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PICTURING 9/11:
TRAUMA, TECHNICS, MEDIATION

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PhD Literature, Film and Visual Culture

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I hereby declare that this thesis has not been and will not be submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

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PICTURING 9/11: TRAUMA, TECHNICS, MEDIATION

SUMMARY

The September 11 attacks employed violence as a means of picture-making on a horrifically unprecedented scale. Furthermore, '9/11' crystallised the intersection of trauma discourse and visual culture at both popular and academic levels. Questions surrounding the role of visual images and processes of mediation within trauma theory are thus important in understanding an event which was fundamentally mediated and intensely visual.

The concept of 'virtual trauma' raises the possibility that mediation can become the site or source of trauma, as well as a mode of its transmission or representation. This thesis explores the ways in which the confusion of presence and absence named by the figure of virtuality operates in the register of visuality and visibility, both literal and figurative, in specific representations of 9/11 by Don DeLillo, Frédéric Beigbeder, Paul Greengrass and Luc Tuymans. These are read as responses to the problem of how to represent an event which was already its own representation. It therefore seeks to situate 9/11 within a history of technics as the enframing of a particular relationship between subject and object through representation, as proposed by Heidegger and developed by others including Derrida and Samuel Weber.

Through detailed analyses of these works and their popular and academic reception, I highlight the ways in which they both employ and problematise structures of visibility, presence and mediation. Such representations offer an account of the tension between securing and 'unsecuring' of the subject or beholder which is, in Weber's reading of Heidegger, the result of representational thinking. The thesis thus moves discussion of the impact of 9/11 into the wider context of debates over visuality and subjectification in contemporary media cultures.

The fundamental event of the modern age is the conquest of the world as picture.

- Martin Heidegger

It takes more than seeing to make things visible.

- T.J. Clark

We are always looking and looking away at the same time.

- W.G. Sebald

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Introduction: **Picturing 9/11**

The September 11 attacks saw violence employed as a means of picture-making on an unprecedented scale. The event which has come to be known as '9/11' may not have been the first truly global media spectacle (the moon landing was watched by an estimated 500 million people); nor was it the first globally televised catastrophe (the Challenger disaster of 1986, whilst broadcast to a fairly small live audience, was quickly seen by millions on television news reports); it may not even be the ultimate spectacle of extreme violence in our era (the nuclear mushroom cloud has a claim to that title). However, 9/11 was the first major catastrophe to be unthinkable *except as spectacle*. As many commentators recognised, the significance of the attacks lay as much in their powerful symbolism as in the physical destruction they wrought which, while grievous for those affected, was relatively minor in comparison to the effects of the wars, hurricanes and earthquakes which all too regularly savage the more benighted parts of our planet. As a tactical strike against a vastly powerful enemy, the attacks make no sense other than as an image of humiliation and defeat. Their exposure through mass media channels was unprecedented, thanks partly to the concentration of cameras already in lower Manhattan: several captured footage of the *first* plane's impact, and three minutes afterward CNN had established a live feed. An extraordinary number of those who were present in lower Manhattan and its environs recorded what they saw in still and moving images, and much of this footage was aired on the internet and television news within days. Rolling news channels repeatedly replayed footage of the attacks over days and weeks; bulletins relayed responses from around the globe, ranging from declarations of sympathetic solidarity with the United States to (relatively isolated) exultation in its pain. The internet was aflame with activity ranging from informed, incisive analysis to deranged speculation and paranoia. All this had no

doubt been foreseen by attackers who clearly possessed a sophisticated understanding of the Western media culture that, along with the boxcutters and airliners, was turned into a devastatingly effective weapon.

Mediation is integral to 9/11 in a way not true of previous mass spectacles; as Marc Redfield puts it, 'Surely there has never been a more utterly mediated event'.[1] The moon landing and the Challenger disaster, while undoubtedly amplified in public consciousness by media coverage, would have happened without it: 9/11 almost certainly would not. The vast majority of people who can be said to have witnessed the event did so, via television or the internet, as a mediated image-event. 9/11 simply cannot be understood outside of its mediation, to the extent that it becomes hard to separate the horror of the violence the attacks inflicted from the horror of the images they produced. The distinction is difficult to articulate but important for my argument. An image of a mushroom cloud is clearly separable from the event it records; that separation becomes problematic in the case of 9/11, where to a large extent the images *are* the event. Public memory of 9/11 seems dominated by the attack on the World Trade Center, precisely because of the images it created; the events in Washington and Pennsylvania are less visible, literally and figuratively. The sheer number of images generated by 9/11 is perhaps unsurpassed for a major historical event; many of them have embedded themselves within the fabric of our culture.[2] '9/11' conjures an unmistakable set of images: the second plane, 'eagerly alive, and galvanized with malice' as Martin Amis put it, smashing into the already-burning towers; crowds of tiny figures leaning out from the smoking buildings; others falling, singly and in pairs, from the towers to their deaths a thousand feet below; the sudden swift buckling of the towers, and people fleeing for their lives from a monstrous rolling cloud of debris; faces frozen in horror and awe, eyes turned upward; ash-covered office workers wandering through a monochrome moonscape; swarms of people, dazed but calm, filing over the Brooklyn Bridge.[3] This was a determinedly visual event, an overwhelming spectacle of violence that dominated the media for weeks, and the effects of which lasted much longer and resulted in the loss of many more lives than were taken on the day itself. One of the central organising assumptions of this thesis is that 9/11 represents the paradigmatic contemporary usage of the image as a weapon of war. The attackers exploited the fact that the media *had to* broadcast the event and so magnify its traumatising force as spectacle. In short, the attacks

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[1] Marc Redfield, *The Rhetoric of Terror: Reflections on 9/11 and the War on Terror* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2009), p. 26.

[2] For example, a search for 'September 11 2001' returns 383,000 hits on YouTube and 3,530,000,000 on Google Images.

[3] Martin Amis, *The Second Plane: September 11, 2001-2007* (London: Vintage, 2009), p. 3.

offered conclusive proof that, in Nicholas Mirzoeff's words, 'the image has become a battleground'.[4]

The significance of 9/11 as media spectacle has been the subject of enormous critical attention, beginning almost immediately after the event itself.[5] Much of the most incisive early analysis focused upon the impact of those unforgettable images.[6] Later efforts have sought to summarise and interpret the growing body of work in literature, television, cinema, theatre, and visual art (to name only the most prominent media) which directly or indirectly takes 9/11 as its object.[7] Much of this work frames 9/11 through the discourses of trauma and mourning, as something which we as a culture must learn to see and speak about in order to assimilate and work through it. My interest here is in the difficulty of picturing and even of seeing 9/11, above all of seeing it *as a picture*, as an intentionally produced aesthetic artefact. 'Picture' evokes a history of artfully produced representations, from cave paintings to murals to oil paintings; 'image' perhaps feels newer, more associated with reproductive technologies such as the camera and the computer than human intentionality.[8] The distinction is provisional and difficult to secure but, as my thesis aims to explore, it names something real: a tension between making and capturing, art and non-art, which brings out the ethically and conceptually disruptive force of 9/11 as an image-event. If it is possible to suggest that an image is captured and a picture made, then the scandal of 9/11 is precisely that the terrorists made a picture: they used the unprecedented saturation of Manhattan by visual imaging technologies of various kinds to produce something as much a visual artwork as a political manifesto or a brutal crime. Mediation is therefore central to the conjunction of art and trauma in 9/11. Both trauma and avant-garde aesthetics have been characterised in terms of

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[4] Nicholas Mirzoeff, *An Introduction to Visual Culture*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 298.

[5] Of the first wave of analysis, the most insightful are perhaps Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, trans. by Chris Turner (London: Verso, 2003); and Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London: Verso, 2002); Two later efforts which I have found particularly useful are Redfield; and David Simpson, *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2006).

[6] Baudrillard; Žižek; Giovanna Borradori, *Philosophy in a Time of Terror: Dialogues with Jürgen Habermas and Jacques Derrida* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

[7] See for example Ann Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn, *Literature After 9/11* (London: Routledge, 2008); *Film and Television After 9/11*, ed. by Wheeler Winston Dixon, 3rd edn (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004); E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (Piscataway, N.J: Rutgers University Press, 2005); Graham Coulter-Smith, *Art in the Age of Terrorism* (London: Paul Holberton, 2005); *Terror, Culture, Politics: Rethinking 9/11*, ed. by Daniel J. Sherman and Terry Nardin (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006); *Journalism After September 11*, ed. by Barbie Zelizer and Stuart Allan, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 2011).

[8] 'Image' derives from *imago*, related to 'imitate'; 'picture' comes from the Latin *pictura,* itself derived from the verb *pingere*, 'to paint'; *The Oxford English Dictionary*, ed. by J.A. Simpson and E.S.C. Weiner, 2nd edn, 20 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 665 (vol. VII), p. 784 (vol. XI). Picturing therefore has etymological associations with craft and judgement, whereas imaging evokes copying and transcription.

shock and immediacy. Aesthetic shock is one of modernity's defining characteristics; not for nothing was Robert Hughes' landmark history of Modernism called *The Shock of the New*. This shock is as much a technological as an aesthetic formation, as Redfield recognises:

> The problem of postromantic art [...] ironically doubles that of testamentary technological practices (e.g. documentary photography, on-site reporting, or other acts of witnessing) insofar as art names an effort to capture and even *produce* the real. The mass killings of 9/11 were not "art", but "art" cannot be kept at a proper and secure distance from this catastrophe, any more than "the media" can.[9]

Redfield identifies the discursive knot which makes 9/11 so significant for contemporary culture. In it are entangled questions of technology, witnessing, mediation, ethics and aesthetics. Modern art has striven at times to demolish the barrier separating it from reality, politics has been framed as the struggle to realise one's desires, terrorism has increasingly sought to utilise the power of media imagery. 9/11 straddles all three with a hallucinatory force which did not go unremarked. The most controversial responses were those that dared to ascribe an aesthetic quality to the attacks. Jean Baudrillard, Damien Hirst and Karlheinz Stockhausen were castigated for treating the images as art.[10] Yet the virulence of the reaction perhaps testified to the literally unspeakable truth their comments acknowledged: that the attacks were pictures made with planes and buildings and bodies.

In tracing the tension between absorption and theatricality, seeing and reading, presence and absence within responses to 9/11, I hope to explore the tangled relationships between seeing and understanding, looking-at and looking-away, which guide our sense of what a picture is and how it works. I shall be concerned to discover how image-makers have responded to the challenge of picturing an event which was already imaged to an unprecedented degree, yet of which no definitive image exists. How to represent something which is already its own representation? What difficulties must be faced, what resistances overcome, in picturing the paradigmatic image-event?

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[9] Redfield, pp. 33–34.

[10] Stockhausen's infamous description of the attacks as 'the greatest work of art that is possible in the whole cosmos' is subjected to penetrating and rather brave analysis in Frank Lentricchia and Jody McAuliffe, 'Groundzeroland', *The South Atlantic Quarterly*, 101 (2002), 349–359 <doi:10.1215/00382876-101-2-349>.

'Like a movie'

Thanks to the intensity of mediation structuring the image-event '9/11', each of its 'signature moments' — the hits on the World Trade Center, the collapse of the towers, the crowds of bystanders staring in horror or fleeing in terror — have been captured on film multiple times from varying angles. Whilst the visual archive of 9/11 is extensive, it is also diffuse; its sheer size reveals the lack of a single definitive image.[11] This diffusion means that canonical images, as opposed to iconic *scenes*, are harder to isolate than in the past. No single record defines these moments in public memory the way the 'Zapruder film', and its central image of Jacqueline Kennedy climbing over the back of the President's car, her husband's head shattered like an eggshell, defines public memory of the Kennedy assassination.[12] Where the Vietnam War can be evoked by a few famous photographs — a little girl screaming in pain as she runs from her burning village; a man being shot in the head at point-blank range in the street; a monk burning himself alive; the vacant gaze of a traumatised marine holding his rifle — the archive of 9/11 consists of a vast agglomeration of images of every facet of the event.[13] The exception, and arguably the most famous single image of 9/11, is Richard Drew's photograph of a man falling to his death from the towers (Figure 1).[14] Known as the 'Falling Man' photograph, it was briefly published in newspapers on September 12 2001 before disappearing from the archive for several years, deemed by news agencies too disturbing or too invasive of a man's death to circulate publicly.

The singularity of Drew's image is as much a result of its formal beauty as of the horror it reveals. Echoing the grid-like severity of Modernist art and the redemptive spirituality of religious art (it is redolent of an inverted '*Ecce Homo*'), the photograph's formal appeal mitigates the horror of its subject matter. The man appears curiously relaxed, as if reconciled

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[11] By 'the visual archive of 9/11' I mean images produced on the day of the attacks itself as a consequence of, and as part of the documentary record of, the event. I exclude from consideration here the no less familiar images produced by the subsequent 'War on Terror', which are deserving of a full-length study of their own. For thoughtful and provocative reflections on the visuality of the 'War on Terror', see Nicholas Mirzoeff, *Watching Babylon: The War in Iraq and Global Visual Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004); W.J.T. Mitchell, *Cloning Terror: The War of Images, 9/11 to the Present* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

[12] It is worth remembering that the Zapruder film was at first withheld from public view and only became iconic after its 1975 airing on U.S. television.

[13] This visual saturation is of course not as totalising as it may at first appear; very few images taken inside the targeted buildings exist, and none from inside the hijacked aeroplanes. These gaps in the visual archive will be touched upon in greater detail in chapters 2 and 3.

[14] Barbie Zelizer specifically compares Drew's photograph to Eddie Adam's Vietnam photographs. Barbie Zelizer, 'Photography, Journalism, and Trauma', in Zelizer and Allan, pp. 48–68.

to his horrifying end: 'His humanity is in accord with the lines of the buildings'.[15] The image's singularity is partly the result of editorial decision-making. The iconic picture is the eighth in a sequence of twelve shot by Drew; the others show him spinning and flailing as he falls. Their affect is markedly different: more straightforwardly horrific, less — well, less *beautiful* — and *because of that* less powerful. Even this most singular image of 9/11 is therefore multiple, shadowed by the virtual presence of the series from which it has been extracted. Perhaps the belated canonisation of this image answers a need for just such an iconic image of 9/11, horrific and yet redemptive, to homogenise the field. It also suggests that ideological work is being performed by the image: that it secures a particular relationship to 9/11 for the beholder as witness (this is a topic on which I will have more to say in the following chapter).

The person who did most to reinsert Drew's photograph into public consciousness is Tom Junod, whose eloquent essay appeared in the September 2003 issue of *Esquire*.[16] Junod tentatively establishes the man's identity as one Jonathan Briley, who worked at the 'Windows on the World' restaurant at the top of the North Tower. At the same time he calls the picture a 'cenotaph' and describes 'the man buried inside its frame' as 'the Unknown Soldier in a war whose end we have not yet seen'.[17] The essay carefully recuperates the image within language, inserting it within a recognisable narrative of loss and mourning and to some extent disavowing the difficulty of looking at it. Especially while the man's identity remained uncertain, he became something of a representative for the dead of 9/11, most of whose remains have never been found. The 'Falling Man' photograph offered a means to witness the trauma of 9/11, partly because it acknowledges the horror as other, more obviously redemptive images circulating in the aftermath did not (Figure 2).

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[15] Tom Junod, 'The Falling Man', *Esquire*, 2009 <http://www.esquire.com/features/ESQ0903-SEP_FALLINGMAN> [accessed 14 September 2012].

[16] Junod.

[17] Junod; A 2006 documentary film also attempted to identify the figure in the photograph; Henry Singer, '9/11: The Falling Man' (United Kingdom: Channel 4, 2006), TRILT <http://bufvc.ac.uk/tvandradio/trilt/index.php/prog/00582878> [accessed 13 September 2012].

Figure 1: 'The Falling Man'. Photograph: Richard Drew/Associated Press.

Figure 2: Firemen raise the U.S. flag at Ground Zero, September 11 2001. A version of this image was used on the cover of magazines including *Newsweek, Today* and *People*. Photograph: Thomas E. Franklin/Associated Press.

Whilst the 'Falling Man' photograph may be the most iconic single image of 9/11, its framing of the event is by no means representative. Part of the horror and the fascination of the image is that, as Junod points out:

> it was, at last, the sight of the jumpers that provided the corrective to those who insisted on saying that what they were witnessing was "like a movie," for this was an ending as unimaginable as it was unbearable.[18]

Uniquely amongst the 9/11 archive, the horrifying sight of people jumping or falling to their deaths from the upper floors of the World Trade Center was *not* haunted by the uncanny sense of its 'pre-mediation' in Hollywood disaster movies. This prefiguring of the event by fictional narratives is an important factor in the particular cultural resonance of 9/11 as an image-event. Summarised in the phrase 'like a movie', the queasy mixture of shock and familiarity provoked by many images of 9/11 gives them an unsettling potency which was crucial to the event's traumatic impact. Slavoj Žižek traces this traumatising confusion of

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[18] Junod.

reality and fantasy to Western culture's 'passion for the Real'. According to Žižek, the 'ultimate and defining moment of the twentieth century was the direct experience of the Real as opposed to everyday social reality — the Real in its extreme violence as the price to be paid for peeling off the deceptive layers of reality'.[19] In Žižek's Lacanian terms, the Real is the unsymbolisable excess abjected from what we call reality, the social world constructed of signs and symbols that give our lives meaning. According to Žižek many of the significant social formations of the twentieth century, from the Russian Revolution to fascism to leftist terrorism, can be understood as attempts to get beyond the surface of social reality to the untouchable Real behind it. However, this repeated attempt to exceed reality in favour of a direct experience of the Real 'culminates in its apparent opposite — in a *theatrical spectacle*, from the Stalinist show trials to spectacular terrorist acts'.[20] Far from an incursion of a violent external reality into the complacent sphere of American public life, Žižek claims that 'what happened on September 11 was that this fantasmatic screen apparition entered our reality. It is not that reality entered our image: the image entered and shattered our reality'.[21] This formulation nicely captures the inversion of reality and fantasy which was so unsettling in the television pictures of 9/11: it was as if a movie were being played out for real.

Responding to that 'as if', Žižek insists upon the role of fantasy in understanding the crisis named by '9/11'. Žižek invokes an idea of cultural fantasy as the staging of an unconsciously-held wish in a scene subject to the distortions of defensive processes. Fantasy is a compromise formation, ambivalent at its core; it allows for the expression of a wish but also marks the presence of anxiety. The prevalence of spectacular narratives involving the near-destruction of society through its archetypes in Hollywood films (the city, the home, the family) stages a cultural fantasy of individual or collective annihilation and at the same time allows the audience to 'survive' that destruction. Fantasy both calls up and wards off trauma, exploring deep-seated fears and desires in displaced form. On this view 9/11 was traumatic precisely because it realised a persistent fantasy of destruction embedded within Western culture which testifies to underlying anxiety over the limits of Western power and self-determination. In other words, 'the unthinkable which happened was the object of fantasy, so that, in a way, America got what it fantasised about, and that was the biggest surprise'.[22] Jean Baudrillard made the same point in typically hyperbolic terms, arguing that 'they *did it*, but we *wished for*

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[19] Žižek borrows the phrase from Alain Badiou. Žižek, pp. 5–6; Compare Lentricchia and McAuliffe's declaration that one ambition of avant-garde art has been 'to communicate not *about* the real, but to communicate the real itself'. Lentricchia and McAuliffe, p. 356.
[20] Žižek, p. 9.
[21] Žižek, p. 16.
[22] Ibid.

it'.[23] By realising a widespread Western fantasy of destruction, the attackers returned to the West in extreme fashion the old Situationist tactic of taking one's desires for reality.

