss Whedon Says,” airlockalpha.com 2. Aug. 2009, 10 Oct. 2014 <<http://airlockalpha.com/node/6583/studio-fought-hard-to-bring-dollhouse-back-joss-whedon-says.html>>.) Interestingly, Summer Glau, who first rose to fame in Whedon’s series *Firefly* and portrayed the character of Cameron, a terminator, on *TSCC*, went on to play a multi-episode arc on *Dollhouse*. Further, the ending of Whedon’s 2012 film, *The Avengers*, like *TSCC*, visually reconfigures the events of 9/11.

³⁹⁶ “Born to Run,” *Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles: The Complete Second Season*, Writ. Josh Friedman, Dir. Jeffrey Hunt, FOX.10 April 2009.

nightmare in which John (Thomas Dekker) is murdered and Skynet succeeds in unleashing a nuclear apocalypse. Towards the end, that nightmare appears to have become reality as Sarah is taken into custody, unable to continue her resistance. Further, in a monologue mirroring the one discussed in my introduction, Sarah, now in jail talking to a priest, states, “I don’t know about God or heaven, but I do believe that someone or something wants this world to burn. The devil, demons. I believe.” However, despite that belief, the show nonetheless moves towards a utopian alternative in which both the fictional nuclear apocalypse it foresees and the events of 9/11 are restructured.



Figure 87: "Born to Run," TSCC.



Figure 88: "Born to Run," TSCC.



Figure 89: "Born to Run," TSCC.



Figure 90: "Born to Run," TSCC.

The imagery of planes crashing into the World Trade Center is directly evoked in the final episode as a plane crashes into the office building in which Sarah and John seek to destroy SkyNet. However, the characters are shielded from the plane's impact by Catherine Weaver (Shirley Manson), a terminator, who has joined their cause. If Sarah's previous capture represented the manifestation of her worst nightmares, this scene functions inversely – it *undoes* the nightmare of 9/11. Executive producer Josh Friedman explained, "It has a resonance to 9/11 for me, which is [...] obviously not something that you take lightly when you're making drama, but to me, it went back to 'Gnothi [Seauton],' where they talk about it, where they've jumped over [...] the significant event – for this country, at least."³⁹⁷ The moment functions as a catalyst for change, both for the characters and the viewer, for it is in the scene immediately following

³⁹⁷ "Born to Run – Director's Commentary," Terminator: The Sarah Connor Chronicles: The Complete Second Season, Writ. Josh Friedman, Dir. Jeffrey Hunt, FOX. 10 April 2009.

that John, in the show's final moment, once again travels across time. The time travel device requires that the traveler step inside a circle and this time, unlike in the beginning, Sarah steps outside the circle, promising John that she will continue to fight Skynet from her moment in time. The future John arrives in, alone after Weaver has also left him, is one which is different, but familiar. In the previous timeline, John was a boy struggling with the responsibilities forced upon him. In travelling through time, he takes his final step into manhood and accepts the burden of becoming the leader of the resistance who will save humanity.

Dolan writes, "The magic of performance, the privilege of relief from banality and the pleasure of working at the ever shifting, always partial understandings and empathy that the stage allows, models a way to be together, as human beings, in a culture and historical moment that's working harder to tear us apart."³⁹⁸ In the end, John discovers in this alternate future, a community, a version of the family he has longed for – albeit without the mother who has now raised him into adulthood – as he is taken in by alternate versions of the characters who had previously accompanied him: his uncle Derek (Brian Austin Green), who is still alive,³⁹⁹ and the human model for Cameron. It is in the folds of this community that he will save humanity and that the utopia of our own redemption is performed. Within the narrative framework of the television show, the alternative future John accesses is a literal one. If his previous jump through time (accompanied by Cameron and his mother) allowed John to bypass the events of 9/11, then this final jump (this time, essentially alone) allows him to jump beyond the framing device, established by the show's beginning and ending, altogether. The future he finds himself in is one still defined by the war with Skynet, but it also one defined by the makeshift family and human

³⁹⁸ Dolan, *Utopia in Performance* 165.