The simile 'it was like a movie' assumes a certain distance from the attacks — it was not like a movie for anyone close to 'Ground Zero'. Reinforcing the trope of cultural fantasy, it suggests a form of mass witnessing: a collective attempt to frame what is coming into view. The problem is to account for this uncanny pre-mediation: as we have seen, both Baudrillard and Žižek offer explanations by way of fantasy. The tension between uniqueness and iteration in critical framings of 9/11 is unpacked by Derrida in a characteristically lucid response.[24] For Derrida the event is inherently traumatic inasmuch as it exceeds any possible conceptualisation. The act of theorising the event, even in the aporetic terms of trauma theory, structures it and so misses this destructuring effect as it tries to think it. The precedents chosen can be deeply ideologically invested: as with the suggestion of Pearl Harbor as a precedent for 9/11, thereby framing the United States as the victim of an unprovoked act of war and legitimating a military response. It is then the responsibility of critique to reveal these investments and the insufficiency of existing frames. For Derrida the challenge to thought in light of 9/11 is to accept that no final understanding of the event *qua* event is possible, and *at the same time* to insist on the necessity of a rigorous attempt to understand it as far as is possible. In a similar vein Žižek urges rejection of the false dichotomy in President Bush's assertion that 'you're either with us or against us', on the basis that 'precisely in such moments of apparent clarity of choice, mystification is total'.[25] Faced with such ideological coercion, the challenge is to reveal the stakes of the false binary and search out real alternatives. Fantasy is useful because it refuses any such binary, replacing either/or with both/and.[26] We must resist the temptations to elevate the event into a sublime moment of ineffability, *and also* to explain it as the product of particular historical circumstances. Instead we must confront the event in both sets of terms, as the site of really existing antagonisms and complex fantasmatic investments.

'Like a movie' thus marks an effort to assimilate 9/11 to existing forms of thought and the event's resistance to that effort. In fact at certain moments the live coverage itself seems to enact this gap between image and comprehension. At several points — notably the impact of the second plane and the collapse of the South Tower — the image overtakes the television

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[23] Baudrillard, p. 5.
[24] Borradori, pp. 85–136.
[25] Žižek, p. 54.
[26] This objection notwithstanding, Bush's binary is itself fantasmatic.

anchor's description of it.[27] Either the anchor continues with her interview or monologue, momentarily oblivious to the new reality of the image, or there is a sudden stunned silence as she struggles to articulate what she has seen — the silence known in broadcasting as 'dead air'. Nowhere in the rolling, 'real time' coverage do we feel the passage of time so intensely as in these seconds between seeing and speaking. Such moments stage in microcosm the rupture in the fabric of reality enacted by 9/11. They momentarily puncture the flow of the media coverage which in itself constitutes an interruption of 'normal service': yet the spectacular event is not really an interruption of 'normal service' but the very essence of 'news'. The attacks, while they 'effected something like a spectral wound in the fabric of mediation itself', also revealed something about the wounding effects of mediation.[28] Tele-vision, as a form of seeing at a distance, both represents the event and, in re-presenting it, splits it off from itself as image. As such it simultaneously emplaces and displaces both subject and object or event. I shall explore this effect in more detail in the next chapter.

Visuality and trauma

It is central to the argument of this thesis that the attacks mark the intersection of two significant currents in contemporary academic thought: visual culture and trauma theory. This conjunction offers a nodal point for the understanding of a public culture increasingly oriented around images and in which images of violence are increasingly prevalent. If we are all cast as spectators, consumers of images, and simultaneously as actual or potential victims of violence (regardless of the vastly uneven global distribution of exposure to actual violence), then it becomes an important task to understand the ways in which images of violence are produced, distributed and consumed in contemporary Western media cultures. Since the important seminar on 'Vision and Visuality' convened by Hal Foster in 1988, and particularly since the diagnosis of a 'pictorial turn' by W.J.T. Mitchell in 1994, the role of images in contemporary Western media culture has been the focus of intense and sustained critical attention. The new discipline of visual studies or visual culture studies sought to investigate not only the social construction of the visual field (previously addressed under the rubric of the social history of

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[27] 'September 11 Television Archive' <http://archive.org/details/sept_11_tv_archive> [accessed 18 December 2012]. See for example the BBC coverage, where the impact of the second plane is momentarily missed by the news anchor: <http://archive.org/details/bbc200109110834-0916?start=1979.5>

[28] Redfield, p. 4.

art by such scholars as T.J. Clark), but also 'the visual construction of the social field'.[29] It applies techniques of formal, genealogical and ideological analysis along with semiotics and psychoanalysis to a field that fuses art history, media and cultural studies, cognitive science and the history of technology in order to investigate the significance and function of images and practices of visualisation within contemporary and historical cultural formations.[30] Along with Mitchell, scholars like Nicholas Mirzoeff, Douglas Kellner and Anne Friedberg have examined the stakes of the image's dominance as a mode of communication in contemporary culture.[31] This predominantly Anglo-American discipline has nonetheless drawn significant inspiration from the work of French thinkers like Jacques Rancière, Georges Didi-Huberman and Jean-Luc Nancy, who from the 1980s onward have sought to re-examine the so-called 'limits of representation', as well as from Friedrich Kittler's media theory and the German *Bildwissenschaft* tradition.[32] By 2001 the politics and aesthetics of media imagery had thus been the focus of a sustained effort of critique for well over a decade.

Trauma theory formed another significant area of critical research in the humanities at the time of 9/11, perhaps even more so than visual culture. Beginning in the early 1990s with the enormously influential work of Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, trauma as a cultural paradigm 'has come to pervade the understanding of subjectivity and experience in the advanced industrial world'.[33] Of course trauma as a psychopathology has a much longer history, stretching from the prevalence of 'railway spine' in the 1860s, through Freud's theorisation of the effects of shell shock on combat veterans in 1919, to the experiences of Vietnam veterans in the 1970s and the emergence of 'Gulf War Syndrome' in the 1990s.[34] The

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[29] Hal Foster, *Vision and Visuality* (New York: New Press, 1998); W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995).

[30] See for example Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Visual Culture Reader*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 2002); Marita Sturken and Lisa Cartwright, *Practices of Looking: An Introduction to Visual Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

[31] Anne Friedberg, *The Virtual Window: From Alberti to Microsoft* (Cambridge, MA: London: MIT Press, 2009); Douglas Kellner, *Media Spectacle* (New York: Routledge, 2003); Nicholas Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look: a Counterhistory of Visuality* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); W.J.T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want?* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

[32] See for example Jacques Rancière, *The Future of the Image* (London: Verso, 2007); Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Ground of the Image*, trans. by Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005); Their work itself responds to the longstanding suspicion of visuality in French thought, going back to Descartes. See Martin Jay, *Downcast Eyes: The Denigration of Vision in Twentieth-Century French Thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1994); From the German tradition see Friedrich A. Kittler, *Literature, Media, Information Systems*, ed. by John Johnston (London: Routledge, 1997); Hans Belting, *The End of the History of Art?* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2003); Hans Belting, *Art History After Modernism* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

[33] Roger Luckhurst, *The Trauma Question* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 1.

[34] For useful histories of trauma as a theoretical paradigm in the humanities, see Luckhurst, pp. 19–76; Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 2000).

concept attained its current importance when Caruth and Felman, heavily influenced by Adornian aesthetics and deconstructive literary theory, expanded the medical diagnosis of trauma as a psychiatric condition so that it became the symptom of a broader individual or cultural inability to process the effects of violence. Trauma is 'a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events' which, exceeding the subject's capacity to process them, have effectively not been experienced and so cannot remain in memory; instead the event is inscribed directly in the unconscious, from where it returns to possess the subject in a series of 'hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event'.[35] Caruth and Felman extend the psychiatric focus on trauma's effect on the victim to investigate its disruptive effect on concepts of causation, experience, reference and agency. The pathology is located neither in the event itself, its belated return, nor the subject, but in the circular, compulsive relation between them:

> The historical power of the trauma is not just that the experience is repeated after its forgetting, but that it is only in and through its inherent forgetting that it is first experienced at all. […] since the traumatic event is not experienced as it occurs, it is fully evident only in connection with another place, and in another time.[36]

In its dispersal across space and time and its disruption of agency and narrative, trauma both demands and resists representation. It is structured by the figure of aporia, the non-dialectical tension between opposing imperatives. The paradigmatic example of a traumatic event is the Holocaust, which marks for Felman 'a radical historical *crisis of witnessing*, and […] the unprecedented, inconceivable, historical occurrence of "an event without a witness" — an event eliminating its own witness'.[37] The psychoanalysts Felman and Laub turned to interpret the testimony of Holocaust survivors recorded in the Fortunoff Video Archive at Yale University as narratives which performed the trauma they could not fully describe.[38] Felman also produced readings of texts by Dostoevsky, Freud, Mallarmé, Camus and de Man which saw the traces of trauma in its disruptive effects upon narrative. Caruth traced the effects of trauma including displacement, fragmentation, repetition and occlusion, in literary texts from Marguerite Duras and Paul de Man to Freud's own writings including *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* and *Moses and Monotheism*. Their work has been hugely influential, inspiring a vast corpus seeking to understand the transmission of traumatic memory in and through culture. In

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[35] *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. by Cathy Caruth (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), p. 4.

[36] Caruth, p. 8.

[37] Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), p. xvii.

[38] Caruth, *Trauma*; Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996); Felman and Laub.

the 1990s, scandals such as the 'memory wars' over the validity of recovered memories of child abuse, the appearance and official denial of 'Gulf War Syndrome' and in Britain the child abuse cases in Orkney and Cleveland, played key roles in disseminating the idea of trauma at a cultural level.

By 2001, therefore, it was possible to speak of a popular culture of trauma that had evolved from concepts articulated by Caruth and Felman. Its significance as a cultural formation was clearly demonstrated by the response to the Columbine High School massacre of 1999, and even more clearly after 9/11. The attacks have become the paradigmatic contemporary example of a culturally traumatising media event in both popular and academic discourses. As Allen Meek puts it, 'A decade or more of academic analysis of trauma and representation and traumatic memory provided a set of discourses ready made to respond to 9/11'.[39] Following 9/11 the American Psychological Association extended the category of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) to include the effect of exposure to the attacks via television or other media.[40] The status of trauma victim could thus be claimed by enormous numbers of people never exposed to physical danger. Although it reflected concern that repetition of the images risked disseminating trauma, the move underestimates the complex relationship of trauma and picturing. Images potentially bind anxieties as well as staging fantasies; if they induce trauma they can also ward it off. As Samuel Weber writes in the context of 9/11, 'the spectacle, at least as staged by the mainstream broadcast media, seeks simultaneously to assuage and exacerbate anxieties of all sorts by providing images on which they can be projected, ostensibly comprehended, and above all, *removed*'.[41] Visual mediation is here integral to both the assimilation and disavowal of trauma, processes which appear to operate in tandem and through the same imagery. The sheer number of images of the attacks in circulation suggests their functioning as a defence mechanism, a way to hold the event at bay or begin to assimilate it.[42]

It is on the grounds of mediation that 9/11 presented a challenge to trauma theory at a broader level. Although it seemed to offer a ready-made critical framework with which to interpret the attacks, the attempt to apply trauma theory to 9/11 exposed tensions around questions of mediation latent within the theory. Perhaps because trauma is most often

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[39] Allen Meek, *Trauma and Media: Theories, Histories, and Images* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 179.
[40] Allan Young, 'Posttraumatic Stress Disorder of the Virtual Kind: Trauma and Resilience in Post-9/11 America', quoted in Meek, p. 173.
[41] Samuel Weber, *Theatricality as Medium* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2004), p. 334.
[42] See for example Gilles Peress and Alice Rose George, *Here is New York: A Democracy of Photographs* (Zurich: Scalo, 2002).

conceived as a visual possession of the victim in dreams or hallucinations, trauma theory privileges narrative over imagery as a means to articulate, assimilate and work through trauma. However there has recently been an upsurge of interest in visual articulations of trauma. Janet Walker, Ann Kaplan and Joshua Hirsch amongst others have sought to trace the disruptions of trauma within cinema as Caruth, Felman and the many scholars who followed them have done in respect of literature.[43] There is also an established critical tradition linking photography and trauma, exemplified by Roland Barthes.[44] However, these efforts tend to present the works they analyse as bearing witness to unseen or repressed traumatic histories such as child abuse or genocide. They locate mediation on the side of testimony rather than within the event itself. Having emerged from attempts to understand representations of the Holocaust, trauma theory was perhaps ill-equipped to accommodate the spectacular conjunction of violence and mediation represented by 9/11.[45] Much of the debate around Holocaust testimony has centred on the question of whether the Holocaust can or should be represented. Conceived and executed in 'night and fog', the Holocaust is shadowed by a certain invisibility that must be both respected and overcome. Mediation therefore arises within trauma theory as a question about the ethics of representation.[46]

Intensely visual from the beginning, 9/11 presents a different challenge to image-makers. Several works have attempted to theorise that challenge, yet most remain content to map trauma theory onto 9/11 without examining in detail the challenge posed by each to the other at a conceptual level. The most successful, including work by Allen Meek, Marc Redfield and David Simpson, nonetheless tend to locate that challenge at the level of theory, rather than show it enacted in specific imaging practices. In this thesis I aim to stage the tension between visuality and trauma at the level of the image and of the practice of representation as well as of theory. How is it possible to picture something already so saturated by visuality? It may be thought that whatever a picture of 9/11 could show has already been seen in the images

[43] Joshua Hirsch, *Afterimage: Film, Trauma, and the Holocaust* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2003); Kaplan; E. Ann Kaplan and Ban Wang, *Trauma and Cinema: Cross-Cultural Explorations* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2004); Luckhurst, pp. 177–208; Janet Walker, *Trauma Cinema: Documenting Incest and the Holocaust* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

[44] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, trans. by Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000); Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002); Luckhurst, pp. 147–176; A more general overview of trauma's value as an interpretive matrix within visual culture can be found in Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas, *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture* (London: Wallflower, 2007).

[45] There are of course other trajectories in the history of trauma theory, from industrial accidents to combat disorders to sexual abuse, but in its recent history the Holocaust forms a privileged model.

[46] See for example Berel Lang, *Holocaust Representation: Art Within the Limits of History and Ethics* (Baltimore, MD; London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003); Georges Didi-Huberman, *Images in Spite of All: Four Photographs from Auschwitz* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

produced by the event itself. This is of course an illusion; in fact the specific visuality of 9/11 is more resistant to picturing than might at first be imagined.

Picturing 9/11

9/11 has been represented over and over, and the images continue to circulate endlessly, yet this very visual excess bears witness to a certain resistance of the event to picturing. There is something missing from the visual archive of 9/11, and that lack drives the continued effort of visualisation to which the event is subject. If the event is endlessly reproduced, how can it be 'resistant' to representation? What I am trying to describe — and I believe it is a difficulty of the images themselves — is more like a resistance of the image to discourse, a refusal to be parsed in language. As in trauma theory, repetition is here the symptom of something that refuses assimilation: something in the image cannot be made legible, cannot be spoken. In *The Sight of Death*, ostensibly a book about Poussin, T.J. Clark finds himself having:

> an argument with the present regime of the image — in particular with the notion that some kind of threshold has been passed in our time between a verbal world and a visual one. […] On the contrary, our present means of image-production strike me as still utterly under the spell of the verbal — that's a main part of the trouble with them. They are an instrumentation of a certain kind of language use […] Therefore it becomes more and more imperative to point to the real boundaries between seeing and speaking, or sentence and visual configuration. And imperative to keep alive a notion of a kind of visuality that truly establishes itself *at the edge of the verbal* — never wholly apart from it, that is, never out of discourse's clutches, but able and willing to exploit the difference between a sign and a pose, say, or a syntactical structure and a physical (visual, material) interval.[47]

I quote Clark at length because his polemic is important for my own project. I have suggested that attempts to understand 9/11 as a symbolic statement or to unpick the way in which it was 'like a movie' fall short of explaining the images' peculiar affective power. Perhaps the fault lies in the very attempt to explain, in the assumption that the visual is reducible to the textual against which Clark is arguing. Like Clark, I am loth to grant that pictures can be fully apprehended in words; something always seems to lie just beyond saying, 'at the edge of the verbal' and yet not quite articulable within it. What, if anything (and it is my contention that

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[47] T.J. Clark, *The Sight of Death: An Experiment in Art Writing* (New Haven, CT; London: Yale University Press, 2006), pp. 175–176.

there *is* 'something') can a picture *do* that is not susceptible of being parsed in language, *and yet can be seen*? Can we nonetheless stage that interweaving of language and imagery in a way that does justice to its complexity and its power?

The sublime, as the discourse of 'the limits of representation' and especially of visual representation, impresses itself upon my argument here. The 'postmodern' or negative sublime arises from the assertion that something is simply not susceptible of representation: it cannot be pictured. According to Lyotard, sublime art 'does not say the unsayable, but says that it cannot say it' — and already the visual and the textual are intertwined.[48] For Caruth, 'the flashback or traumatic re-enactment conveys […] both *the truth of an event* and *the truth of its incomprehensibility*'.[49] Trauma theory's concern to preserve the disturbance to representation presented by traumatic experience is admirable. However, its insistence on the '*affront to understanding*' of trauma can tip over into a cult of the sublime.[50] This is evident in the following statement of Claude Lanzmann, maker of the canonical Holocaust documentary *Shoah*:

> There is an absolute obscenity in the very project of understanding. Not to understand was my iron law during all the eleven years of the production of *Shoah*. I had clung to this refusal of understanding as the only possible ethical and at the same time the only possible operative attitude.[51]

Lanzmann's insistence on ineffability seems to me an example of what Gillian Rose has called 'Holocaust piety'. Rose argues that to invoke the ineffable is often '*to mystify something we dare not understand*'.[52] In recent years the pendulum of critical opinion has swung away from Lanzmann's argument, as witnessed in the writings of Jacques Rancière and Georges Didi-Huberman amongst others.[53] Furthermore, unlike the Holocaust, 9/11 was a fundamentally mediated visual event. The images produced by 9/11 are sublime in the sense of figuring an event the magnitude of which exceeds the mind's capacity of apprehension. However, this may be one of the least interesting things about them. Far more compelling in my view is the fact that an event so thoroughly embedded in representation produced images which, escaping analysis even as they demand it, seem to exist 'at the edge of the verbal'. That excess

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[48] Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger and 'the jews'*, trans. by M.S. Roberts and A. Michel (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), p. 47.

[49] Caruth, *Trauma*, p. 153.

[50] Caruth, *Trauma*, p. 154.

[51] Lanzmann, quoted in Caruth, *Trauma*, pp. 154–155.

[52] Gillian Rose, 'Beginnings of the Day: Fascism and Representation', in *Mourning Becomes the Law: Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 41–62 (p. 43).

[53] See for example Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, pp. 109–138; Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator* (London: Verso, 2009), pp. 83–105; Didi-Huberman; *Picturing Atrocity: Photography in Crisis*, ed. by Geoffrey Batchen and others (London: Reaktion, 2012).

may be readable in terms of the images' staging of powerful cultural fantasies of destruction and survival. I shall attempt in what follows to show that those fantasies can be traced in many of the most interesting artistic responses to 9/11. My interest lies not in what cannot appear in representation *per se*, but in what within the image resists speech yet remains visible, and conversely in what can be said of the image which cannot simply be seen in it. In other words I am interested in the ways in which the visual and the verbal are haunted by each other, each refusing fully to — what? To speak, to appear? Even here the bifurcation is hard to avoid — in the other's terms. I take it as an axiom that the images of 9/11 are an example of this resistance of the visual to speech, even as the event is so thoroughly mediated. I intend neither to reduce the image to discourse nor to place it finally outside of discourse, but to understand the mutual haunting of image and language. I cannot predict that I will finally unravel this complex interweaving; I suspect that it is constitutive. It may be that, as Clark asserts, 'There is no clear boundary line between knowledge and ignorance', in which case I leave it to the reader to judge when the line is crossed and in what direction.

Diagram

My aim is then to investigate how the extraordinary visuality of 9/11 has been translated in representations of the event; how does the paradigmatic image-event come to be pictured, and in what ways does it yet resist picturing? My argument is framed by four main questions which it seeks to explore, if not to answer in any definitive fashion:

Firstly, if trauma is marked by a blurring of distinctions between presence and absence, to what extent is this blurring present in representations of 9/11 across visual and textual media?

Secondly, what does it mean to represent an event that is already its own representation? What strategies do such representations employ in order to describe the particular relations of presence and absence, and the particular conditions of mediation, which make 9/11 so significant?

Thirdly, if trauma is often presented in visual terms (if only as a limit to, or in excess of, visual representation) and mourning and recovery often conceived through processes of narration and witnessing, what is the relationship between verbal and visual articulation in the artefacts in question?

Fourthly, to what extent can these representations be re-inserted into the history of globalising, technocratic modernity, of which the attacks have been seen as a key moment, both exemplar and rupture?

My project is thus to trace the conceptual, ethical and formal issues raised by the visual archive of 9/11 in particular responses to that archive. I hope to show that the films, novels and artworks I discuss engage with the problem of how to 'picture' 9/11 in complex and thoughtful ways, which in turn take part in debates about 'the limits of representation' that have been operative in particular ways within Western visual culture since at least the end of the Second World War.[54] My attempt to answer the questions above makes no pretence to completion or comprehensiveness. I have chosen to proceed through a series of case studies based around close readings of specific works of art and literature. These are not the only or even the most representative examples I could have chosen. Nor am I suggesting that they are all unambiguously 'successful' artworks, nor that my readings address the questions their authors intended. They are simply artworks which seemed to respond in interesting and productive ways to the questions I am investigating. I nevertheless applied several roughly-sketched criteria. None of the chosen works satisfy all of them, and some have been chosen specifically because their relation to those criteria seems problematic. I hope that the results may encourage the reader to reassess the works in question or forge new connections to other works with which she may be familiar. The criteria are as follows:

Firstly, the chosen work should be an imaginative response to 9/11, rather than a documentary record or an investigation into 'what really happened'. The many documentary films made about that day and its aftermath are thus excluded, as are the various written and filmed accounts which seek to explain 9/11 in terms of a conspiracy, whether passive ('Let it happen on purpose') or active ('Make it happen on purpose'), on the part of the U.S. government or its agencies. On the other hand, whereas *United 93* is an explicit attempt to reconstruct some of the events of that day, it is a dramatised reconstruction after the fact, and except for a small but significant section does not include documentary footage of the attacks.

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[54] I have neither the space nor the expertise to diagnose the continuing history, at once ancient and contemporary, of the question of representation and ethics: suffice to say that both Plato and Aristotle expend energy on the question of what can and should be made into a picture, as do the Old Testament and the Qur'an. On the Biblical prohibition of images, see W.J.T. Mitchell, 'The Unspeakable and the Unimaginable: Word and Image in a Time of Terror', *ELH*, 72 (2005), 18; Joel Snyder, 'What Happens by Itself in Photography?', in *Pursuits of Reason: Essays in Honor of Stanley Cavell*, ed. by Ted Cohen, Paul Guyer and Hilary Putnam (Lubbock: Texas Tech University Press, 1993), pp. 361–373.

Secondly, the work should be centrally concerned with 9/11 as an historical event and should expect the viewer or reader to understand this; the work is impoverished if we exclude 9/11 from consideration as a context. Excluded by this criterion are many works widely read as allegorical accounts of 9/11 (such as *Cloverfield*) or as evidencing a recognisably 'post-9/11' sensibility without directly referencing the attacks themselves (such as *The Road* or *V for Vendetta* in both cinematic and literary form).[55] The exception here would seem to be Luc Tuymans' *Still Life* of 2002, the subject of my final chapter. However, I argue that the painting is in fact centrally concerned with 9/11, and not merely in the mode of a refusal of representation or marking the event as somehow 'beyond representation' as was widely assumed at the time of its appearance.

Thirdly, each work should investigate the nature of 9/11 as a specifically visual and fundamentally mediated event. It should address the uncanny combination of familiarity and strangeness in the 9/11 archive, and should present a rigorous and committed attempt to account for the impact of those images on contemporary culture beyond simply restating their novelty, familiarity or traumatic affect.

The iconography of 9/11 has attained an extraordinary degree of global exposure and cultural penetration. Any attempt to reckon with those images must in a sense compete with their sheer spectacular power, without simply trading on that power or repeating the images' traumatising effect. If it does not critique those images it risks simply repeating them and thus becoming complicit with the attackers, who presumably wanted maximum exposure for the images they created. Finally, unless it acknowledges the trauma of 9/11 it risks falling into what Eric Santner has called 'narrative fetishism', whereby the wound of trauma is disavowed under the pretence that there is nothing to mourn or that mourning has already been completed.[56] The tactic can be detected in calls to 'move on' before proper mourning has been completed, or in representations of 9/11 which frame it as a heroic tale of courage and sacrifice, ultimately redeeming that sacrifice by annexing it to a narrative of reaffirmation or renewal; this would be the major fault with Oliver Stone's film *World Trade Center,* for

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[55] I have written on *Cloverfield*'s relation to 9/11 elsewhere; see Ronan McKinney, 'Attack of the Unknown Known: *Cloverfield*'s Crises of Visibility', György Fogarasi (ed.), *Terror(ism) and Aesthetics,* forthcoming. See also Daniel North, 'Evidence of Things Not Quite Seen: *Cloverfield*'s Obstructed Spectacle', *Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Film and Television Studies*, 40.1 (2010), 75–92 <doi:10.1353/flm.0.0157>.

[56] Eric Santner, 'History Beyond the Pleasure Principle: Some Thoughts on the Representation of Trauma', in *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the 'Final Solution'*, ed. by Saul Friedlander (Cambridge, MA: London: Harvard University Press, 1992), pp. 143–154.

example.[57] In other words, a truly critical response to the iconography of 9/11 must reckon with its power and fascination without sacralising it and thus falling back into the cult of the negative sublime so common in trauma theory. Demystification must begin in recognition of the fascination the object exerts, or lose the tension between presence and absence which marks both the 9/11 archive and the antagonism that ultimately produced it.

Chapter 2 takes as its object Paul Greengrass' 2006 film *United 93*. The film narrates in docudrama mode the story of the passenger rebellion aboard United Airlines Flight 93, which caused the plane to miss its intended target and crash in rural Pennsylvania with the loss of all on board. I argue that, in its framing of the narrative and its positioning of the spectator as a virtual witness to the events, *United 93* operates as a site of governmentality. *United 93* is based on the published report of the 9/11 Commission, which thus warrants the film's authenticity as documentary. However, the film also answers to the commercial imperatives of a major Hollywood production, and the resultant conflict appears in its *mise-en-scène* and in the critical discourse surrounding the film as a tension between the demands of documentary and narrative, or memorialisation and entertainment. Furthermore, the construction of a virtual presence allowing the spectator 'to walk through 9/11 at eye level' arouses tensions between presence and absence, revelation and concealment.[58] The film's presentation of 9/11 as a crisis of visuality has an interesting if unacknowledged parallel in the form of radical Islamism. Militant Islamist groups such as al-Qaeda are responding to a crisis of self-presence arising from the conditions of globalised modernity, a crisis the displacing effects of which are visible in the formal and rhetorical structure of *United 93*.

The third chapter addresses the ethics of spectatorship as provocatively staged in Frédéric Beigbeder's novel *Windows on the World* (2003). The novel is an attempt to imagine the experiences of those who, faced with a choice between death by falling and death by fire, jumped to their deaths from the World Trade Center. Beigbeder counterpoints this narrative with a series of reflections on the cultural significance of the World Trade Center, the impact of 9/11 and, crucially, the ethics of his own aestheticisation of others' suffering. I argue that the book maintains its ethical integrity only by losing it. A series of formal and structural devices serve to highlight the theatricality of the narrative. Rather than a valorisation of textuality for its own sake (the charge often levelled at 'postmodern' works), this strategy continually arouses the reader's awareness of the ethical stakes of her involvement in the text: ultimately,

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[57] This move can also be discerned in the decision of the Bush administration to designate September 11 'Patriot Day' as of 2002, a name which, as Redfield points out, 'implicitly forbids mourning': Redfield, p. 17.

[58] Paul Greengrass, *United 93* (Universal Pictures, 2006), director's commentary.

the book questions the pleasure it derives from suffering. As such Beigbeder's novel responds to Adorno's meditations on the necessity and integrity of art 'after Auschwitz'. Adorno has often been invoked, with varying degrees of legitimacy, to authorise the 'witness of ineffability' that Gillian Rose criticises as a mystification of what must instead be rigorously examined. Against the 'negative sublime' whereby art presents its own incapacity to present the unpresentable, Beigbeder highlights the theatricality of his narrative, critiquing its own investment in the spectacle of horror. However, at crucial moments the book trades its pitiless imagination of disaster for sentimental cliché, and certain provocative passages are omitted from the English translation. The effect is of a looking-away which compromises Beigbeder's stated attempt to 'go where television cannot', and reinstates the interweaving of presentation with concealment that imbues the texts discussed here.

Chapter 4 analyses the staging of trauma through the image in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007). DeLillo's pre-2001 output, concerned with themes of spectacle, terror, violence and conspiracy, seemed to eerily prefigure 9/11. *Falling Man,* his first novel written after 9/11, disappointed some critics by taking a different approach to his previous work.[59] The novel describes the trauma suffered by a survivor of the attacks, seen walking out of the towers in a bravura opening scene, and the people around him as they live through the days and years after 'the planes'. Keith and Lianne's trauma is figured through their different interactions with their world and particularly with artworks: principally a pair of still life paintings by Giorgio Morandi and a series of performances by the 'Falling Man' of the title, who dangles from New York buildings in a pose mimicking the figure in Drew's photograph. Rather than 'representing' trauma, the artworks in question stage its effects, in particular the intrusion of the outside into a subject defined by the security of its boundaries. This allows Lianne to come to terms with her bodily vulnerability, the forced realisation of which has provoked trauma. DeLillo thus suggests that the image, far from being incapable of representing the rupture in memory and language caused by trauma, can stage its effects in a sensitive and nuanced way that may aid the process of recovery.

The final chapter analyses the reception of Luc Tuymans' large *Still Life* at the major international art exhibition *Documenta 11* in 2002. Tuymans is known for a body of work which constantly returns to themes of trauma, repression and the relationship of violence and representation. Like DeLillo, Tuymans was widely expected to respond to 9/11 via some form of public artistic statement. The expectation was particularly intense in the context of

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[59] DeLillo began writing *Cosmopolis*, published in 2004, before 9/11 and finished it afterward.

Documenta 11, framed by its curators as an investigation of the artistic politics of globalisation. *Still Life* was widely interpreted as a pointed refusal of those expectations. I suggest that Tuymans chose to address the politics of aesthetics rather than parade a self-consciously 'political' aesthetic. In fact the painting subtly critiques the disavowal of the violence of 'primitive accumulation' in some conceptions of the aesthetic, as exemplified by the avowedly 'apolitical' genre of still life. The painting pictures 9/11 precisely by questioning what a picture 'of' 9/11 might look like. It both inserts itself within the visual archive of 9/11 and inserts 9/11 within the twinned histories of picture-making and colonialism. The question of what is visible in the painting thereby becomes highly unstable, and reveals wider instabilities in our concept of what a picture is and what forms of visuality it can embody. In a brief conclusion I situate the discussion of picturing in relation to the historical development of modern visuality from the conflation of thinking with seeing, and picturing with possession, in the seventeenth century. This move returns us from the beginnings of globalising capitalism in the guilds of seventeenth-century Holland to which the discussion of visuality has been led in the final chapter, to the contemporary image with which the thesis opens, placing it in a newly historicised light informed by that longer view.

In order to begin tracing that path, however, and to start unpacking that complex mixture of horror and familiarity, fear and desire which characterises the visual archive of 9/11 I shall need, in defiance of my earlier assertion that the archive is constitutively diffuse, to isolate an image or a group of images upon which to focus. That shall be the subject of the next chapter, which will trace in more detail how the particular visuality of 9/11, consummately spectacular yet strangely resistant to picturing, encodes fantasies of self-determination and vulnerability and thus responds to the images of 9/11 even as it attempts to ward them off.

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1: **In the Situation Room**

Thirteen people cluster around a table in an anonymous room, watching. The object of their attention is offstage to our left, hidden from view. Faces and postures bespeak tension, uncertainty, intense concentration. Something important is happening, and these men and women can only watch and wait. Abandoned on the desk sit laptop computers, paper coffee cups, documents, a pair of spectacles: the detritus of the office meeting. In fact, were it not for the military uniforms, the presidential seal and the recognisable faces of President Barack Obama, Vice President Joe Biden and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, we could be seeing a group of middle managers receiving news of job losses at their company.

But of course we are not. We see the President of the United States and his closest advisors watching the endgame of the mission to find and kill Osama bin Laden (Figure 3). The image, popularly known as 'the Situation Room photograph', is world famous, an instant icon of the present. In the days after bin Laden's death on May 1 2011 this photograph, taken by White House photographer Pete Souza, appeared in newspapers, broadcasts and on websites around the world. It has been called 'iconic' and 'a classic'.[1] Acclaiming it 'a photo for the ages,' CNN suggested it would come to define Obama's presidency and quoted a previous White House

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[1] 'Breaking Down the Situation Room', *The Washington Post*, 2011 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/lifestyle/style/situation-room.html> [accessed 29 October 2012]; Danny Groner, 'Dissecting the Photo of Obama in the Situation Room', *Huffington Post*, 2011 <http://www.huffingtonpost.com/danny-groner/obama-situation-room_b_858385.html> [accessed 29 October 2012]; John Blake, 'What "Situation Room Photo" Reveals About Us', *CNN.com*, 2011 <http://articles.cnn.com/2011-05-05/us/iconic.photo_1_black-men-photo-national-security-team?_s=PM:US> [accessed 30 March 2012].

press photographer's opinion that it captures 'a defining moment in history'.[2] Posted to the White House Flickr account, it received well over a million views within twenty-four hours, and quickly became the subject of several parodies.[3] One of the defining images of the 'War on Terror', it appears seductively to bring to a close the chapter of recent history begun on September 11 2001 with the infamous attacks on New York and Washington. Whether that is in fact the case only time will tell; for now it is enough to note that this is how the image has been presented to us.

Figure 3: The 'Situation Room Photograph'; President Barack Obama and Vice President Joe Biden, along with members of the national security team, receive an update on the mission against Osama bin Laden in the Situation Room of the White House, May 1, 2011. Seated, from left, are: Brigadier General Marshall B. "Brad" Webb, Assistant Commanding General, Joint Special Operations Command; Deputy National Security Advisor Denis McDonough; Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton; and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates. Standing, from left, are: Admiral Mike Mullen, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff; National Security Advisor Tom Donilon; Chief of Staff Bill Daley; Tony Blinken, National Security Advisor to the Vice President; Audrey Tomason Director for Counterterrorism; John Brennan, Assistant to the President for Homeland Security and Counterterrorism; and Director of National Intelligence James Clapper. Please note: a classified document seen in this photograph has been obscured. Official White House Photo by Pete Souza.

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[2] Alan Silverleib, 'Obama on Sunday: A Photo for the Ages?', *CNN.com*, 2011 <http://articles.cnn.com/2011-05-03/politics/iconic.obama.photo_1_barack-obama-white-house-situation-room-national-security-team?_s=PM:POLITICS> [accessed 29 October 2012].

[3] Alexia Tsotsis, 'Obama "Situation Room" Photo Is Already Half Way to Becoming Flickr's Most Viewed Pic', *TechCrunch*, 2011 <http://techcrunch.com/2011/05/03/obama-situation-room-photo-is-already-half-way-to-becoming-flickrs-most-viewed-pic/> [accessed 29 October 2012].

The photograph presents itself as a privileged look at the operation of power. It grants the viewer carefully limited access to a space ordinarily hidden, figuring democratic power as open to scrutiny but only up to a point. These people are authorised to see what we are not, but in the interests of transparent democracy we are allowed to see them seeing it. We see the head of state and his advisors undertaking important state business — business involving the security of the state and by implication that of the viewer too, whatever his nationality. As President of the United States Obama is, according to the popular phrase, 'leader of the free world', and this is certainly how the photograph positions him: as leader of a government concerned to protect the freedom of its citizens and those of the Western world from the threat of violence embodied in the figure of bin Laden. The photograph inhabits a subgenre of famous images of presidential power in the modern era, including those of President Kennedy and his advisors in the White House Cabinet Room during the Cuban missile crisis (Figure 4); other presidents including Johnson and Reagan in the Situation Room; their fictional counterparts in the television dramas *The West Wing* (1999-2006: Figure 5) and *24* (2001-2010); and perhaps less happily, the War Room in *Dr. Strangelove* (1964). Such images provide a history of the visualisation of political sovereignty in our era.

Figure 4: President Kennedy meets with the Executive Committee of the National Security Council (EXCOMM), White House Cabinet Room, 29 October 1962. Official White House photo by Cecil Stoughton. The John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, Boston.

Figure 5: *The West Wing;* President Bartlett and his advisors in the Situation Room. Image: NBC.

I am interested in the ways in which history, rhetoric and visuality overlap within the Situation Room photograph. For what may at first appear a straightforward image becomes more complex the longer one looks at it, drawing the viewer into a web of layered concealment and revelation, of showing as hiding and vice versa. If the Situation Room photograph is an 'icon of the present', it achieves that status by virtue of more than the simple record of an historic moment it appears to offer.[4] Although the image apparently grants access to the operation of power in a democratic display of transparency, that access is carefully managed and the scene depicted subtly ambiguous. After the photograph's release it emerged that it does not actually show the Situation Room, but a smaller room adjoining it.[5] There has been some confusion as to what exactly President Obama and his team are watching in the picture, owing to conflicting accounts of the raid.[6] Initially the White House reported that the President was able to watch

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[4] Christoph Schaden, 'Welcome to the Situation Room', *European Photography*, 89 (2011), 65–67 (p. 65).

[5] Jamie Crawford, 'The Bin Laden Situation Room Revisited – One Year Later', *CNN.com - Security Clearance blog*, 2012 <http://security.blogs.cnn.com/2012/05/01/the-bin-laden-situation-room-revisited-one-year-later/> [accessed 29 October 2012].