³⁹⁹ In a time-travel paradox, Derek is sent by John from the future to help Sarah and John, but is eventually killed. The future John travels to is therefore Derek's past.

connections John will formulate.

“DIFFERENT CHOICES”

Unlike *TSCC*, *Fringe*, another FOX television show which likewise first aired in 2008, was not cancelled until 2013, allowing the latter to unfold over the course of four and a half seasons rather than two. Referring to the early demise of shows including *Firely*, *TSSC*, and *Dollhouse*, Fox entertainment president Kevin Reilly commented, “Fox has never left the genre business. It was great to finally see one through and finish it in a great way for fans, and not leave them hanging. We set the standard many years ago with *The X Files*.” The added narrative space allowed the show, which centered around the fictional FBI “Fringe” division charged with investigating the unexplainable, to span in multiple directions including alternate universes, flashbacks, and time travel.

In “There’s More Than One of Everything” the final episode of the first season of *Fringe*, FBI agent Olivia Dunham (Anna Torv) has been transported to a parallel universe. “Where am I? Who are you?” she asks the man (Leonard Nimoy) standing across from her. “The answer to your first question is... it’s very complicated. The answer to your second question is: I’m William Bell.”⁴⁰⁰ As a season finale, the moment is significant in that it first introduces an alternate universe, which drives much of the narrative arc of seasons two through four. However this climactic moment is not further developed until the fourth episode, “Momentum Deferred,” of the following season, in which Olivia, with the help of a sensory deprivation tank and LSD recalls the remainder of Bell’s words:

The truth will come out. It always does. Livy, you don’t have to trust me. You

⁴⁰⁰ “There’s More Than One of Everything,” *Fringe*, writ. J.J. Abrams, Alex Kurtzman, Roberto Orci, Jeff Pinkner, J.H. Wyman, Akiva Goldsman, and Bryan Burk, dir. Brad Anderson, FOX Television, 12 May 2009.

don't even have to like me, but you can't deny I have a unique perspective shaped by having lived in two worlds. I know the difference a wrong choice can make. Or a right one. For example, this building is still standing because different choices were made. So, Livy, if you can look past your anger, you may find that I am more of an ally than you think.⁴⁰¹

In its efforts at universe building, the show takes great pains, across multiple seasons, to establish the differences between the two universes. In the encounter in Bell's office for example, a shot of a newspaper reveals that John F. Kennedy is still alive. Most notably however, the building Bell is referring to is one which is first revealed in the final shot of the first season finale, where Olivia looks out the window of the top floor of the skyscraper in which they are standing and the camera slowly pulls back to reveal that the building is, in fact, the South Tower of the World Trade Center.



Figure 91: "There's More Than One of Everything," *Fringe*.

⁴⁰¹ "Momentum Deferred," *Fringe*, writ. J.J. Abrams, Alex Kurtzman, Roberto Orci, Zack Stentz, and Ashley Miller, dir. Joe Chappelle, FOX Television, 8 Oct. 2009.



Figure 92: "There's More Than One of Everything," *Fringe*.

As movieline.com's Seth Abramovitch suggests, the shot is designed as an "homage to the final shot of *Planet of the Apes* – that butterfly inducing image of an epic monument standing where that monument should not be."⁴⁰² In my second chapter, I discussed the omission and insertion of imagery of the Twin Towers in films and television following 9/11. Here however, that imagery is taken to a deeper level as it is only the first moment of a series of moments which pervade the show. Executive produce Jeff Pinkner described the shot as "a wonderful symbol for [a better alternate reality] than the world we live in,"⁴⁰³ and that symbol is referenced and expanded upon throughout the show, which frequently relies on the towers (along with an unpainted, copper Statue of Liberty and Gaudí's never-built 1908 Grand Hotel⁴⁰⁴) for establishing shots of the alternate "Manhatan."