[6] Philip Sherwell, 'Osama Bin Laden Killed: Behind the Scenes of the Deadly Raid', *Telegraph.co.uk*, 7 May 2011, section world news <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/al-qaeda/8500431/Osama-bin-Laden-killed-Behind-the-scenes-of-the-deadly-raid.html> [accessed 30 March 2012]; Nicholas Schmidle, 'Getting Bin Laden', *The New Yorker*, 2011 <http://www.newyorker.com/reporting/2011/08/08/110808fa_fact_schmidle?currentPage=all> [accessed 30 March 2012]; Terry Moran and others, '"TARGET: Bin Laden - The Death and Life of Public Enemy Number One" (extract)' <http://abcnews.go.com/Politics/target-bin-laden-death-life-osama-bin-laden/story?id=13786598&singlePage=true#.T3WT8nlXKZQ> [accessed 30 March 2012]; Robert

the mission unfold via a live satellite link to a camera carried by one of the soldiers.[7] However, CIA Director Leon Panetta later stated that whilst Obama was able to view some 'real-time aspects' of the raid, he did not in fact see bin Laden's death.[8] The official caption to the photograph describes President Obama receiving 'an update on the mission', which could mean a visual or verbal report from Panetta or from an officer in the field.[9] This ambiguity underlying the apparently straightforward question of what we are seeing begins to undermine the photograph's claim to transparency: the claim 'that-has-been' which Roland Barthes called its *noeme*.[10] This claim arises from the indexicality of the photographic process, the direct transfer of light onto celluloid which in 1844 caused Fox Talbot to refer to the new technology as 'the pencil of nature'.[11] Thanks in part to the development of digital technologies, contemporary viewers are more sceptical of the photograph's claim to indexicality than were Fox Talbot or Barthes; as Allan Sekula puts it, the 'old myth that photographs tell the truth has succumbed to the new myth that they don't'.[12] The Situation Room photograph has predictably become implicated in conspiracy theories alleging that the image was staged in order to grant legitimacy to the supposed fiction of bin Laden's death.[13] Whilst such speculation may be far-fetched it nevertheless recognises a truth about the image, for whilst the photograph tells us that something 'has been', it reveals little about the nature

Booth, 'The Killing of Osama Bin Laden: How the White House Changed Its Story', *Guardian*, 4 May 2011, section world news <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2011/may/04/osama-bin-laden-killing-us-story-change> [accessed 29 March 2012].

[7] Booth; Ian Drury, David Williams and Sam Greenhill, 'Osama Bin Laden Dead: Photo of Obama Watching the Al Qaeda Leader Die on Live TV', *Mail Online*, 3 May 2011, section News <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-1382859/Osama-bin-Laden-dead-Photo-Obama-watching-Al-Qaeda-leader-die-live-TV.html> [accessed 29 March 2012].

[8] Michael Winter, 'Panetta: Obama Did Not See Bin Laden Being Killed', *USATODAY.COM* <http://content.usatoday.com/communities/ondeadline/post/2011/05/panetta-obama-did-not-see-bin-laden-being-killed/1> [accessed 29 March 2012].

[9] Pete Souza, *Obama_and_Biden_await_updates_on_bin_Laden.jpg (JPEG Image, 4096×2731 Pixels) - Scaled (14%)*, 11 February 2012 <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/a/ac/Obama_and_Biden_await_updates_on_bin_Laden.jpg> [accessed 10 February 2012].

[10] Barthes, p. 96.

[11] William Henry Fox Talbot, *The Pencil of Nature* (New York: Da Capo, 1969). The book was originally published in six volumes between 1844 and 1846, and has been credited as 'the first commercially published book illustrated with photographs'; *Timeline of Art History* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art), October 2006 <http://www.metmuseum.org/toah/works-of-art/1994.197.1-.6> [accessed 18 July 2012].

[12] Quoted in Iain Boal, 'Heads in a Box', *Photoworks*, 17 (2011), 44–49 (p. 48).

[13] Matea Gold, David S. Cloud and Eryn Brown, 'Osama Bin Laden Dead: Bin Laden's Burial at Sea Fuels "Death Hoax" Rumor', *Los Angeles Times Articles*, 3 May 2011 <http://articles.latimes.com/2011/may/03/world/la-fg-bin-laden-conspiracy-20110503> [accessed 30 March 2012]. Such theories add another layer to the photograph's staging of dreamwork mechanisms. As evidence of a conspiracy, it represents secondary revision in addition to its displacement of the moment of bin Laden's death and condensation of the history of his pursuit, and indeed of the 'War on Terror' as a whole. My thanks to Vicky Lebeau for this insight.

of that event. Several commentators located the photograph's ambiguity as the source of its power. In this reading the photograph figures the uncertainty characteristic of the 'War on Terror', such that 'it would be hard to think of a more telling image of the elusiveness of truth in a democracy's fraught struggle with terror'.[14]

If we pursue this elusiveness as the source of the Situation Room photograph's undoubted fascination, we may note that the image is structured by invisibility and occlusion as much as by revelation. Both lure and testament, it parries the viewer's gaze even whilst soliciting it. Most obviously, we cannot see what these people are looking at. Their power is figured in visual terms as the authority to see what is hidden. Whether or not they see bin Laden's death or his corpse, the picture at least supports the possibility, the force of which can be seen in the reaction to the image and the desire therein to ascertain what it is we cannot see. In the picture that desire is filtered through our identification with those who see what we cannot: the forbidden image of the death of bin Laden, the great figure of Otherness in contemporary political discourse. Bin Laden's corpse is the structuring absence of the image, which determines its significance but cannot appear within it. Below I shall argue that the question of the content of the withheld image is complex and overdetermined, infused with a powerful mixture of fear and desire. For now it is enough to note that the image of bin Laden (and especially of his corpse), invested as it is with connotations of otherness and evil, is a deeply phobic one, and *for that reason* fascinating. The fascination of the image with which these authority figures are presented is only increased by its invisibility to the viewer of the photograph. If authority is here figured in visual terms, desire is aroused by the denial of vision.

Secondly, the photograph dissimulates the structure of power present even as it provides an image of the exercise of power. Were we unaware of who is in charge here, we might be unlikely to pick out the hunched figure of Obama as sovereign. Seated on the margin of the group, he seems withdrawn and isolated. His tensed posture contrasts with the relaxed pose of Biden and the macho arms-folded stance of National Security Advisor Tom Donilon.[15] There are few obvious signs of rank here; in fact the most ostentatious symbols adorn the chest of the officer in uniform who, whilst sitting in the chairman's seat, works on his laptop like a functionary. He is also the only person looking away from whatever the others are staring at,

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[14] Ken Johnson, 'The Power of the Situation Room Photograph', *New York Times*, 7 May 2011, section Week in Review <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/08/weekinreview/08johnson.html> [accessed 30 March 2012].

[15] Blake. In this article Jerald Podair of Lawrence University offers an intriguing analysis of Obama's self-presentation as an attempt to avoid the stereotype of the aggressive black male.

suggesting either that he is not included in the drama being played out or that, unlike the others, he knows the outcome. Like them, he looks at a screen hidden from us. Even as the photograph presents a democratised, decentralised form of power, it is deceptive. Not only is the strictly delineated hierarchy dissimulated, but the appearance of spectators watching an event of which they are not in control, 'elides recognition of the agency of power and violence that appears to be offscreen but is before us in this room'.[16] They may not directly control the events they watch onscreen, but they control the apparatus of surveillance and military force — of *targeting* — which made the situation a reality. They also control the mediation of that reality in the photograph by granting permission for the photographer's presence. Control and spectatorship are interwoven in this image in more complex fashion than is at first apparent.

This, then, is an image of looking, but it is equally an image of blindness and the blocking of vision. On looking at the image our eye is immediately deflected to the space beyond the frame into which the figures stare with such rapt attention. The object of their gaze is invisible and indeterminable; their vision reflects and deflects our blindness. We viewers are not voyeurs; the subjects know they are being photographed but do not look back. Making a spectacle of their spectatorship, these figures project power in their authority to see what is hidden from us. They may be looking at a corpse, perhaps the exemplary uncanny object. This structure of the diverted gaze may also be prophylactic; these fascinated figures screen the corpse's uncanny non-gaze for us. The photograph then fulfils the function of Perseus' shield, screening the Gorgon's gaze and allowing us to look upon it in virtual, reflected form.[17] As a relay for that absent image the figures become themselves screens, picturing as well as pictured (this is especially true of Hillary Clinton, the emotional centre of the image).[18] The photograph screens this relay of gazes, this interweaving of looking-at and looking-away.

Also striking are the multiple areas of vacancy, fragmentation or blocked vision within the image. These include the much-discussed figure of Audrey Tomason straining to see at the back of the group; the fact that the only hands visible are Clinton's; the tall figure cut off by the frame's edge at right, and the blurred shape at bottom left; the obscuring of the presidential

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[16] Liam Kennedy, 'Seeing and Believing: On Photography and the War on Terror', *Public Culture*, 24 (2012), 261–281 (p. 269) <doi:10.1215/08992363-1535498>.

[17] After slaying the Gorgon, Perseus used her head and its still-lethal gaze as a weapon against Atlas. In contrast, the Obama administration refused to use the image of bin Laden's corpse, perhaps fearing that it might be turned against its master in the same way as did bin Laden himself. On the other hand, perhaps the knowledge of bin Laden's death, and the resultant virtual image of his corpse, was felt to be weapon enough, and could not be used as an image of martyrdom.

[18] There is a whole complex involving death, sexuality and the fear of castration centred on the figure of Clinton which is deserving of elaboration yet which I have insufficient space to explore here.

seal; the area of empty space at top left which isolates Obama and Biden from the group; the blank and obscured computer screens; and the pixelated image on the desk in front of Clinton. In a way this censored image inverts the rhetorical strategy of the photograph as a whole, inasmuch as it proclaims its denial of legibility.[19] It also epitomises that strategy; it bespeaks the operation of power as the determination of access to information, both offering limited access and signifying the presence of another level of power with the authority to view the uncensored image. Linking vision and authority, disclosure and concealment, the blurred image emblematises the visual rhetoric of the photograph as a whole.[20]

Looking at the photograph I notice the obscured image's proximity to the pair of discarded reading glasses, the open arms of which point directly toward it. Together they serve as the index of an image poised between transparency and opacity. It is as if the wearer has discarded them in the face of something easily seen by the naked eye: or better, something (too) easily read and digested. At the same time, however, these abandoned reading glasses suggest the illegibility of an image made blurry and obscure by their relinquishing. I find myself wondering if they belong to the only man not looking beyond the frame. Their proximity to the censored image makes the theme of reading and visibility all the more apparent. Clinton's hand raised to her mouth has been described as the Barthesian *punctum* of the image, 'the not necessarily conspicuous detail that gives a photograph its emotional resonance'. The conjunction of censored photograph and discarded spectacles is the key to its *studium*, the way in which it is positioned as a form of discourse.[21] If the *punctum* determines the photograph's affect, the *studium* refers to its presentation of a form of knowledge about the world. Together, the discarded spectacles and censored image position the Situation Room photograph in a complex relationship to vision and legibility. This is an image of the withholding of an image wherein concealment becomes a form of presentation.[22] Nothing about this photograph is simple, least of all its presentation as an image of revelation whereby the viewer is granted access and becomes witness to a 'moment of history'. It is we who need a corrective lens through which to see this photograph more clearly: one which will place the complex visuality we have uncovered within a wider historical and theoretical context. Given

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[19] The blurring is also the marker of secondary revision of the image, added later for its public release.

[20] For Dora Somosi, picture editor at GQ magazine, the blurring of the photograph paradoxically 'makes you feel that you have an insider view'; John Koblin and Zeke Turner, 'Photo Op: Inside the Situation Room', *WWD*, 4 May 2011 <http://www.wwd.com/media-news/media-features/peak-time-3601104?src=facebook/share> [accessed 5 April 2012].

[21] Johnson; Blake.

[22] This theme will be explored in greater detail in the final chapter in relation to Luc Tuymans' painting *Still Life* (2002).

such an historical framing it will be possible to see how the Situation Room photograph compellingly stages the contemporary organisation of visuality.

Screening 9/11

Clinton has said that her gesture merely signifies that she was trying not to cough, but it deserves closer attention.[23] On one level it is significant that the most emotional gesture on view is made by a woman — perhaps the most powerful woman in the world. Clinton's explanation of her gesture as the repression of a cough may express reluctance to conform to the stereotype of emotional femininity that has shadowed her entire career in the male-dominated world of politics.[24] Clinton's role as the image's emotional centre is significant because her gesture recalls the horror-struck witnesses in many photographs from 9/11. Such images are so numerous as to constitute a minor subgenre of the 9/11 archive.[25] One well-known example shows two women watching the collapse of the North Tower of the World Trade Center (Figure 6). One covers her eyes with her hand; the other raises her hand to her mouth in the same way as Clinton. She wears spectacles, in the lenses of which the reflected image of the falling tower can just be discerned. This photograph, taken by Angel Franco, first appeared in the *New York Times* the day after the attacks; it was reprinted there twice over the next two weeks and again in *A Nation Challenged,* the coffee-table book compiling the paper's coverage of the attacks and their aftermath.[26] Like the Situation Room photograph, it stages picturing as the simultaneous presentation and withholding of an image, as lure and blockage: in short, as a process of *screening*, in the double meaning of that term. It also includes a figure looking away from the action: in this case the man in a blue T-shirt in the middle distance. Like the blue-uniformed figure of Brigadier General Marshall B. "Brad" Webb in the Situation Room photograph, the man occupies the very centre of the image yet appears

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[23] 'Clinton: Allergy Led to My Situation Room Photo', *msnbc.com*, 2011 <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/42914093/ns/health-allergies_and_asthma/t/clinton-allergy-led-my-situation-room-photo/> [accessed 27 October 2012].

[24] In these terms it is also interesting that the other woman visible, Audrey Tomason, displays a curiosity markedly distinct from the professional reserve evinced by most of the men present. The exceptions are Tony Blinken to Tomason's immediate right, whose posture echoes her own, and Obama himself, whose tense, vulnerable posture prompted a discussion of the untypical version of presidential masculinity he presents here. See Blake.

[25] Peress and George, pp. 46–69, 209–223.

[26] *A Nation Challenged: A Visual History of 9/11 and Its Aftermath*, ed. by Michael Levitas, Nancy Lee and Lonnie Schlein (London: Jonathan Cape Ltd, 2002), p. 26.

incidental to its narrative. The source of his distraction is similarly hidden from view. How can he possibly look away, I wonder, when that enormous, roaring collapse is occurring within view? The two women in the foreground are captured by the sight; one cannot bear to look, the other cannot tear her eyes away, but neither can simply ignore it as does this man. Yet the two men engaged in conversation behind him seem equally oblivious to the awful spectacle.

Figure 6: Watching the North Tower of the World Trade Center collapse. Photograph: Angel Franco/ NY Times.

Like Clinton, the woman on the left appears transfixed by a sight that may haunt her forever. Together, she and her neighbour embody the conflicted relationship to the spectacle of horror enacted by Leontion and related by Plato in the *Republic*:

> He wanted to go and look at [a pile of corpses outside the city walls], and yet at the same time held himself back in disgust. For a time he struggled with himself and covered his eyes, but at last his desire got the better of him and he ran up to the corpses, opening his eyes wide and saying to them, "There you are, curse you — a lovely sight! Have a real good look!" [27]

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[27] Plato, *The Republic*, trans. by H.D.P. Lee and Desmond Lee, Penguin Classics, 2nd edn (London: Penguin, 2007), p. 148.

The photograph stages Leontion's conflicted response in neatly bifurcated form; one woman is unable to look, the other unable not to. This photograph then reveals something of the tension between desire and horror which so thoroughly infused the sight of 9/11. As an image, the attacks were both repellent and horrifically compelling. Perhaps one source of the fascination of the Franco photograph, which emblematises the structure of looking present in the many images in the 9/11 archive showing people looking at and reacting to the attacks, is the way it separates that conflict into two clearly opposed reactions: I must look/I can't look. Its achievement is to stage the ambivalence which so muddies our own spectatorship of horror.

Barbie Zelizer argues that one important role for the visual archive of 9/11 was to insert the attacks within a political framework and model an appropriate response. She suggests that the images of traumatised spectatorship prevalent in the aftermath of 9/11 fulfilled specific public functions: reassuring the viewer of the reality of the improbable spectacle; instructing the public in how to respond to the traumatic sight, precisely by figuring trauma as the appropriate response; and interpellating the viewer as part of a national community which recognised itself through collective witnessing and mourning of 9/11.[28] The photographs thus fulfilled a governmental function in that they provided public models of an affective and political response to 9/11. As theorised by Foucault, governmentality refers to the way in which public institutions, rituals and discourses model 'the conduct of conduct', producing citizens through discursive and representational practices.[29] Zelizer draws a parallel with the release in 1945 of photographs of the liberated Nazi concentration camps, where the presence within the frame of viewers witnessing the atrocity 'emphasised in some fashion the capacity not only to see horror but the response that came with "looking" at horror'.[30] The dissemination of images of public witnessing after 9/11 similarly helped facilitate public mourning. This Zelizer induces from the continued use of such photographs, and of the imagery of 9/11 in general, in the media after they had ceased to have specific news value as information, their role having by that point become therapeutic. In a discussion of the different subgenres of photographs of witnessing in circulation after 9/11, Zelizer picks out the Franco photograph as an example of the way such images encouraged a particular response:

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[28] Barbie Zelizer, 'Photography, Journalism, and Trauma', in *Journalism After September 11*, ed. by Barbie Zelizer and Stuart Allan (London: Routledge, 2003), pp. 48–68. Zelizer includes a reproduction of the Franco photograph as an example.

[29] Michel Foucault, 'Governmentality', in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 87–104. I shall have more to say on the role of media imagery in governmental discourse in Chapter 2.

[30] Zelizer, p. 53.

> This kind of photo was crucial, for it forced spectators to fill in what was known but not pictured beyond the camera's frame. Understanding a photo of this sort required the spectator to call to mind the slew of other images already seen — and thus helped connect each concrete depiction with the larger story about terrorism. This larger story, in turn, was necessary for mobilising public support for the military actions in Afghanistan.[31]

The use of the image as a tool of governmentality assumes that its meaning is stable and controllable by the discourses which frame it: that the 'slew of other images' the photograph invokes, and the public meanings of all those images, can be determined and controlled in the interests of a broader political agenda. My interest in this image and in the others which I shall address lies in their discursive instability. The more an image or a text apparently embodies a given fantasy — of security, of control, of self-presence — the more it is haunted by its opposite, for this is the nature of fantasy: it stages a more or less conscious wish, but it also bears traces of the anxiety to which that wish responds. The horrifying, fascinating power of the iconography of 9/11 then lies in its simultaneous embodiment of deep-seated fears *and* desires. To cite Baudrillard once more, 'They *did it*, but we *wished for* it'.[32]

This ambivalence can be found in the Franco photograph, in which there is a third term to the struggle between compulsion and repulsion staged in the women's reactions. If Clinton's gesture can be located as the *punctum* of the Situation Room photograph, its equivalent in this photograph (at least for me: and Barthes insists that it is a strictly subjective formation) lies in the figure with hands clasped to face in the background between the two women. On its own this gesture clearly recalls that of the humanoid figure in Edvard Munch's painting *The Scream*, long taken as the classic depiction of existential horror and despair. In fact Munch's figure has been so thoroughly appropriated by popular culture that it has become a cliché largely stripped of its pathos. Furthermore, taken together the three witnesses' gestures recall those made by the group of comic figures which popularly signifies the ethic 'see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil'. The resemblance inserts a note of obscene parody into the image which for me increases its horror. It feels wrong to make the parallel and worse to find it funny, but I cannot help myself. Laughter is of course a notoriously difficult reaction to control: as Freud well knew, it is often a response to horror or anxiety. The discomfort I feel when making this parallel is rooted not so much in the image itself, or even in the horrific sight which it holds offstage, but in the memory of my own reaction to the images of 9/11: the queasy thrill I felt at the awesome spectacle. This obscene echo is the image's true *punctum*, the 'element which

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[31] Zelizer, p. 63.
[32] Baudrillard, p. 5.

rises from the scene, shoots out of it like an arrow, and pierces me'.[33] Perhaps it is not the comic echo itself which is obscene, but the very instability of the gesture which produces it: its readiness to switch registers suggests a contamination that, as Mary Douglas has pointed out, is deeply phobic.[34] It provides a reminder of the instability of images, their refusal to be domesticated within approved structures of reference. And yet what is the ethic 'see no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil' but an instruction in how to behave? And what are these people (not) looking at but an image of evil? The very existence of a normative command admits the possibility of its transgression. At both the rhetorical and formal levels, the photograph thus stages a tension between compulsion, repulsion and transgression. Below we shall trace this tension between the staging of a fantasy and its undoing in the Situation Room photograph.