⁴⁰² Seth Abramovitch, "How Tasteless Was *Fringe*'s Twist Ending?" [movieline.com](http://movieline.com/2009/05/13/fringe/) 12 May 2009, 10 Oct. 2014, <<http://movieline.com/2009/05/13/fringe/>>.

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ Antoni Gaudí, a practitioner of Catalan modernism, designed the Grand Hotel in 1908. Some believe that the hotel was intended for the site where the World Trade Center was eventually built. When the towers collapsed in 2001, a group of Spanish designers submitted Gaudí's original plans as a potential replacement.



Figure 93: "Olivia," *Fringe*.



Figure 94: "Olivia," *Fringe*.

In fact, 9/11 imagery saturates *Fringe*. Numerous episodes feature airplanes, airplane crashes, terrorist attacks, “missing” signs, and people jumping from skyscrapers or high-rises. Among these, there are two specific moments especially pertinent to my discussion. In “Olivia,” the first episode of the third season, Olivia has been left imprisoned in the alternate universe by the secretary of state, who is the doppelganger of Walter (John Noble) – the scientist who first discovered the alternate universe, and whom Olivia later helped to release from a mental institution to join the Fringe team. In this episode, the alternate universe is depicted as a police state, with people required to carry “Show Me” photo IDs, which include a bar code, a chip, and an American flag.



Figure 95: "Olivia," *Fringe*.

Olivia is held in a cell reminiscent of those in Guantanamo or supermax prisons. Walter wants to implant Olivia with the memories of Fauxlivia (the alternate universe version of Olivia), but is warned that this may kill her. He responds:

You and I know something that many lives and many more dollars have been spent to keep secret. That we are at war. At war with another universe populated by creatures that have damaged the very fabric of reality. All around us, our world is under attack. Somehow, this girl came here. Somehow, she is equipped to move through universes. We need her to help us understand this skill. Because if we can do it, we can win this war. And if not, soon there will be nothing left to protect. Let's try again.⁴⁰⁵

The speech is held against the iconography of the American flag, Olivia's torture juxtaposed with a "war on terror" held in the name of patriotic ideals. As she is about to receive another round of "treatments," the viewer sees numerous puncture marks, indicating the previous extent and frequency of her torture. Nonetheless, Olivia manages to escape. She runs, hunted like an animal through a forest, unknowingly toward a cliff. At the precipice, the Statue of liberty is behind her, the New York skyline with the Twin Towers ahead of her. She is wearing only a

⁴⁰⁵ "Olivia," *Fringe*, writ. J.J. Abrams, Alex Kurtzman, Roberto Orci, J.H. Wyman, and Jeff Pinkner, dir. Joe Chappelle, FOX Television, 23 Sept. 2010.

hospital gown, her body exposed and vulnerable. In a striking visual metaphor, she leaps into the water, away from Walternet's torture and towards a "Manhatan" skyline dominated by the still standing Twin Towers, symbols of a utopian performative in which "different choices" can be made. It is this future, one which seeks a reconciliation between the two universes, which dominates much of the narrative in the following season.



Figure 96: "Olivia," *Fringe*.

The towers are again prominently featured in "Lysergic Acid Diethylamide," the nineteenth episode of the third season. Here, they are located in a space outside of both universes. It is a space Olivia has constructed within her mind to escape those who seek to harm her, buried deep within her subconscious. There, Peter (Joshua Jackson), a member of the Fringe team, seeks to find her and to separate her consciousness from that of William Bell, whose soul sought temporary refuge in Olivia's mind following his death. What is remarkable about the universe that is depicted in this episode is that it is one purely of the imagination. Therefore, once Peter enters the universe, he remarks that the distance of the towers has changed. Once he arrives in Bell's office, at the top of the towers, the episode switches to animation, where Bell, like the towers, is resurrected. This place is a violent one, dominated by "the darker parts of [Olivia's] subconscious, allowing her deepest fears to run rampant."⁴⁰⁶ These fears manifest as

⁴⁰⁶ "Lysergic Acid Diethylamide," *Fringe*, writ. J.J. Abrams, Alex Kurtzman, Roberto Orci, J.H. Wyman, Jeff Pinkner, and Akiva Goldsman, dir. Joe Chappelle, FOX Television, 15 April 2011.

zombie-like creatures, who chase Walter and Peter to the top of the tower. In a final moment, Peter leaps from the tower. His leap evokes the jumpers of 9/11.