To look at a scene of horror, and go on looking because there is a form of pleasure involved, implies a certain masochism of the gaze: 'it hurts/don't stop'. Masochism has conventionally been regarded as an aberration and often as the simple inverse of sadism. However, Leo Bersani argues that it describes the structure of sexuality itself. Bersani suggests that sexuality begins in trauma, in the infant's overwhelming and self-shattering experience of the mother's love. Any overwhelming experience is traumatising, precisely because trauma is conceived as an experience of excess. The child has not yet developed the ego structures necessary to bind the stimuli it receives. Its solution to the unpleasurable excess of stimulation is to libidinise it: to turn unpleasure into pleasure. Thus for Bersani sexuality is founded in a masochism both structurally and evolutionarily vital: 'Masochism, far from being merely an individual aberration, is an inherited disposition resulting from an *evolutionary conquest*'.[35] Intriguingly, Bersani suggests that both erotic and aesthetic experiences attempt to recapture and repeat that libidinised primary self-shattering:

> If the sexual is, at the most primitive level, the attempted replication of a shattering (or psychically traumatising) pleasure, art […] is the attempted replication *of* that replication. That is, it repeats the replicative movement of sexuality as a domesticating and civilising project of self-recognition.[36]

Both sexual and aesthetic experiences are rooted in the mediation of a self-shattering trauma as masochistic pleasure. If for the Freud of *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* trauma results from a failure of mediation, in Bersani's account masochism offers a structure capable of mediating

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[33] Barthes, p. 26.

[34] Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2002).

[35] Leo Bersani, *The Freudian Body: Psychoanalysis and Art* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 39. I will return to Bersani in chapter 5.

[36] Bersani, p. 111.

trauma. The divergence between an art of the sublime wherein the aesthetic is staged as an experience of excess, and an aesthetic of beauty where pleasure derives from the attainment of equilibrium and harmony, would then equate to the privileging of different moments of that mediating process: the sublime focusing upon the prior self-shattering, the beautiful upon its restitution.[37]

Bersani's account of the aesthetic as the attempted replication of a primary self-shattering can be mapped onto the Franco photograph, which stages the process of self-constitution through self-shattering in an unusually frank and concise manner. Above I cited Zelizer's argument that in the aftermath of 9/11 photographs of witnessing, of which this is an exemplar, helped construct a public around collective self-recognition in images of mourning. Here that collective self-constitution is presented as fundamentally split, yet unified by the frame of the image itself. Simply put, the two women stage the conflicted spectatorship of horror as two separate reactions, allowing us to identify with each in turn rather than having to accommodate them simultaneously. The beholder torn between repulsion and fascination is here figuratively split in two, the image riven by the tension between the two women's reactions. Its affective charge is decided in the space between them, although ultimately fascination is dominant (as indeed it proved for Leontion), the woman on our left having greater pictorial weight. At the same time the two figures are unified by their formal relationship and by their presence within the same image. The dialectic is undermined, however, by the presence of the figure between them with hands clasped to face, the obscene comedy of which destabilises the image's rhetorical appeal and threatens to tip it over into bathos. The image refuses to be domesticated within a prescribed affective register and the precise point which most clearly encodes horror — the figure's Munch-esque gesture — in fact provokes uneasy laughter as well.[38]

This is not a sublime image. It does not present a spectacle of extraordinary scale or intensity in order that the viewer, in confronting his own capacity to rationally conceive what lies beyond sensual apprehension, may experience the transcendent power of *logos* (the Kantian sublime). Nor does it refuse to present such an image in favour of staging the limitations of its own capacity to represent the event, to 'say that it cannot say' the unsayable (the negative or

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[37] Similarly, Žižek argues that 'Beauty and Sublimity are opposed along the axis pleasure-displeasure'. Slavoj Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 102.

[38] There is perhaps an echo of this dark laughter in the appearance of various parodies of the Situation Room photograph based around inserting unlikely figures or references into the image. See Brad Kim, 'Know Your Meme: The Situation Room', *knowyourmeme.com* <http://knowyourmeme.com/memes/the-situation-room> [accessed 19 November 2012].

'postmodern' sublime).[39] Rather than the discourse of the sublime, which tends to promote discussion of the 'limits of representation', my project will be better framed by the psychoanalytic structure of fantasy. Fantasy is a compromise formation which permits the staging of unconscious fears and desires in distorted or displaced form. Where the sublime image attests to the absence of what it cannot present, the move toward fantasy allows us to discuss images which are both present *and* absent within the frame. In the same way that fantasy stages one scene in the guise of another, the postulation of what might be called, in Walter Benjamin's phrase, an 'unconscious optics' will allow us to trace the desires and fears encoded within images such as the Franco and Situation Room photographs in apparently unacknowledged ways.[40] I have suggested that the Franco photograph stages a fantasy of self-shattering and self-recognition in its presentation of a conflicted response to the spectacle of 9/11. I want now to explore another aspect of the form of spectatorship staged by the photograph. This discussion will then enable us to further analyse the fantasy of spectatorship staged in the Situation Room photograph.

Virtual trauma

The women in the photograph are eyewitnesses to 9/11, whereas most people will have seen the attacks on television. What fantasy of witnessing is then enacted within this image? I suspect it is one of presence and embodiment; through our identification with this image of women who are 'there', we who were not 'there' can participate in the event in a more 'immediate' way.[41] In his essay 'In the Ruins of the Future', first published in November 2001, Don DeLillo claimed that, 'For the next fifty years, people who were not in the area when the attacks occurred will claim to have been there. In time, some of them will believe it'.[42] On the level of fantasy, the Franco image allows us to believe it. What might be the appeal of identifying oneself with the eyewitness of a traumatising catastrophe? To answer this we must unpack the complex spatiality, and the intertwined involvement and isolation, of television

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[39] Lyotard, p. 47.

[40] Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 211–244 (p. 230).

[41] As a product of the camera's mediation, this immediacy is actually what Bolter and Grusin call hypermediacy; Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, MA; London: MIT Press, 1999).

[42] Don DeLillo, 'In the Ruins of the Future: Reflections on Terror and Loss in the Shadow of September', *Harper's Magazine*, 2001, pp. 33–40 (p. 35).

spectatorship. 9/11 was quickly and near-universally framed as a traumatising experience, even for the majority who 'witnessed' it via television. Marc Redfield argues that to call the mediated experience of 9/11 traumatic implies a change in our concept of trauma:

> We who watched TV were not, as a rule, traumatized in the technical, psychological sense or even in the more broadly idiomatic sense of having suffered abiding psychic damage — and if we can affirm that no real trauma can be said to have been produced in such a context, well, that, of course, is the principal connotation we now grant the adjective "virtual": for something mediated, technically produced, not properly real. For those who had the protection of distance, the September 11 attacks were not "really" traumatic; they were a spectacle: a famously, infuriatingly cinematic spectacle.[43]

If the trauma suffered by those who watched 9/11 on television can be described as virtual, it is because it names 'a wound that […] exceeds the difference between the real and the unreal'; unlocatable in any experience of physical threat, it nonetheless feels real.[44] The difficulty of separating markers of presence and absence in traumatic memory is commonly related to its *nachträglich* or belated quality; here, however, it is a result of the constitutively mediated nature of the traumatic event. The assertion that trauma is transmissible in representation is not new; Caruth and Felman both describe its tendency to disseminate itself in the process of witnessing. In fact Caruth and Felman have been criticised for their over-emphasis on the transmissibility of trauma. In one notorious example Felman compares her students' distress upon watching video testimonies of Holocaust survivors to Paul Celan's experience of the Holocaust itself.[45] Dominick LaCapra warns that failure to distinguish historically specific from structural (and therefore universal) traumas can lead to over-identification with, and even usurpation of, the victim's identity and voice.

In describing 'virtual trauma', however, Redfield is not arguing that an image of a traumatic event may itself be traumatising. Nick Ut's photograph of Phan Thi Kim Phúc may be a traumatising image but it is clearly distinguishable from the event it records (Figure 7). However, in the case of 9/11 the archive *is* the event. Redfield and others recognise the existence of a form of trauma assignable only to the images of 9/11 and not to the event considered outside of its mediation. Allen Meek asserts that visual media enact a complex dialectic of emplacement and displacement similar to trauma itself:

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[43] Redfield, pp. 2–3.
[44] Redfield, p. 43.
[45] Felman and Laub, p. 51.

> Visual media […] represent and reconstitute events in contexts that are always removed in space and time yet often experienced with a powerful sense of immediacy and involvement. Just as trauma is transmitted without reference to a clearly situated memory, media representations can become events in their own right, displacing access to any original context.[46]

Certainly the physical event was traumatic for those who experienced it at first hand, but we surely cannot describe those who witnessed the event on television as having suffered a sudden and overwhelming threat, except on a psychic level through the mediation of the image. To an unprecedented extent, the traumatic event we call '9/11' *is* the image-event as distinct from the physical attack on targets in New York and Washington. The trauma arose *from the images themselves*, rather than simply being transmitted by them.

Figure 7: Phan Thị Kim Phúc running down a road near Trảng Bàng, Vietnam, after a napalm bomb was dropped on the village. Photograph: Nick Ut/Associated Press.

For Redfield virtual trauma is also 'a making legible, within the medium itself, of a violence inherent to all media technologies, which record and remember the unique only by effacing and forgetting it'.[47] Redfield gestures beyond the specific horror of the spectacle of violence

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[46] Meek, p. 11.
[47] Redfield, p. 29.

toward a structural trauma rooted in the displacing effects of live television. *As an image-event*, 9/11 was visible from anywhere there was a television; this very ubiquity unmoored the event from its geographical location, meaning that it happened everywhere and nowhere at once. For Mary Ann Doane, 'Television's greatest technological prowess is its ability to be there — both on the scene and in your living room'.[48] This is the trauma of tele-presence that television incites; its ability to be both 'here' and 'there' at the same time ultimately erodes the distinction between 'here' and 'there'. Samuel Weber describes it thus:

> If […] television is both here *and* there *at the same time*, then, according to traditional notions of space, time and body, it can be *neither fully there nor entirely here*. What it sets before us, in and as the television *set*, is therefore split, or rather, it is a *split* or a *separation* that camouflages itself by taking the form of a visible *image*. And yet, what this image conceals is at least as important as what it shows. What it shows are images; what those images conceal is *another vision* — a vision that is other than as we know it, cut free from its bodily attachment, decorporealised.[49]

Might this decorporealising tendency be similar in effect to Bersani's self-shattering produced in an infant who has not yet learned to configure the boundaries of its corporeal self? In Bersani's reading of Freud the infant's inability to mediate the stimulus of its mother's love via the ego structures it has not yet developed lead to a traumatic self-shattering which is then recoded as pleasurable through the structure of masochism. In Weber's Heideggerian analysis of television the viewer finds himself split between the 'here' of the body and the screen and the 'there' of the distant event at which television allows him to be virtually present. Image and viewer are in both places at once and therefore finally in neither. That the channel-surfer's capacity to be anywhere, everywhere and nowhere at once is experienced as a kind of ecstasy — a pleasure of disembodiment — suggests a linkage with Bersani's masochistic pleasure in self-realisation through self-annulment. The fantasy of disembodied visuality indulged by television has as its correlate a trauma of decorporealisation. This would be another form of the 'virtual trauma' Redfield describes: as well as a virtualised trauma, a trauma of the virtual arising from the structural parallels of trauma and media.

For both Redfield and Meek the conjunction of trauma and visual media in 9/11 brings into focus a more profound implication of trauma and media as such. Trauma discourse was widely employed in the aftermath of 9/11 in both academic and popular discourses to legitimate collective identification as an innocent victim of violence, justifying an aggressive response and

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[48] Mary Ann Doane, 'Information, Crisis, Catastrophe', in *Logics of Television: Essays in Cultural Criticism*, ed. by Patricia Mellencamp (London: BFI, 1990), pp. 222–239 (p. 238).

[49] Samuel Weber, 'The Parallax View', *Assemblage*, 20 (1993), 88–89 (p. 89).

obviating the need to consider prior aggression as a possible factor in the attack. According to Meek, '[a] supposed shared experience of trauma allowed for a displacement of guilt for the forms of violence, exclusion and exploitation through which Western nations enforce global hegemony'.[50] Many leftist commentators, from Noam Chomsky to Derrida, highlighted the United States' prior implication in neo-colonial violence. Chomsky interpreted 9/11 as an example of 'blowback' whereby the U.S. became the victim of the kind of violence it had been exporting around the globe for decades in pursuit of its strategic and economic interests.[51] Framing 9/11 as a trauma thus both registered its impact and disavowed its geopolitical context. Both Redfield and Meek raise the possibility that the recourse to trauma as a mode of identification is itself a symptom of cultural melancholia: an undeclared mourning for the loss of presence which subtends the rise of both televisual media (which replace presence with a virtual non-presence or tele-presence that is both everywhere and nowhere) and deterritorialised global capitalism. Trauma theory exhibits a persistent drive to return to an originary event conceived in terms of the impact of violence upon the body, at the same time as it places the possibility of that return in question. Identity is figured through the memory of violence inflicted upon bodies: in Fredric Jameson's succinct phrase, 'history is what hurts'.[52] Within this paradigm, 'the "traumatic image" can serve an attempt to reconnect with the reality of an event that nevertheless persistently resists understanding'.[53] Trauma theory has a melancholic orientation toward a fantasised past wholeness that it constructs as always already lost.

We can see this interweaving of presence and absence, and the anxieties over the stability and integrity of the self, in the Franco photograph (and in the Situation Room photograph too, as I will outline below). I argued that together the two women dramatise the splitting of the self in its conflicted reaction to the spectacle of horror. They also satisfy the nostalgic desire for presence that is a corollary of the displacing effect of television. Derrida describes how television 'constantly introduces the elsewhere and the global into the home. [...] The more powerful and violent the technological expropriation, the delocalisation, the more powerful, naturally, the recourse to the at-home, the return toward home'.[54] Franco's photograph both delocalises the trauma it depicts and brings it home, appropriates it for the beholder. The

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[50] Meek, p. 171.

[51] Noam Chomsky, *9-11* (New York: Seven Stories, 2001).

[52] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 88.

[53] Meek, p. 186.

[54] Jacques Derrida and Bernard Stiegler, *Echographies of Television*, trans. by Jennifer Bajorek (Cambridge: Polity, 2002), p. 80.

photograph allows the viewer, who most likely saw 9/11 on television, a point of identification as an eyewitness, as someone whose experience of the event was not mediated by television.[55] Their obvious presence on the scene relocates trauma in a real physical experience (although whether these women are close enough to prevent the spectacle from looking 'like a movie' is a moot point). The virtual embodiment offered by the photograph is however split, divided against itself in the opposing reactions of the two women.

The Franco photograph therefore both sustains and counters anxieties over decorporealisation associated with 'virtual trauma'. Paradoxically perhaps, it also stages cultural anxieties over the violation of bodily integrity in the women's reactions. Both women, along with the figure behind them whose gesture echoes *The Scream*, are attempting to seal off nodal points in their bodies' interface with the outside world. Mouth, eyes and ears are psychically important nodes of perception, as well as bodily orifices linking inside and outside. The women's actions echo those of the municipal and federal authorities, whose respective response to the crisis was to seal the entry points into Manhattan and the U.S. in an attempt to secure the collective body's boundaries. This was an important symbolic manoeuvre as well as a pragmatic one, for the 'concept of the nation-state is constituted as much by the concept of the border as by the border itself'.[56] Alongside the attempt to secure boundaries, however, the photograph stages their transgression. The falling tower can be seen reflected in the spectacles of the woman on our left, where it adjoins and overlays the image of her eye. I find this terribly invasive; we are extraordinarily phobic about our eyes. The image of the collapse seems to enter her body through this most overdetermined orifice, vividly rendering her vulnerability. In *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* Freud describes trauma as 'resulting from an extensive breach of the protective barrier' provided by the perceptual apparatus.[57] Franco's photograph is thus a remarkably concise staging of visual trauma as a function of spectatorship. Judith Butler sees in the domestic reaction to 9/11 a traumatising realisation of the vulnerability of the national body. The cultural loss which the U.S. suffers through 9/11, on top of the physical loss of life, is that of 'the prerogative, only and always, to be the one who transgresses the sovereign boundaries of other states, but never to be in the position of having one's own boundaries

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[55] I realise that in its publication in the *New York Times* many of the photograph's viewers will have had a similar experience of 9/11 to the women pictured. However, the *Times* is a national and international paper of record and so the photograph will also have been seen by many who did not experience 9/11 first-hand, especially as it becomes more widely known.

[56] Derrida and Stiegler, p. 17.

[57] Sigmund Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', in *Beyond the Pleasure Prinicple and Other Writings*, trans. by John Reddick, The New Penguin Freud (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 43–102 (p. 70).

transgressed'.[58] Franco's photograph stages the traumatising disruption of the boundaries of the collective national body as the threatened infiltration of the individual body by an image of violence, which thereby becomes a violent image.

If we now return to the Situation Room photograph we can note the similarity of its subject. Again people are held captive by an image withheld from the viewer, somewhere out of frame to the left.[59] The woman's gesture which is repeated by Clinton now functions as a symptom of the trauma of 9/11 in an image which proclaims an end to that crisis and thereby seeks to ward off that trauma. If the image withheld in the Franco photograph is of 9/11 (and its withholding means that its place can be occupied by any *or all* of the images in that archive), then this is equally true of the Situation Room photograph. Here too the unseen image, at the level of fantasy, is *both* that of bin Laden's corpse *and* the entire 9/11 archive which the non-image of his corpse is designed to ward off. By killing bin Laden the trauma of 9/11 is supposed to have been overcome, yet here in the very image of that triumph the trauma returns. Part of the photograph's fascination lies precisely in its dramatisation of fantasy as a staging of psychic conflict, screening both desire and anxiety. Like the Franco photograph, the Situation Room photograph stages a complex series of fantasies concerning the American national body politic:

Firstly, it stages a fantasy of the transparency of power. The head of state is pictured taking action to protect his subjects from violence through the use of 'legitimate' violence, yet remains open to scrutiny by those subjects as he does so.

Secondly, the photograph stages the reassuring fantasy that there is somebody in control who can see what is hidden from us and knows what to do with this information. This is the agency Žižek calls the 'big Other', and this image presents its operation as benevolent yet also threatening. Do not become the object of the big Other's ire, it says.

Thirdly, it stages a paradoxical fantasy of witnessing, of seeing an event whilst at the same time not having to see it. This perhaps suggests that the photograph encodes the subject's primal fantasy of witnessing its own origin in the scene of its parents' coitus, but here displaced through the withheld image of the other's death.

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[58] Judith Butler, *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2006), p. 39.
[59] I am aware that the sight which makes the women in Franco's photograph into witnesses is not strictly speaking withheld; it is visible as a reflection in the woman's glasses. However, so powerful is the force of her gaze, as well as the blocked gaze of her neighbour, that the fantasy of the out-of-frame image holds. The phobic image is thus both present and absent in the photograph.