Figure 97: “Lysergic Acid Diethylamide,” *Fringe*.



Figure 98: “Lysergic Acid Diethylamide,” *Fringe*.



Figure 99: “Lysergic Acid Diethylamide,” *Fringe*.



Figure 100: “Lysergic Acid Diethylamide,” *Fringe*.

Unlike those who jumped from the towers on 9/11, Peter manages to grab hold of a rope ladder dangling from a zeppelin, as it climbs upward and away. Dolan writes, “[...] The utopian performative [...] is grounded in the humble, messy attempt to seek out human connectedness, rather than a grandiose fixed vision of one perfect future or one perfect idea of a better life.”⁴⁰⁷ Here, in the darkness of Olivia’s subconscious the tower is a menacing place of death, but through his escape, Peter manages to subvert this moment, transforming the death of the jumpers into an escape, a downward trajectory into an upward one, and a beginning into an ending.

“A COLLECTION OF PECULIAR SOULS”

While both *TSCC* and *Fringe* point to alternative, utopian futures in the wake of 9/11, they lack one element Dolan deems crucial, namely the “*communitas*” of live theatrical performance: “Utopia is always a metaphor, always a wish, a desire, a no-place that performance can sometimes help us map if not find. But a performative is not a metaphor; it’s a doing, and it’s in the performative’s gesture that hope adheres, that *communitas* happens, that the not-yet-conscious is glimpsed and felt and strained toward.”⁴⁰⁸ While the cult following generated by these two science fiction shows may itself be considered a form of *communitas* – albeit one that is localized in twitter feeds, message boards, and comic-cons – it lacks the element of “liveness” specific to theatre. To focus on the significance of that “liveness” and its role in establishing “*communitas*,” I will therefore examine the play *Omnium Gatherum*.

Omnium Gatherum (meaning “a collection of peculiar souls”), first produced in New York in 2003, depicts a surrealistic dinner. After the first plane, American Airlines Flight 11, hit the North Tower of the World Trade Center, Theresa Rebeck phoned her friend, Alexandra

⁴⁰⁷ Dolan, *Utopia in Performance* 136.

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid* 170.

Gersten-Vassilaros, whose husband is not only a businessman, but also a pilot, to ask if what she was hearing on the news could indeed be true. Could this sort of damage be caused by a small, private plane, as the newscasters were suggesting? Gersten-Vassilaros told her that no, it could not and over the next couple of days the two friends remained in contact. As Gersten-Vassilaros recalls:

Within a few days we both were so alit by the amount we didn't know about everything that was being talked about, which was Al Qaeda, Osama Bin Laden, a radical movement bound to make their point in a very destructive, tragic way. And the way they were being cast as evil, evildoers... It all just seemed to completely ignite our curiosity, our decision not to be led around by our own government or by whatever was starting to cement, which was good and evil, black and white. Both Theresa and I, I don't think, are likely to be contained by black and white categorization so easily, even in the face of so much fear and so much that we didn't know. I just said "Let's write a play." We both obviously would have written something. But I said "I have this idea and here's how I see it. It's a group of people talking and they're around a table and...."⁴⁰⁹

From there, the play evolved "organically," drawing on a number of influences including Edgar Allen Poe's *Masque of the Red Death*, Jean Paul Sartre's *No Exit* and Luigi Pirandello's *Six Characters in Search of an Author*. Further, both playwrights later became aware of and saw similarities to George Bernard Shaw's *Heartbreak House*, though Rebeck added that these were coincidental and "utterly unintentional".⁴¹⁰ The playwrights started identifying individuals they believed should be at this gathering, which originally took the form of a talk show. However, the

⁴⁰⁹ Alexandra Gersten-Vassilaros, Interview with the Author, 25 May 2007.