Fourthly, it stages a fantasy of self-securing through targeting of the other *and at the same time stages that fantasy's undoing*. This ambivalence is constitutive of fantasy as a compromise-formation, which always sustains what it represses. This fantasy ultimately responds to the subject's fear of a traumatising self-shattering resulting from its porous boundaries. The fear of self-shattering is allayed in a fantasy of self-securing. Inasmuch the Situation Room photograph presents itself as the inverse of the phobic 9/11 images (as an image of potency to counteract the prior images of vulnerability), in each case the image is haunted by its inverse: the Situation Room photograph by the fear of vulnerability, the 9/11 images by the desire for spectacles of destruction. The significance of this double fantasy needs to be elaborated by placing the Situation Room photograph in a wider historical context: one which will allow us to position it as the emblem of contemporary visuality.

Targeting, or, Heidegger in the Situation Room

As Nicholas Mirzoeff notes, the term 'visuality' was introduced by Thomas Carlyle in the mid-nineteenth century. Clausewitz had claimed the necessity for modern generals to visualise a battlefield that could not be seen from a single viewpoint. Carlyle extended the principle to all areas of modern life, seen as the battlefield of a conflict between tradition and modernity, authority and anarchy:

> Whereas Clausewitz had defined a military strategy of rendering the battlefield as a mental picture, Carlyle generalised the visualising of History itself as being the means to order and control it [...] If the exceptional capacity for vision and imagination was first formulated as a tactic for war, it was then reverse-engineered by Carlyle as a mode of governance.[60]

Visualisation was the necessary condition for imposing order on the theatre of human actions. The Hero could visualise visuality itself as a clash between tradition and modernity. 'Carlyle opposed order to anarchy as the necessary movement of human life, understanding that movement was the inevitable corollary of modernity, but insisting that it be toward order not chaos'.[61] Carlyle, an inveterate conservative, was firmly on the side of tradition and order, yet he recognised that modernity was a significant cultural shift that demanded a response, and that the response was best couched in visual terms. Vision was the mode of representation of

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[60] Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, p. 125.
[61] Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, p. 143.

power best suited to modern conditions. Thus, 'the emergence of visuality was not a discourse about sight at all, but about power and its representation, now conceived in visualised terms as part of a new division of the senses'.[62] Seen in these terms, the Situation Room photograph provides a diagram of power exercised through a Hero's capacity to visualise the battlefield of a conflict between modernity and archaic tradition, and to identify and eliminate the enemy. Visuality is presented there as the visual mode of technical rationality, of the construal of thinking as representation. In other words, visuality as the operation of power takes the form of targeting.

The consequences of understanding thought as representation were the major concern of Heidegger, who saw therein the culmination and crisis of Western metaphysics. For Heidegger, modernity is 'the age of the world picture' [*die Zeit des Weltbildes*].[63] The phrase 'world picture' in Heidegger's sense 'does not mean "picture of the world" but, rather, the world grasped as picture': the world itself delivered over in and as representation.[64] Heidegger plays on the resonances of the German word for 'representation': *Vorstellung,* literally 'placing before'. Representation places the world, conceived as a series of discrete objects, before a subject for whom they are at hand [*Zuhanden*] and available for instrumental use. It fixes in place both objects and subject as knowable and locatable yet separate from each other. Although he traces the tendency back to classical philosophy, finding its traces in Plato and Aristotle, the crucial figure in Heidegger's narrative is Descartes, for 'It is in the metaphysics of Descartes that, for the first time, the being is defined as the objectness of representation, and truth as the certainty of representation'.[65] In Heidegger's reading of Cartesianism, 'the truth of objectivity is thereby determined as its capacity *to fix and to secure the subject'*.[66] Modernity is a project of self-securing itself dependent upon an effort to fix things in place. The name Heidegger gives to this mode of thinking is *Technik,* which I shall here translate, following Samuel Weber, as 'technics'.[67] For Weber, 'the controlling essence of technics, as Heidegger describes it, resides precisely in this ability to dislodge and to re-place, which is to say, in its

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[62] Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, p. 132.

[63] Martin Heidegger, 'The Age of the World Picture', in *Off the Beaten Track*, ed. by Kenneth Haynes and Julian Young (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 57–85 (p. 71).

[64] Heidegger, p. 67.

[65] Heidegger, p. 66.

[66] Samuel Weber, *Mass Mediauras: Essays on Form, Technics and Media*, ed. by Alan Cholodenko (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996), p. 49. Italics in original.

[67] Heidegger's term *Technik* itself derives from the Greek *technē*. I follow Samuel Weber's translation here, firstly as I will be drawing on Weber's reading of Heidegger, and secondly because I accede to Weber's insistence that rendering the word as 'technology' makes the term too familiar and omits some of the crucial resonances of the German term, such as the sense of technics as 'technique'. Samuel Weber, *Mass Mediauras*, p. 60.

power of emplacement'.[68] Technics is a form of thinking as representation, based in the opposition of subject and object and operating through an effort of emplacement.[69] There is a strongly visual dimension to Heidegger's characterisation of technics which takes its cue from Descartes, where the subject must become an image for itself. The effort of self-securing which structures modern metaphysics has a similarly visual dimension; the object must be pictured in order to be securely located or, in Weber's term, targeted.

However, as Weber explains, the attempt to locate and target objects is continually undone by an opposite tendency toward abstraction. The more technics places, the more it displaces and replaces; as the object is placed on demand it becomes abstracted and increasingly virtual. As Derrida puts it, 'There is no appropriation without the possibility of expropriation, without the confirmation of this possibility'.[70] The effort of emplacement, of self-securing, must therefore be constantly renewed as it undermines itself. We have already traced this effect in television, where the locations of image and body are destabilised, 'neither fully there nor entirely here'.[71] The subject posited by Cartesianism is hollow, emptied of particular characteristics; its very universality renders it abstract, corresponding finally to no actual person. This can be seen in the discourse of universal human rights; in order to guarantee its universality, the subject of this discourse, upon which modern legal and democratic frameworks are grounded, is so emptied of specificity as to be unrecognisable in any actually existing subject. Lacking any of the markers which define actually existing subjects — race, class, gender, age, nationality — the universal subject is abstracted to the point of disappearance; it is a virtual rather than an actual subject. In acceding to this universality I relinquish all the particular characteristics that make me the singular individual I am. That which secures my legal and political rights thus unsecures my corporeal lived identity. Technics is marked by this double movement of 'unsecuring' which both emplaces and displaces: 'Emplacement itself remains tributary of that movement of unsecuring that it ostensibly seeks to escape or to ignore'.[72] The danger of representational thinking lies in the forgetting of this fact: in the belief that a fully secure self is achievable. The ethical demand of modernity is to be heedful of this movement of unsecuring or unconcealment latent within technical thinking: to remember that as subjects we are constitutively unsecure.

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[68] Samuel Weber, *Mass Mediauras*, p. 52.

[69] I adopt Weber's translation of *Gestell* as 'emplacement' rather than the more common 'enframing' as it brings out the particular spatiality of the term in Heidegger's thinking. Samuel Weber, *Mass Mediauras*, pp. 70–72.

[70] Derrida and Stiegler, p. 80.

[71] Samuel Weber, 'The Parallax View', p. 89.

[72] Samuel Weber, *Mass Mediauras*, p. 73.

The Situation Room photograph stages contemporary visuality as irreducibly marked by technics. Here, power is figured in visual terms as the capacity to identify, locate and isolate an individual over virtually unlimited distances as a preliminary to the exercise of disciplinary technologies of coercion, incarceration and annihilation. Samuel Weber identifies this conjunction of visuality and power as the discourse of targeting:

> This is the end of the military response to 'terrorism': it must be named [...], given a face [...] and then, above all, *located*: [...] in order then to be depicted, if possible, and destroyed.[73]

The term connects the military origins of visuality with its more recent history, for as Weber notes, 'the obsession with "security," whether national, international, local, or personal, has not ceased to grow and dominate political discourse since the end of the Second World War'.[74] Here that obsession is manifested in an image that stages power through surveillance: through the capacity of a sovereign subject, spatially and morally distanced from its objects, to *target* and unleash violence with the ultimate aim of securing that subject's own identity. For Weber, 'hitting the target and doing away with the object are [...] designed to confirm the subject as that which through the process confirms its ability to survive and remain the same'.[75] We are after all in the Situation Room, and this photograph provides a graphic reminder of the United States' unmatched capacity to *situate*, target and annihilate its enemies.[76] This capacity underwrites the security strategy of the U.S. yet was called into question for as long as bin Laden remained at large. If the Situation Room photograph 'illustrates the sovereign power of the United States to extend violence with impunity', that power depends upon the technological displacement of the sovereign body.[77] The global satellite network allows Obama and his generals to exercise their prerogative from the other side of the world; eyes in the sky, hands in Pakistan, brain in Washington.

The photograph is a weapon as well as a declaration of victory. Deploying the language of munitions and targeting, one article described how the image 'exploded online' and 'landed on

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[73] Samuel Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, p. 333.

[74] Samuel Weber, *Theatricality as Medium*, p. 60.

[75] Samuel Weber, *Targets of Opportunity: On the Militarization of Thinking* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), p. 85.

[76] Of course one corollary of this power to locate the other's body is the capacity to make that body disappear, to place it 'nowhere', through the illegal process of 'rendition'. U.S. military and panoptic power is maintained partly through a global network of 'black sites', prison and interrogation centres which are often unlocatable, and beyond the reach of or 'invisible' to international law. These are locations where bodies designated as potential enemies are placed beyond the law's power of location in order to be converted, often through the harrowing of the flesh, into information (or 'actionable intelligence') which can be used to locate more enemies.

[77] Kennedy, pp. 270–271.

the front pages' of newspapers around the world.[78] If, as W.J.T. Mitchell has argued, the 'War on Terror' was fought in part through images, this image represents both the knockout punch and the record of its delivery.[79] The photograph reinstates the global panoptic mastery of the United States, briefly threatened after 9/11. To be more precise, the photograph reinstates a fantasy of total mastery, the fantasmatic status of which was revealed by 9/11. In doing so, it attempts to reconfigure public memory of that event and undo its traumatising effect. The photograph thus serves a similar function to Freudian screen memories, which 'owe their retention in the mind not to their own content but to its associative connection with another, repressed subject'.[80] If the screen memory '[preserves] not the real trace of memory but a later revision of it', the Situation Room photograph allows 9/11 to be remembered as a tragic yet ultimately reassuring narrative: the monster was defeated in the end.[81] The photograph thus serves the 'domesticating and civilising project of self-recognition' with which Bersani associates art as a whole.

As any Freudian knows, however, repression is never entirely successful, and the Situation Room photograph bears witness to the limits of U.S. mastery. The image stages both the self-securing project of modern technical rationality as an effort of targeting, *and* the limits of that project. As described above, areas of blankness, illegibility and obstructed vision undermine the photograph's claim to transparency. If this image shows the attempted self-securing of a sovereign subject, does it not seem odd that the issue of sovereignty — of who is in charge — is so uncertain? One theme in commentary upon the photograph is its dissimulation of the power structure in the room; Obama does not project the kind of swaggering authority that often appears to be invested in the image of the American President, and which his predecessor performed so hyperbolically. Bin Laden himself is invisible, and would remain so, for the Obama administration refused to release a photograph of the corpse as proof of his death. Various reasons were given for the decision, not least amongst them reluctance to provide an image of martyrdom around which his supporters could rally. The image's absence testifies to its potential value as a propaganda weapon that could be used against the U.S. as were the images of 9/11. The photograph itself stands in for the absent image of bin Laden, replacing a potentially horrific image with a triumphant one. This image of triumph nonetheless stages in compelling fashion the anxieties over picturing that have so marked the

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[78] Koblin and Zeke Turner.

[79] Mitchell, *Cloning Terror*.

[80] Sigmund Freud, 'On Childhood Memories and Screen Memories', in *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, trans. by Anthea Bell, The New Penguin Freud (London: Penguin, 2002), pp. 45–52 (p. 45).

[81] Freud, 'Screen Memories', p. 49.

'War on Terror'. This is an image of 'unsecuring' (to use Weber's translation of Heidegger's *Entbergung*) which hides the very thing it seems to show (the vanquished enemy), an image of spectatorship haunted by what it attempts to repress. The photograph calls up the image it aims to hide and recalls the trauma it seeks to ward off.

The photograph is also haunted by various other images historically, thematically or formally connected to it. These include images of the exercise of presidential power from Kennedy to Reagan, and from *Dr. Strangelove* to *The West Wing*. They also, however, include a more diffuse archive of images of people watching television, perhaps the dominant modern form of the group portrait. It presents a collection of people engaged in an activity which constitutes them as a group and as representatives of a class or public: the family, the fan, the bystander, the witness, the citizen, above all the spectator. Such images help define the public who watch and the publicity of the event they are watching: national and international sporting contests, from football matches to the Olympic Games; public and civic rituals from homecoming parades to royal weddings; historic events such as the moon landing. For Iain Boal, 'when Americans are shown clustered round a domestic TV, it means usually one thing: they are watching sport'.[82] Weber argues that televised sports stage the fantasy of self-securing in exemplary fashion:

> In professional competitive sports [...] the technological dream of planning and control is rendered visible. Whoever wins, the outcome is clear and decisive. In watching such events, television viewers can forget, at least temporarily, just how ambivalent and undecidable the reality of their world has become, not least of all by virtue of television itself.[83]

The spectacle of competitive sport offers 'the technological dream of planning and control' made manifest. The rules, the field of play and the division of combatants are clearly determined. (This, perhaps, is an echo of which the Obama administration may have approved: global politics as the 'great game' in which we are the home team, our superiority confirmed by objective victory.) Yet as we have seen, this is exactly the fantasy that television itself tends to undermine. Television emplaces and simultaneously displaces, and so for Weber exemplifies the tendency of technics to unsecure as it secures: 'Television takes place in taking the place of the body and at the same time in transforming both place and body'.[84] The spectacle of

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[82] Boal, p. 48. Boal also notes that another image released by the White House is of a lone bin Laden watching television, apparently taken from a videotape found in the house (p. 46). Shot from behind bin Laden and looking toward the screen, it forms a pendant for the Situation Room photograph.

[83] Samuel Weber, *Mass Mediauras*, p. 127.

[84] Samuel Weber, *Mass Mediauras*, p. 117.

televised sport thus stages the fundamentally ambivalent relationship of place and the body installed through technics as the matrix of contemporary visuality.

Boal argues that an image of Americans watching television in a domestic setting usually signifies some kind of sporting event. The Situation Room is not a domestic setting. Neither is it a public one, nor (quite) an office in the usual sense. It could be described as a quasi-private governmental-military space masquerading as a public one. Furthermore, the feeling of a White House Super Bowl party is unsettled by the echo of public disasters from the Kennedy assassination to the Challenger disaster and, especially in this context, the September 11 attacks. Nothing in Western public culture allows that public to recognise itself quite so vividly as the spectacle of catastrophe, of which 9/11 is the paradigmatic contemporary example. The echo is surely unmistakeable. Along with Clinton's distinctive gesture, the crowd of spectators pictured in the Situation Room photograph inevitably recalls the subgenre of images within the 9/11 archive showing people frozen in horror-struck spectatorship. In fact Clinton's gesture, and the specific linkage to the Franco photograph it provides, may not even be necessary to place this image within the 9/11 archive. The mere fact that it shows a group of people staring tensely at something out of frame may be enough to make the connection. The body of Osama bin Laden and the entire visual archive of 9/11 are condensed in the hidden image which holds the figures in the photograph spellbound.[85] Its power, like that of the Franco photograph, is that in not showing any of these images it invokes all of them. The strange fascination exerted by the Situation Room photograph is then a result of its complex status as a kind of dream image, condensing the trauma of 9/11 and its apparent working-through in a single, massively overdetermined image. The photograph shows the workings of the state as it wants to be seen, yet also functions as 'a critical mirror of the workings of the state', revealing the operation of power in ways that power itself would rather remained invisible.[86] There are multiple layers of visibility woven into the image, and to understand its significance requires patient and sustained looking in order to begin to see what it shows and what it hides, what it shows to be hidden and what hides in plain view. The question 'what are we looking at?' thus has no simple or final answer in regard of this photograph. We are, it seems, looking at the process of looking itself, and what we see is not 'visible' in any straightforward sense. Such is the visual and rhetorical complexity of the Situation Room photograph and the difficulty of finally determining what it means to 'picture 9/11'.

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[85] In this context, the averted gaze of the officer in uniform recalls the inability of the U.S. military to mount a convincing defence of the nation on September 11 2001, its attention partly diverted by a military exercise which coincided with the attacks.

[86] Kennedy, p. 265.

I have presented the photograph as an allegory of contemporary visuality itself: of visualisation as a mode of power/knowledge. Visuality, as the precise location and visualisation of the object in real time and at a potentially infinite distance, here takes the form of targeting. However, the effort of emplacement produces, as a kind of 'blowback', an opposite movement of displacement. The following chapters will trace that tension between presentation and concealment, emplacement and displacement, self-securing and self-shattering, through specific responses by image makers to 9/11. In doing so I hope to uncover — or better, to unsecure — something of the complexity of picturing as currently practiced and understood.

2: **Mediating trauma in *United 93***

The second plane

Interior: the Federal Aviation Authority (FAA) air traffic control centre in Ronkonkoma, New York, shortly before 9:00 a.m. on September 11 2001. An aircraft has crashed into the World Trade Center; several other aircraft are suspected hijackings. United Airlines Flight 175 (UA175), already flagged as a potential hijacking, is ignoring air traffic control (ATC) radio communications. It has just survived a near miss with another airliner, and is descending rapidly toward Manhattan — 'dropping like a manhole cover' as the radar operator puts it. The plane's icon disappears from the radar screen. Cut to Newark Airport control tower where officials spot the missing plane through the tower windows, flying low and fast toward Manhattan. Cut to a grainy shot of a television screen filling the frame; news footage shows the smoking World Trade Center from the north (Figure 8). Diegetic sound is replaced by an atonal brass note, sustained and ominous. The plane crosses the frame from the right, disappearing behind the North Tower. An enormous fireball erupts from the South Tower. A yell is heard as the camera cuts to the NORAD control centre, recording the soldiers' shocked expressions as they watch the television footage. Cut back to Newark tower, to a similar group of men standing in stunned silence, and then to the FAA control centre in Virginia, where FAA National Operations Manager Ben Sliney and his staff stare in shock at a screen. Finally, cut back to NORAD control centre. The hubbub returns as Major James Fox orders everyone back to work.

Figure 8: United 93; 'the second plane' as seen on TV.

This sequence is the fulcrum of Paul Greengrass' film *United 93* (2006). It comes forty-three minutes into a total duration of one hundred and six minutes and lasts around forty seconds. It is the most cinematically complex moment in the film, marked by shifting relations of mediation and visibility and epitomising the crises of visuality and virtuality played out in the film and in the media spectacle of 9/11 itself. The central shot of UA175 colliding with the World Trade Center excerpts a section of television footage recorded on September 11 2001; this is 9/11 itself, not a reconstruction. The archive footage is framed by shots of men and women in positions of authority looking at screens, at first in puzzlement and alarm and then, after the impact, in shocked disbelief. The shots following the impact, group portraits of people in rapt and horrified fascination, recall the Situation Room photograph. In fact two of the women visible, in the FAA control centre and the NORAD command centre, echo Clinton's gesture in that image (Figure 14, Figure 15). However, whereas in the Situation Room photograph we see the spectators but not the screen, the film gives us both, at first showing the spectators from behind so that the television pictures they watch are visible (Figure 10, Figure 12), then cutting to reaction shots of their faces (Figure 11, Figure 13).[1] The exception is the shot of the men in the Newark control tower, seen in profile to reveal their faces but not the object of their gaze (Figure 9). Significantly, these men are not watching television but witness the disaster through the framing windows of the control tower. This crucial moment in

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[1] These reactions are of course staged by actors, whereas those in the Situation Room are apparently spontaneous. However, the discussion below of screen performance in *United 93* will disturb the opposition between theatricality and spontaneity.

the film thus restages the disaster through the all-too-familiar footage. If the archive footage presents 'the thing itself' rather than a reconstruction, 'the thing itself' is here a media image.