⁴¹⁰ Theresa Rebeck, E-mail to the Author, 14 May 2006.

setting was soon transformed into a surrealistic dinner party for practical and metaphorical reasons. On the one hand, the playwrights had read quite a bit about New York dinner parties and been to some themselves. On the other, according to Gersten-Vassilaros, “it seemed to magnify and represent in an iconic way that super-entitled Martha Stewart attention to detail dinner party which would conceivably invite these disparate characters.”⁴¹¹

Many of the characters are drawn from real world counterparts. Suzie is said to be drawn from Martha Stewart, Roger from Tom Clancy, Khalid from Edward Said (who coincidentally died the same night the play opened in New York), and Terence from Christopher Hitchens, whereas Jeff and Mohammed are a “typical” fireman and terrorist, respectively.⁴¹² The characters of Lydia and Julia have proven more elusive, though it is tempting to read Rebeck and Gersten-Vassilaros into these characters. Nonetheless, such a reductive reading is only a partial one. Rebeck explains:

We were hoping, in the writing of the play, to latch onto contemporary cultural prototypes because so many of them became familiar faces in the public discourse after 9/11 and beyond. Part of the impulse behind the writing of the play was to skewer the way all the pundits kept trying to squeeze very small meanings and understandings onto what was obviously a historic and mythic and unimaginable event. There is no way to understand the events of 9/11, truly, is my position – they are beyond our reckoning, in history and in culture. And yet there are all those very smart people on television insisting on one or another version of what

⁴¹¹ Ibid.

⁴¹² In conversation, Gersten Vassilaros has told me that the choice of the name Mohammed was meant to reflect its commonness, not as a reference to the Prophet Mohammed.

it all means. But the "people" on whom our characters are based actually skewed very quickly off the prototype.⁴¹³

Gersten-Vassilaros expanded on this, stating:

We called them iconic, almost mythic figures in our culture, like Martha Stewart. The value of having icons is that people already bring whole stories and attitudes to the table about those people. The audience does. A lot of what the playwright's work is, is already cut or mined [for them] just by virtue of who that icon is to [the audience]. [...] There's something for everybody to feel righteously connected to. Not just that they recognize themselves, they recognize themselves righteously, ferociously clinging to one point of view.

In crafting these characters, Rebeck and Gersten-Vassilaros took the unique approach of role-playing to create the conversations between their characters – even taking on roles they did not necessarily identify with – thus mirroring in the creative process itself the dialogue which must occur between the characters if there is to be any hope of breaking the cycle of violence in which they are trapped. Here, the characters not only require a greater understanding of one another to move forward, but they are literally born of such a dialogue and are the physical remnants of it.

To read the characters in the play as being merely representative of a particular historical individual or group of individuals does them a disservice. All creative works have some basis in reality. Being able to identify those sources can provide some insight, but in the case of *Omnium Gatherum*, identifying these correlations is only a first step. In discussing *Mother Courage*, Oskar Eustis once stated, "Mother Courage doesn't learn, so that the audience might."⁴¹⁴ Similarly, I argue that the peculiar souls of *Omnium Gatherum* are formulated as stereotypes, so

⁴¹³ Theresa Rebeck, E-mail to the Author.

⁴¹⁴ "Born to Run."

that the audience might, in turn move beyond these stereotypes. The characters are deliberately skewed, in part, so that the audience may likewise move beyond their preconceived notions.