Figure 9: United 93; FAA personnel in Newark airport's control tower react to the crash of UA175.
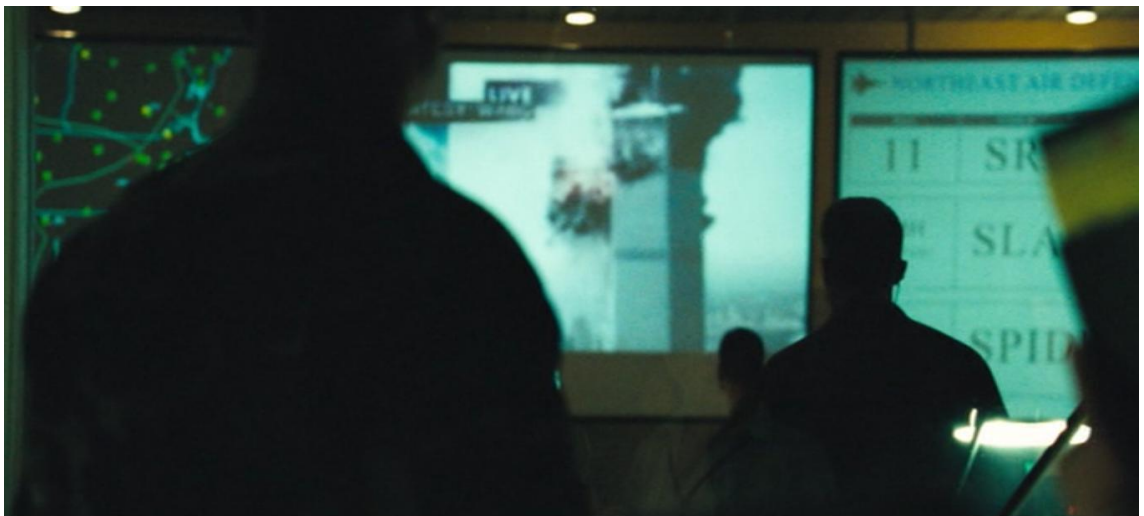
Figure 10: *United 93;* the crash as seen by NORAD personnel.

Figure 11: *United 93;* NORAD personnel absorb the crash.

Figure 12: *United 93;* the crash as seen by FAA personnel.

Figure 13: *United 93;* FAA personnel absorb the crash.

Figure 14: *United 93;* female FAA staff member reacts to the crash.

Figure 15: *United 93;* female NORAD personnel react to the crash.

The impact of UA175 marks the moment when a disaster became a national trauma. Up to that point it was possible to believe that the impact of the first plane, American Airlines Flight 11, had been an accident. With the second impact, that interpretation was no longer sustainable and it became obvious the crash was an orchestrated attack.[2] The television footage of UA175 colliding with the World Trade Center is one of the most infamous and familiar images of our time for millions in the Western world and elsewhere around the globe. Like the Situation Room photograph it is an icon of the present, only more so. *United 93* retains its shocking impact; it seems no more gratuitous or voyeuristic than it always has. The switch to archive footage implies recognition of the power and familiarity of these images; Greengrass cannot compete with the television footage, nor does he need to. For the spectator, the image of the plane entering the tower will be all too familiar.

The use of archive footage both exemplifies and disrupts the visual logic of the film. Inasmuch as *United 93* is premised upon its verisimilitude, the inclusion of actual archive footage can be regarded as the culmination of this effort. If the rest of the film aims at recreating 9/11, this *is* 9/11. The use of archive footage thus completes the 'warranting' of the film's account. By 'warranting' I mean the way that fiction or quasi-documentary reconstruction refers to actual locations, people involved, official documents or indexical traces to reinforce the authenticity of its account:

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[2] By which I mean that the first crash was retrospectively recoded as deliberate, in an exemplary instance of the Freudian thesis that trauma involves the recoding of an earlier event by the introduction of new knowledge.

> [Docudrama] validates its assertions and actually makes an argument by locating its drama in relation to real indexical footage and other 'data': this material acts as an anchor, that 'warrants' that what we are watching is (to some degree) true.[3]

The effect of this warranting is to convince the spectator 'that it is properly both logical and emotional to associate cinematic proximity with moral truth'.[4] The imputation of moral truth through cinematic proximity is precisely the strategy we will identify in the discursive and technical construction of *United 93*. In the 'second plane' sequence the film co-opts the indexicality of the archive footage to warrant its narrative authenticity and moral authority. The television footage 'plays itself' in the same way as do various 'non-actors' amongst the cast. Nine people in the film 'played themselves', including Major James Fox and Ben Sliney, the FAA National Operations Manager on his first day in the job, both of whom can be seen in this sequence.[5] Their presence, together with the use of archive footage, bestows a level of indexicality upon the film and bolsters its claim to authenticity as testimony. The subject of non-professional actors 'playing themselves' is one to which I shall return in greater detail below. For now it is important to note that both image and people 'play themselves' at this crucial point in the film, and the effect of verisimilitude, even of 'authenticity' toward which the tactic contributes.

The use of archive footage also disrupts verisimilitude, however. The film image is here both more conspicuously mediated, and more immediate, than elsewhere in the film. In fact it is the very mediation of the image which is the sign of its documentary authenticity. Throughout the rest of the film, as will be analysed below, the *mise-en-scène* encourages the viewer's absorption within the diegetic world. The film induces an unusually powerful 'reality effect' thanks to Greengrass' skilful recreation of the characteristic look and sound of documentary footage. The obvious mediation of the image — the restless camerawork, crosstalk and jump cuts — produces an intensified sense of immediacy evidenced in the bodily rhetoric employed by many reviewers, as discussed below. That mediation therefore tends to dissimulate itself. Elsewhere Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin argue that the insertion of extra layers of mediation into the image often produces a sense of immediacy, which they call 'hypermediacy'.[6] Where this excess of mediation should distance the viewer, breaking the

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[3] Paul Ward, 'Drama-documentary, Ethics and Notions of Performance: The "Flight 93" Films', in *Rethinking Documentary: A Documentary Reader*, ed. by Thomas Austin and Wilma de Jong (Maidenhead: Open University Press, 2008), pp. 191–203 (p. 198); Ward is summarising Steven Lipkin's concept of warranting. See Steven N. Lipkin, *Real Emotional Logic: Film and Television Docudrama as Persuasive Practice*, 3rd edn (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2002).
[4] Lipkin, p. 31.
[5] Greg Marks, 'A Credible Witness', *Film Quarterly*, 60 (2006), 3 <doi:1139915411>.
[6] Bolter and Grusin.

suspension of disbelief, it paradoxically increases her involvement in the *mise-en-scène*. This is the crucial difference between remediation and Brechtian *Verfremdung*, where the additional layer of mediation is employed to counter rather than increase the spectator's absorption in the text. Thus, in *United 93*, the very obvious mediation of the image bolsters its claim to immediacy.

In the 'impact shot' the mediation of the image is foregrounded *and is perceived as such*. At this point the spectator will be in no doubt that she is watching a mediated image. As Redfield puts it, '*United 93* stages here a canny refusal of any illusion of unmediated vision': precisely the illusion that the rest of the film works so hard to construct, paradoxically, through hyper-mediation.[7] Furthermore, the use of archival footage means that is precisely at this point in the film where the image is most obviously mediated, that its indexical claim to represent reality is strongest. This is documentary news footage, not docudrama reconstruction; here where the mediation of the image is most visible, the mediation of the events of 9/11 by the producers of *United 93* is at its least intensive. The rest of the film is an imaginative reconstruction of something few members of its audience, if any, will have seen. This shot is different; globally familiar, in a sense it belongs to everyone. This is part of *our* memory of the event, and the powerful shock of recognition shifts the viewer's affective relationship to the image. The sudden shift from the reconstruction of particular experiences to the recall of a near-universal experience provides a jolt of the kind Dominick LaCapra calls 'empathic unsettlement'. Writing in the context of Holocaust historiography, LaCapra describes empathic unsettlement as:

> an aspect of understanding which stylistically upsets the narrative voice and counteracts harmonising narration or unqualified objectification yet allows for a tense interplay between critical, necessarily objectifying reconstruction and affective response to the voices of the victims.[8]

Sounding somewhat similar to *Verfremdung* in that it draws attention to processes of mediation, empathic unsettlement disturbs the reader's identification with the narrative in order to produce a critical ethical response. LaCapra cautions against formulaic tropes designed to highlight the movement of the text, 'including the compulsively repetitive turn to the aporia, paradox, or impasse'.[9] The use of the television-screen shot at this point in *United 93* avoids the clichéd assertion that the traumatic event is unrepresentable. Instead the attack is presented as an uncannily immediate experience of mediation. The removal of the interceding gazes of diegetic characters frames the image as the kind of flashback upon which

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[7] Redfield, p. 42.
[8] Dominick LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma* (Baltimore, MD; London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000), p. 109.
[9] LaCapra, p. 47.

trauma theory so often focuses; we watch alongside the characters, rather than through their intercession. At the same time, the mediation of the image is unmistakable. This tension may remain within the terms of paradox or aporia, but it does not place the image 'beyond representation'. Instead it is enmeshed in a complex interchange of mediation and immediacy, proximity and distance.

The television screen showing the impact of UA175 fills the entire frame (Figure 8). The screen is displaced, its relation to diegetic space uncertain; both NORAD personnel in Rome, New York and the FAA staff in Herndon, Virginia are shown in the following montage watching the attack on CNN. The image may also occupy the viewer's psychic space as a flashback. The interceding gaze of the characters watching the television screen is removed and we all watch together, in an uncertain space and time, as if in a dream or traumatic flashback. The sequence thus exemplifies the displacing effect of television discussed in the opening section. The more television places, the more it displaces; the more it delivers the world framed as a picture and placed at the viewer's disposal, the more this virtual archive becomes distributed, dislocated, both everywhere at once and nowhere in particular. Throughout the world people watched similar footage as the 'second plane' slammed into the tower; watching this image we were and are everywhere with everyone, and simultaneously nowhere. The use of archive footage to screen the 'second plane' in *United 93* recognises the innate mediation of the attacks in perhaps their cardinal image.

The obvious mediation of the image at the point of UA175's impact contrasts starkly with the rest of the film. In the preceding shot a group of ATC officials in the control tower at Newark Airport track the plane through the tower windows. This is the only point in this sequence at which the plane itself, as opposed to its image, is visible to the characters. The transparency of the image, which contrasts powerfully with the mediation of the TV-screen shot which follows, is nonetheless deceptive. The plane the controllers 'see' is a digitally rendered effect added in postproduction. Where vision appears most immediate it is in fact highly mediated. Immediately prior to the TV-screen shot's 'canny refusal of any illusion of unmediated vision', the film apparently offers just such an illusion. Yet even here the men watch through the tower windows framing the scene. The conjunction of these two shots illustrates nicely the paradoxes of vision and mediation which structure *United 93*. Once again we encounter the complex interweaving of presentation and concealment that we identified in the Situation Room image and the Franco photograph of women watching 9/11.

Governmentality and the story of Flight 93

The last of the four hijacked planes to take off, United Airlines Flight 93 (UA93) was the only one not to hit its intended target (probably either the White House or Capitol). It left Newark bound for San Francisco at 08:42 and was hijacked at 09:28. Alerted to the attacks on New York and assuming they faced a similar fate, the passengers tried to regain control of the aircraft. The plane crashed into a field near Shanksville in rural Pennsylvania at 10:03.[10] No images from the flight exist. The story of the passenger revolt was reconstructed from the plane's cockpit voice recorder and telephone calls made by passengers during the hijack. The story of UA93 was widely reported in the media and played upon repeatedly by the Bush administration as an inspiring if harrowing example of sacrifice and heroism in horrific circumstances. In speeches made in the aftermath of 9/11, President Bush invoked the passengers and crew of Flight 93 as exemplars of patriotic courage and self-sacrifice and as points of identification for Americans during the 'War on Terror'.[11] In particular, the phrase 'Let's roll', spoken by passenger Todd Beamer just before the passengers rushed the cockpit, was co-opted by the Bush administration as a slogan for the 'War on Terror'.[12] The story of UA93 was thus familiar to many Americans in the wake of 9/11. It was employed as a means of national reconciliation with the trauma of the attacks, and as ideological support for the 'War on Terror'. It formed a crucial part of the developing public memory of 9/11, and allowed Americans to feel that their country had not been totally defenceless. Through the Flight 93 story, Americans could remember the victims of 9/11 as having gone down fighting: 'Flight 93 was thus recuperated as a glorious defeat, like the Alamo or the Battle of Bataan'.[13] Furthermore, as the story of a hastily-formed citizen militia which fought to defend the

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[10] National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, *The 9/11 Commission Report: The Full Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., 2004), pp. 10–14.

[11] President Bush referred to Flight 93 in his speech to the joint session of Congress of September 20 2001, and in Atlanta on November 8 2001. See Cynthia Weber, 'Popular Visual Language as Global Communication: The Remediation of United Airlines Flight 93', *Review of International Studies*, 34 (2008), 137–153 (p. 141 n17, p142 n20) <doi:10.1017/S0260210508007833>.

[12] According to the *Report*, an unknown passenger can be heard to yell 'Roll it!' at 10:00:42 on the cockpit voice recorder of Flight 93, as the passengers struggled to breach the cockpit door (National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, p. 14.). The phrase 'Let's Roll' was reportedly overheard by Lisa Jefferson, a phone company employee to whom Todd Beamer's call from the plane had been connected, after Beamer dropped the phone, leaving the line open, as the passengers began their attack at 09:57. See Jim McKinnon, 'The Phone Line from Flight 93 Was Still Open When a GTE Operator Heard Todd Beamer Say: "Are You Guys Ready? Let's Roll'', *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* (Pittsburgh, 16 September 2001) <http://old.post-gazette.com/headlines/20010916phonecallnat3p3.asp> [accessed 1 August 2012; Cited in Weber, p. 141.

[13] J. Hoberman, 'The New Disaster Movie', *Village Voice*, 2006 <http://www.villagevoice.com/2006-05-09/film/the-new-disaster-movie/> [accessed 27 July 2012].

country from foreign attackers, the 'citizen soldiers' narrative tapped into the United States' own origin myth in powerfully redemptive fashion. The story was thus heavily overdetermined by themes of loss, heroism, patriotism and sacrifice.[14]

As Cynthia Weber notes: 'The uniqueness of what happened on UA93 lies in its location as an historical, linear, meaning-making event that was narrated as such at the very moment it was occurring by the passengers and crew who experienced it'.[15] The 9/11 Commission Report included a chapter on 'The Battle for United 93', which drew on the records of phone calls made by the passengers and crew, computer data and the recovered cockpit voice recorder to reconstruct a fairly detailed narrative of the events on board. This helped solidify the official version of the story and cemented its status as a key part of the public memory of 9/11. Moreover, the Report itself is unusual amongst official documents in that it 'make[s] for gripping reading, often feeling more like a novel than a Congressional document'.[16] The early chapters in particular read like a thriller, with concise and lucid prose. This was reflected in a nomination for the National Book Award and sales of more than one and a half million copies, an extraordinary number for a government report. The Report played an important role in fixing the public memory of Flight 93, functioning as both a factual record and a gripping narrative of desperate struggle and heroism.

In influencing the way Flight 93 and 9/11 as a whole were to be remembered the Report became an instrument of governmentality, 'a form of activity aiming to shape, guide or affect the conduct' of collections of individuals conceived as a population.[17] It 'designates a model for conceptualising power in its diffuse and multivalent operations, focusing on the management of populations, and operating through state and non-state institutions and discourses'.[18] In general, governmentality aims toward the maintenance or advancement of the health, wealth and wellbeing of the population, employing tactics including measurement, surveillance and the promotion of norms through various state, civil and private institutions. Governmentality is concerned with what Foucault described as 'the conduct of conduct', structuring the possible field of action of subjects and encouraging self-government through 'practices of the self'.[19]

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[14] The presentation of the Flight 93 narrative also powerfully reflected the reassertion of 'traditional' gender roles. See Susan Faludi, *The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy in Post 9/11 America* (London: Atlantic, 2008), pp. 56–64.

[15] Cynthia Weber, p. 140.

[16] Cynthia Weber, p. 144.

[17] Colin Gordon, 'Governmental Rationality: An Introduction', in *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality*, ed. by Graham Burchell, Colin Gordon and Peter Miller (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), pp. 1–52 (p. 2).

[18] Butler, p. xv.

[19] Gordon, p. 2.

The Bush administration's use of the Flight 93 story to promote certain norms of behaviour and affect, and the 9/11 Commission's presentation of the story as a narrative of loss and heroism, clearly fall into such categories.

The discourse of governmentality also functions through entertainment media including cinema and television. Although independent of government and geared toward generating commercial profit from entertaining large and diverse audiences, media representations offer powerful models for the governance of our political and affective lives. *The West Wing* is one clear example of television's capacity to provide such models. It stages the organisation and disposal of executive power in a contemporary media democracy, interpellating its audience as citizens. As an example of 'presidentiality', the series 'demarcates the cultural and ideological meaning of the presidency for the general public' and so 'defines, in part, the national community'.[20] The series does not serve the interests of particular governments directly but eulogises one form of the political process and provides a model for viewers' engagement therewith. Thus 'the spirit of America found in *The West Wing* remains not a set of tired ideals but a vibrant drama of possibilities and service — offering hope for the nation's future'.[21] The series' realism is integral to its appeal and authority. Widely seen as embodying a liberal fantasy of an enlightened, humanist presidency, its storylines nonetheless often reflect real world events. 9/11 thus initiated a crisis of credibility for its creator Aaron Sorkin, who felt 'that his show's subtle connection to reality had been severed and that unless he could find a way to let viewers know that his characters had suffered the same trauma as everyone else, the show would forever clink hollow'.[22] The result was the episode 'Isaac and Ishmael', broadcast on October 3 2001, in which the White House is locked down after a suspected terrorist is found to be working there. A party of high school students taking a guided tour is caught up in the alert and wait in the kitchen while the building is secured. During their stay various members of the president's team, including President Bartlett (Martin Sheen) himself, drop by and talk to the students. They explain the antagonism between the West and radical Islam, suggest possible strategies for dealing with it and offer reassurances about the future and the superiority of liberal (American) values. The viewer is addressed as a voter to whom these people are accountable, a citizen whom they protect and a layman to whom they explain the harsh realities of global politics. Whilst 9/11 is never mentioned, the parallel would have

[20] Trevor Parry-Giles and Shawn J. Parry-Giles, *The Prime-time Presidency: The West Wing and U.S. Nationalism* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2006), p. 2.
[21] Ken Dvorak, 'Timely Works (Review)', *Film & History*, 34 (2004), 94–95 (p. 95).
[22] Peter De Jonge, 'Aaron Sorkin Works His Way Through the Crisis', *New York Times,* 28 October 2001, section Magazine <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/10/28/magazine/aaron-sorkin-works-his-way-through-the-crisis.html> [accessed 3 January 2013].

been immediately obvious to the show's audience. The clear linkage between 'real' and fictional media images, news and entertainment, ensured the continued credibility of *The West Wing* as an accurate portrayal of U.S. political culture and reinforced the construction of its audience as political subjects. The most interesting aspect of 'Isaac and Ishmael' is that it had to be made; *The West Wing*'s presentation as a realistic portrayal of the workings of government necessitated a response to 9/11, and required that the episode guide its audience's response to the real world events its fictional narrative reflected.