One criticism which has been leveled against the play is its purported lack of plot, or so-called “talkiness”. To be sure, the play has no conventional plot to speak of and the characters seem to exist remarkably removed from “recent tragic events” (to borrow the title of Craig Wright’s 9/11 play). However, as the stories progress, they steer towards an ending in which the reality of the play collides with the reality of its respective audience. As the sound of helicopters grows ever louder for the dinner party in *Omnium Gatherum*, ultimately crescendoing in an explosion, the audience can not help but recollect the sounds and images of 9/11.

Einstein once warned that the third world war would be fought with atomic weapons, the fourth with sticks and stones. It is in this vein that the play ends with a warning about the future. However, it is not the destruction itself which is the centerpiece of the play (in fact, it does not occur until the very end, almost as a structural afterthought), but rather the path which leads towards it. More importantly, it is the many possible paths of prevention which are not taken. Time and again, we are reminded, this destruction could have been prevented. It is because of this failure that the ending proves tragic. Theresa Rebeck, in an email to me, explained the ending in detail and her words are worth repeating in their entirety here, not only because they provide a counterpoint to the play’s critical reception, but also because of the manner in which Rebeck conceptualizes violence:

The imminence and reality of a violent end to everything is naturally going to shock an audience. I do think that the reason it is effective [...] is not merely that simple fact – that guess what, we live in a world where technological violence can just appear out of nowhere and annihilate everything. Because that can happen in

a completely arbitrary way and just feel arbitrary. Which in fact is what large-scale technological violence on the scale of 9/11 is, a bit – just arbitrary. But [...] I hope *Omnium Gatherum*, you see people struggling with the larger questions which make those kind of violent events even a possibility; you see some people really arguing for a change of heart and intellect which would pull the human race away from its fascination with these terribly destructive roads. But the impassioned argument fails, which means that when the impersonality of the violence and utter destruction descends, it is not arbitrary; sadly, it is only inevitable. We didn't get smart enough fast enough. It truly triggers the deep fear I think most of us live with in a post-industrial world: that the instruments of destruction our fellow men have constructed are in fact destined to destroy all of us.⁴¹⁵

It is in the character of Jeff in *Omnium Gatherum* that reality is ultimately manifested. Though he has been largely silent until the end, it is he who recounts the events of September 11 simply and realistically. In a play populated by stereotypes, it is the “hero” firefighter who is most firmly rooted in reality. Whereas the characters throughout the play had been maneuvering through a series of mindscapes, Jeff has remained removed, negatively insulated by the actual events he has experienced. Thus, in the end, reality crashes into the play, not just through the helicopters circling overhead, but through Jeff’s words. Once his account is finished, he asks “Is there desert?”⁴¹⁶, signaling the third and final act of the play - which is structured around the courses of the meal itself, thus serving as a container for the story.

⁴¹⁵ Theresa Rebeck, E-mail to the Author.

⁴¹⁶ Theresa Rebeck and Alexandra Gersten-Vassilaros, *Omnium Gatherum* (NY: Samuel French, Inc., 2003) 70.

At the end of the play, the characters move into a realm in which language ultimately fails them, ending their journeys where those of the playwrights began. As Gersten-Vassilaros explained, “The crisis for me personally as a writer about this was the failure to communicate and the power to lead us through a complex time into a richer understanding was so lost. [...] It was such a critical moment and it was so casually overlooked and traded in for something so banal, distorted, arrogant and destructive.”⁴¹⁷ In its efforts to seek out a “richer understanding,” the play functions as a utopian alternative to the loss described by Gersten-Vassilaros.

The antithesis to this destructiveness is the power of food: literal and spiritual. Food serves a significant function in the play overall, not simply as a plot device, but also as a metaphor. In a previous draft of the play, Khalid, in a speech about the importance of love, quoted a poem by Antonio Machado titled “Last Night as I Was Sleeping” in which the dreamer imagines a series of images ranging from water to a beehive to the sun occupying his heart only to realize that the occupant is in fact, God.⁴¹⁸ In the final version of the play, Khalid simply states, “I wish I had no brain, just a heart the size of a giant fruit, then I would feed us all.”⁴¹⁹

Omnium Gatherum is not concerned with getting its point across by means of a parallel allegory, but rather with finding a single, overarching metaphor. In this case, it is literally a dinner table. The meal is not so much a “last supper” before death, but rather, as the following passage suggests, a reminder of the necessity of breaking bread

⁴¹⁷ Alexandra Gersten-Vassilaros, Interview with the Author.

⁴¹⁸ Antonio Machado, “Last Night As I Was Sleeping”, *Ten Poems to Change Your Life*, ed. Roger Housden (NY: Harmony Books, 2001), 21-22.

⁴¹⁹ Rebeck and Gersten-Vassilaros, *Omnium Gatherum* 70. The Pittsburgh takeout restaurant Conflict Kitchen may be understood as a literal manifestation of this. Co-founded by Jon Rubin and Dawn Weleski, and under the culinary direction of Robert Sayre, the restaurant “only serves quisine from countries with which the United States is in conflict [... and...] uses the social relations of food and economic exchange to engage the general public in discussions about countries, cultures, and people that they might know little about outside of the polarizing rhetoric of governmental politics and the narrow lens of media headlines.” (conflictkitchen.org, 2014, 10 Oct. 2014 <<http://conflictkitchen.org/>>.) To date the restaurant has served quisine from Afghanistan, Cuba, Iran, North Korea, Palestine, and Venezuela. (Full disclosure: I am currently employed by CK.)

KHALID. No! No! You who talk so well must learn to listen! We haven't got a lot of time to evolve here! This will be a compassionate universe or it will cease becoming altogether! Let America strive to become, the size of a true hero, like our friend the firefighter! Let her assistance be brave and supernatural!

TERENCE. And how would you go about doing this?

KHALID. By feeding everyone!

LYDIA. With what?

KHALID. With food! The fear we feel is because we do not see where or how or if a new world will be born!

The play is therefore “talky”, not because its playwrights are incapable of depicting action onstage, but because they are deliberately commenting on the ineffectiveness of words removed from action. They are seeking to create debate and discussion and therefore literally projecting it onto the microcosm they have created onstage. Like a giant theatrical ark, the plays seek to encompass as many facets as possible of the very society upon which it is commenting.

In the end, we learn that some (if not all) of the dinner guests in *Omnium Gatherum* have been dead all along, thereby allowing the characters to, at least metaphorically, rise from the dead. The play offers no real sense of resolution, which may indeed be the point. Instead, the play suspends the characters in a moment of white light, only to push them onward within the purgatory in which they, like the societies they represent, must relearn the lessons of violence every day anew.

It is not surprising that *Omnium Gatherum*, with its complex, predominantly anti-war perspective, would not fare well in 2003. Bill Maher, for example, found his long-running show, *Politically Incorrect*, cancelled in June of 2002 after stating on September 17, 2001, “We

have been the cowards, lobbing cruise missiles from 2,000 miles away. That's cowardly. Staying in the airplane when it hits the building, say what you want about it, it's not cowardly." Two years later, the Dixie Chicks found themselves the victims of death threats following lead singer Natalie Maines' statement at a concert in the UK that she was "ashamed" the president was from Texas. Further, at the time the play was presented, New York was (and arguably still is) in an acute state of mourning and any responses to the play were inevitably colored and impacted by that grief. Though a number of factors likely led to the early closing of the play, including its release so soon after the attacks, marketing choices and differences in execution between the original Humana production and its New York transfer, Frank Rich's October 5th review in *The New York Times*, referring to his attendance of the show as a "mistake" undoubtedly served as the final nail in the coffin.⁴²⁰ (Nonetheless, a number of reviewers including Ben Brantley⁴²¹ and John Lahr⁴²² offered largely favorable analyses.)⁴²³ However, perhaps the single largest factor to account for the difference in reception between the play's previous Humana production and its New York transfer is a simple change in staging.

Before moving to a proscenium stage in New York, the play was staged on slowly moving turntable in a theatre-in-the round, ensuring that audience members would be confronted with a variety of perspectives, further complicating the stereotypes it sought to transcend. While

⁴²⁰ Frank Rich, "Where's Larry Kramer When We Need Him?" *New York Times on the Web* 5 Oct. 2003, 10 Oct. 2014 <<http://www.nytimes.com/2003/10/05/theater/where-s-larry-kramer-when-we-need-him.html>>.

⁴²¹ Ben Brantley, "A Feisty Feast of Wicked Wit," *New York Times on the Web* 26 Sept. 2003, 10 Oct. 2014 <http://www.nytimes.com/mem/theater/treview.html?res=9d04eedd153df935a1575ac0a9659c8b63&_r=0>.

⁴²² John Lahr, "Cultural Gas: The discreet harm of the bourgeoisie", *newyorker.com*, 6 Oct. 2003, 10 Oct. 2014 <archives.newyorker.com/?iid=15307&startpage=page0000142>.

⁴²³ By contrast, Dolan discusses the largely positive critical reception to Mary Zimmerman's *Metamorphoses*, which opened in New York in October 2001. However, Zimmerman's production preceded the events of 9/11 – first with a 1996 production at Northwestern University and later at the Lookingglass Theatre in Chicago. While Zimmerman's production may be read as an analogy through which to approach an understanding of 9/11, it was not designed as such. By contrast, Rebeck and Gersten-Vasillaros directly addressed the events of 9/11 and wrote in response to them. This difference between the plays may account – at least in part – for the difference in reception.

some have criticized the stereotypical nature of these characters, I argue that these, in fact, constitute one of the play's strengths, embodying a rhizomatic "betweenness," – by incorporating a multitude of equally weighted perspectives. Further, that "betweenness" is profoundly enhanced by the spinning turntable which, unlike a proscenium stage, forces audiences to engage multiple, often contradictory perspectives for the duration of the production. The staging of *Omnium Gatherum* forges an alternative reality, a utopian performative through which the audience may cathartically engage and confront the abject.

DECONSTRUCTING "THE ABYSS OF THE FUTURE"

Throughout, my dissertation has been structured as a historical intervention, examining the manner in which 9/11 has been formulated as a narrative and as a historical sequence of events in the United States through select plays, film adaptations, performances (construed broadly) and select documentaries. When discussing the relative dearth of artistic representations explicitly of 9/11 to have emerged in response to the events, reviewers, critics and scholars – while acknowledging that perhaps not enough time has passed for the events to be absorbed culturally – frequently suggest that 9/11 has so completely permeated our collective consciousness as to render their narrative re-presentation, at best, ineffective, and, at worst, superfluous. My project argues that the events themselves have been, from the beginning, relegated to the realm of the symbolic and that what we refer to as "9/11" is itself a narrative construction. Furthermore, I contend that in representing 9/11, a series of liminal space(s) open up, at the intersection between the semiotic and the symbolic that expose radical possibilities for the (re)configuration of identity, nation and history. My project has been to pry open these

liminal spaces, to examine how representations of 9/11 engage a narrative outside of the conceptual framework formulated within the context of the “war on terrorism.”

My dissertation has examined performance across various media, in an attempt to undo and reformulate the manner in which memory, identity, and history are binarily constructed in the context of 9/11. In doing so, I have sought to reclaim the potentialities to restructure these notions which have been otherwise suppressed by the narrativization of the events of 9/11 in public discourse. If “9/11” is itself a construct in this sense, my aim is to deconstruct “the abyss of the future” that it represents. Finally, in addressing the issues outlined above, it is my hope that this dissertation will serve as an interdisciplinary contribution addressing the need for theoretical and critical analyses of representations of 9/11. While I write within the context of an evolving field of inquiry, with performative representations of 9/11 continuing to emerge, I hope to not only broaden and expand our understanding of the insights these works offer and the manner in which these works are perceived, but also to argue for a reconsideration and expansion of the canon regarding performances of 9/11.

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