Following the publication of the 9/11 Commission Report, two documentaries based on its account of the Flight 93 story aired on U.S. television. *The Flight That Fought Back* was produced by the Discovery Channel and aired on the fourth anniversary of 9/11; it was generally well-received and was nominated for an Emmy in 2006. Its narrator, dynastic Hollywood figure Kiefer Sutherland, was most famous at the time for his portrayal of Jack Bauer, the hero of television drama series *24* and another significant node of governmentality in the post-9/11 U.S. The series' huge success made the maverick counterterrorist agent Bauer an influential figure in the debate over how the US should respond to terrorism, and once again illustrated television's importance as a site of governmentality. Bauer's willingness to exceed the law in order to uphold it provided one model of conduct in the 'War on Terror', making him something of a cult figure amongst political conservatives.[23] He was therefore a significant choice as narrator for *The Flight That Fought Back.* The film is formally conventional, its use of voiceover narration and clear distinction between documentary and docudrama footage keeping the viewer at a distance from the diegetic action, which does not unfold in real time. Positioned as an observer rather than a participant in the action, as I will argue is the case in *United 93*, the viewer's affective response to the narrative is heavily influenced by the tone of Sutherland's narration, and indirectly by his fame as Bauer. The film thus implicitly legitimates the Bush administration's designation of the crisis as a terrorist act requiring a 'tough' martial response.

Flight 93 aired on the A&E television channel in January 2006 and was subsequently nominated for six Emmys, winning one for sound editing. Like *United 93* it adopts a docudrama mode, mixing documentary reconstruction with elements of speculation and the pacing of a thriller. However, *Flight 93* uses the tropes of fiction film more overtly than *United 93* and to correspondingly lesser effect. The focus on a central group of characters (Tom Burnett, Mark

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[23] Bauer would become a controversial figure owing to his repeated use of torture in the series. Andrew Buncombe, 'US Military Tells Jack Bauer: Cut Out the Torture Scenes ... or Else!', *The Independent*, 2007 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/americas/us-military-tells-jack-bauer-cut-out-the-torture-scenes--or-else-436143.html> [accessed 1 August 2012].

Bingham and Todd Beamer) whose backstories are sketched in, and the cross-cutting between the passengers and the friends and relatives to whom they make phone calls, are recognisable tropes of disaster movies and deny *Flight 93* the claustrophobic intensity and visceral documentary immediacy of *United 93*. Lacking the production values and budget of Hollywood, as well as Greengrass' skills in docudrama filmmaking, *Flight 93* offers formulaic sentiment in place of *United 93*'s visceral emotion. *Flight 93* therefore fails to provide the sense of traumatised embodiment, or virtual presence, which I shall suggest is the major achievement of *United 93*. Nonetheless the two make for an interesting comparison at the level of visual rhetoric, for they are pitched in subtly different affective registers. I shall discuss the rhetorical differences in their remediation of the Flight 93 story in more detail below.

This chapter will show that *United 93*, in providing a model for affective and political engagement with the story of Flight 93, encodes a similar form of governmentality to the 9/11 Commission Report*, The West Wing* and *24*. As *The West Wing* had to respond to 9/11, so the combination of a powerfully redemptive narrative and the lack of a visual record meant that a cinematic treatment of the Flight 93 narrative was to some degree inevitable: 'Without a visual archive of Flight 93's demise, it became practically a necessity for a major movie studio to tell the dramatic story of "the flight that fought back", which seemed tailor-made for a Hollywood film'.[24] *United 93* thus presents a claim on behalf of Hollywood for the effectiveness of cinema as a medium of governmentality, in tension with the claims made by the different television versions of the story. This chapter investigates *United 93*'s modelling of public memory of 9/11 through a crisis of visuality in which authenticity and performance, mediation and transparency, acting-out and working through, collapse into each other.

United 93 as document and memorial

Released in April 2006, *United 93* was the first major Hollywood film to represent the events of September 11 2001.[25] Greengrass described *United* 93 as an attempt to 'create a film that allowed an audience to walk through 9/11 at eye level'.[26] The film offers the spectator a virtual

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[24] John W. Jordan, 'Transcending Hollywood: The Referendum on *United 93* as Cinematic Memorial', *Critical Studies in Media Communication*, 25 (2008), 196–223 (pp. 201–202) <doi:10.1080/15295030802032267>.
[25] Oliver Stone's *World Trade Center* was released in August 2006.
[26] Greengrass, director's commentary.

presence on the scene of 9/11 beyond that available to television viewers or readers of the 9/11 Commission Report. It nonetheless leans heavily upon the authority of the Report, referred to by Greengrass as 'the bible' upon which the film was based.[27] Promotional material emphasised the painstaking accuracy of *United 93*'s version of events and its sensitivity toward the families of the victims, many of whom were interviewed by the filmmakers and gave their approval of the finished film. John Farmer, senior counsel to the 9/11 Commission, said *United 93* was 'closer to the truth than every account the government put out before the 9/11 Commission's investigation', implying that narrative truth was the film's goal.[28] Despite its makers' insistence upon their painstaking efforts at veracity however, *United 93* is necessarily speculative in much of its account. No footage of the hijacking and subsequent revolt exists, nor any survivors to serve as witnesses. The Report is itself a construct including elements of speculation in its accounts of the hijacking and of the organisation and effectiveness of the passenger rebellion. As the official narrative of 9/11 the Report both acknowledges and somewhat downplays the speculations it includes. *United 93*, however, can take advantage of its status as a Hollywood film in order to acknowledge tensions between objectivity and completion, documentation and narration, history and entertainment, that the Report has to downplay. As an institution Hollywood traditionally has a more flexible approach to such tensions, and this very flexibility allows *United 93* to encode the governmentality of the Report in ways that the Report itself cannot. The film is free to trade historical veracity for affective intensity whilst yet promoting a certain model of 'the conduct of conduct' to its audience. In fact the film both echoes and competes with the narrative enshrined in the Report, trading some of its putative objectivity for a level of affective immediacy impossible within the constraints of an official document. As Greengrass said, 'Film can take you there in a way that published reports can't'.[29]

United 93 nonetheless sticks fairly closely to the Report's version of events. The opening counterpoints the hijackers' final preparations with scenes of the passengers boarding the plane. The audience's knowledge of what is to come imparts pathos to decisions to switch flights for birthdays or anniversaries, and frantic dashes to make the flight. Tension rises as the authorities lose contact with first one, then another aeroplane. We follow the confusion as they struggle to keep up with the fast-unfolding situation, and share their horror as they realise that this is an orchestrated attack using airliners as weapons. The film cuts back and forth between civilian and military control centres and the interior of UA93, where the

[27] Ibid.

[28] Jean-Paul Flintoff, 'United 93', *Sunday Times* (London, 21 May 2006), section Culture, p. 6.

[29] Flintoff.

passengers are oblivious to the disaster unfolding around them. Shortly after the second plane hits the World Trade Center, the hijackers take control of UA93 and turn toward Washington. The passengers, at first frightened and compliant, learn of the other hijackings and their tragic results through phone calls made to people on the ground. As the military struggle to co-ordinate any effective response the passengers and crew realise the hijackers are on a suicide mission and outside help is unavailable. In desperation they formulate a plan to retake control of the plane and perhaps land it safely. Amidst tearful goodbye calls a group charges the cockpit, killing at least one hijacker and using the food trolley as a battering ram to breach the cockpit door. In the desperate struggle for the controls the hijackers crash the plane in a field. Everyone on board is killed, although the crash itself is not shown; the screen cuts to black at the point of impact, followed shortly by a dedication to the passengers and crew before the credits roll.

United 93 was positioned by its makers and reviewers as both document and memorial. The film ends with a roll call of the dead of Flight 93 and a dedication to 'the memory of all those who lost their lives on September 11th, 2001'. Universal Studios donated 10% of the film's first weekend gross to the Flight 93 memorial fund. The press notes issued for the film assert that 'Greengrass wanted to commemorate the lives lost […] that day'.[30] Asserting that *United 93* 'is best understood as a memorial', Dennis Lim suggested that Greengrass 'may yet emerge as the Maya Lin of cine-memorialists'.[31] Nonetheless, *United* 93's claim to memorial status gave rise to considerable controversy. The film became a *de facto* referendum on Hollywood and the role of entertainment and commerce in public rituals of commemoration. Those critical of the film felt that cinema's role as a commercial entertainment medium invalidated its claim to memorial status. They maintained that the profit motive would inevitably outweigh the necessity of faithful representation of the facts, and the memory of the passengers' sacrifice would be corrupted in order to produce a more entertaining film. Those supportive of the film's commemorative claim, 'framed the film more as a memorial than a movie'.[32] It was seen as a sensitive, morally serious portrayal which maintained an overall fidelity to the factual record. As Jordan argues, 'The film either transcended or succumbed to Hollywood's excesses,

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[30] Stephanie Zacharek, 'United 93', *Salon*, 2006 <http://www.salon.com/topic/911/> [accessed 27 July 2012].

[31] Dennis Lim, 'A Flight to Remember', *Village Voice*, 2006 <http://www.villagevoice.com/2006-04-11/film/a-flight-to-remember/> [accessed 27 July 2012].

[32] Jordan, p. 206.

providing viewers with reasons for accepting or refusing the film as memorial on this question alone'.[33]

Positive reviewers emphasised the film's respectful fidelity to the historical record enshrined in the Report. Several maintained that watching the film restored a sense of agency to viewers, cathartically allowing them to relive the trauma of 9/11 in the safe space of the cinema: 'the audience's act of witnessing was characterized as courageous, and the reaction promised to be personally edifying because it was intentional and purposeful'.[34] Thus the spectator is coded as courageous not only through his identification with the passengers but in his initial decision to see the film. Negative reviewers denied the possibility of catharsis, or argued that they were not yet ready for such an experience or that the cinema was an inappropriate medium. They also cited the speculative nature of the film's account as a flaw destructive of its claim to memorial status.[35] The film's decision to show the passengers breaking into the cockpit was one of three significant deviations from the *Report's* account, in each case implicitly presenting these scenarios as fact. The Report concludes that 'Jarrah's objective was to crash the airliner into symbols of the American Republic, the Capitol or the White House', but refuses to speculate further.[36] In the film, we see the lead hijacker and pilot Jarrah pin a photograph of the US Capitol to the flight deck, suggesting it is the hijackers' target. Secondly, as mentioned above the film shows the passengers entering the cockpit, whereas the Report considers this unlikely. Finally, the film significantly alters the chronology surrounding a radio message from the hijacked American Airlines Flight 11, which would be flown into the North Tower of the World Trade Center. The message is carefully analysed, revealing that the voice says "We have some planes"; the plural indicates a coordinated multiple hijacking. Whereas this message was actually decoded after both planes had hit the World Trade Center, the film increases narrative tension by having it decoded before their impact and just after UA93 has taken off.[37] The film thus alters, in the name of entertainment, the details of the moment the authorities realised they were not faced with an 'ordinary' hijacking. The alteration involves a fragment of recorded speech from the cockpit of a hijacked plane: the main source for the film's account and the warrant of its documentary authenticity. *United 93* thus makes precisely the kind of compromise with commercial interests decried as inevitable by those sceptical of its capacity to serve as a medium of public commemoration.

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[33] Ibid.
[34] Jordan, p. 210.
[35] Jordan, pp. 216–218.
[36] National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, p. 14.
[37] Stephen Prince, *Firestorm: American Film in the Age of Terrorism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), p. 110.

On both sides of the debate, therefore, 'United 93 became not just a film, but a gauge of the nation's sensibilities'.[38] Questions of memorial propriety and documentary authenticity were interlinked. The film was 'a cathartic act of bearing witness, an experiment in therapeutic re-enactment, an anti-procedural, a meditation on the agonizing limits of communication — and a memorial'.[39] As Redfield puts it, the film's ostentatiously documentary visual rhetoric betokens 'a desire for an antitheatrical, antisublime, and above all anti-"Hollywood" literalism: a literalism that, in its necessary failure [...] seeks to become the sign of memorial authenticity'.[40] The issue of the very theatricality of this absorptive anti-theatricality brings us back to Bolter and Grusin's concept of remediation, whereby the film text presents a carefully staged and heavily mediated version of immediacy. Remediation complicates the framing opposition between absorption and theatricality in the rhetoric surrounding the film. *United 93* encourages absorption through the erasure of traces of its manufacture as a fiction film. The entire apparatus of scriptwriting, casting, rehearsal and performance, lighting, filming, editing, and all the machinery of projection and display of the image, are erased to produce a powerful sense of immediacy. At the same time it is theatrical inasmuch as it bears certain traces of its mediation openly; it is crucial that the viewer notice the shaky camera, occasionally inaudible dialogue and sudden editing, but also that they attribute it to a camera transparently recording a diegetic reality, and not to a massive cinematic apparatus constructing that reality. It might then be said that *United 93* theatricalises absorption.

United 93 adopts a quasi-documentary mode in order to warrant its claim toward memorial status. The film therefore embodies a certain tension between the modes of documentary and memorial. Documentary aims toward an ideal of transparency, the simple recording of events wherein the process of mediation is effaced. Memorial is concerned to tell a story *about* the event in question, to provoke a particular response in its audience; as Lim says of *United 93*, 'it not only tells us we should never forget but also illustrates how we should remember'.[41] The film thus participates in the discourse of governmentality. Public acts of commemoration are one field in which governmentality as 'the conduct of conduct' is visible. Memorialisation interpellates its audience as part of an imagined national, cultural, religious or ethnic community which recognises itself through the act of remembering. Judith Butler makes a similar claim when she argues that grief 'furnishes a sense of political community', for it

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[38] Jordan, p. 219.

[39] Gavin Smith, 'Rules of Engagement: United 93', *Film Comment*, 2006 <http://www.filmcomment.com/article/united-93-paul-greengrass-review> [accessed 13 January 2013].

[40] Redfield, p. 41.

[41] Lim.

reveals 'something that delineates the ties we have to others, that shows us that these ties constitute what we are'.[42]

The practice of communal self-recognition through identification with an image is powerfully illustrated by the final scene of the television film *Flight 93*. The film ends with a time-lapse crane shot of the crash site shown 'healing' as the seasons change, overtly performing this visualising function (Figure 16 - Figure 19). It is preceded by a montage showing the different families as they come together to mourn their loss. Several generations are present, from grandparents to babies. Tom Burnett's wife and Mark Bingham's mother turn off television news reports and turn toward their families. Mourning is shown as a private, intra-familial ritual prior to a shot which frames that same process as public and communal, enacted through identification with the image of the crash site. This 'healing scar' stands in for the crater at Ground Zero in Manhattan, in 2006 still an open construction site. The overlaid memorial text on the crash site shot makes its function as an image of remembrance explicit (Figure 21). The entire sequence is accompanied by a swelling, sentimental score recalling fictional melodramas, which unabashedly directs the spectator's affective response. Forming a kind of epilogue, the sequence models the remembrance of 9/11, metonymically encoding the rhetorical purpose of the film as a whole. It does so by making an implied link between landscape and nation, between the crash site and the 'imagined community' which calls itself into being through this act of mourning and self-recognition.[43] The shot is infused with Christian motifs: sunlight cutting through trees; the pan upwards to a sunlit sky; the 'god's eye view' of the crash site offered to the spectator. Such iconography commonly encodes a Romantic identification of natural beauty with the experience of the divine. Here the landscape serves to naturalise the cultural (the American nation) in the presence of the divine. The crash site becomes an obvious metaphor for the nation which, the sequence implies, has been gravely wounded but will return to full health in time, even if it will always bear the scar of 9/11.

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[42] Butler, p. 22.

[43] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 2006).

Figure 16: *Flight 93;* the crash site as 'Ground Zero'.

Figure 17: *Flight 93;* 'autumn' - the crash site as a scar on the landscape.

Figure 18: *Flight 93;* 'winter' - the scar begins to heal.

Figure 19: *Flight 93;* 'spring' - the scar healed, the landscape restored.

Landscape imagery has long served as a site of national self-recognition, in America as much as anywhere. From Frederic Edwin Church and Thomas Cole through Ansel Adams and John Ford to Terrence Malick, the American landscape has been visualised overtly or implicitly as a symbol of national identity, most commonly via the grandeur of the West but also in the

forests and industry of the East. There has often been a strongly utopian aspect to such visualisations, especially during the nineteenth century. Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze's 1861 mural *Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way*, which hangs in the US Capitol building, presents the unmatched grandeur of the landscape of the American West as a suitably magnificent setting for the fulfilment of Manifest Destiny (Figure 20). Cole's series *The Course of Empire* (1834-36) sought to place American national ambitions within a history of imperial growth, decadence and decline through the representation of its landscape. At this point in American history the rhetorical associations of landscape were oriented mainly toward the future, in contrast to the classical tradition of European landscape exemplified by Claude Lorrain, which harked back to an imagined Arcadian past.

Figure 20: Emanuel Gottlieb Leutze, *Westward the Course of Empire Takes its Way,* 1861. Mural, 610 x 910 cm. United States Capitol, Washington, D.C.

The attributes claimed for the American nation via its landscape have been many and varied, but freedom, vitality, variety and honesty have often been prominent amongst them. The mythical representation of the American landscape has tended toward one of two paradigms; either as the Garden of Eden (the forested landscapes of the East, and Yellowstone) or as primitive and untamed wilderness (the frontier landscape of the West and Southwest). The

two strands connect in the interpretation of the American landscape as granting its occupants a moral purity unavailable to Europeans. As Denis Cosgrove puts it:

> While the broad axe and the steel plough might subdue [the American landscape], the experience of being in it would purify human society, a theme which Frederick Jackson Turner would later take as the guiding principle of American history, an ideology that fused European romanticism and American homespun into a justification of a continental imperialism.[44]

The Romantic idea of the physically and morally restorative power of landscape runs through American culture from Walt Whitman and Thoreau to John Huston to the far-right militias of the 1990s. Thus the American imaginary, via its landscape, has been commonly imbued with the potential to start over, to re-imagine the relationship of culture to nature freed from the historical and social constraints of the Old World. Placed in this historical context, *Flight 93*'s final crash site image harks back to the early republican era, when the newly emergent nation sought to construct a sense of national identity rooted in its people's relationship to the land. The invocation of landscape in this shot serves to stabilise the image of America as a sovereign entity possessed of social, ideological and historical consistency, both with itself and with its own image of itself. Where once America represented the chance of a regained utopia for Europeans, this scene promises the recovery of its utopian status for Americans themselves. Together with the images of the family group spanning several generations (and with young children and babies figuring both the nation's vulnerability and its utopian hope for the future), the crash site shot functions as a memorial to the fallen, a recognition of loss, and a promise that the nation will recover and endure. The inclusion of 'epitaph' text over the image at the very end of the film implies not simply that the crash site is a place of pilgrimage, a national memorial akin to a battlefield (this was already well established by the time of the film's release), but that *the film itself* is such a memorial. In watching the film and this sequence in particular the viewer commemorates the fallen heroes of Flight 93.

However, the rhetorical overdetermination of the crash site in *Flight 93* is so obvious as to undermine its effectiveness, and ultimately highlights the aestheticisation of the film's account. In terms of visual rhetoric, in this shot the film overplays its hand. Rather than placing the film beyond the political in an uncomplicated relation to national memory, the overt aestheticisation of the post-crash sequence in *Flight 93* highlights the governmentality of the film's representation, its recuperation of the story to a national ideology.

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[44] Denis E. Cosgrove, *Social Formation and Symbolic Landscape* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), p. 186.
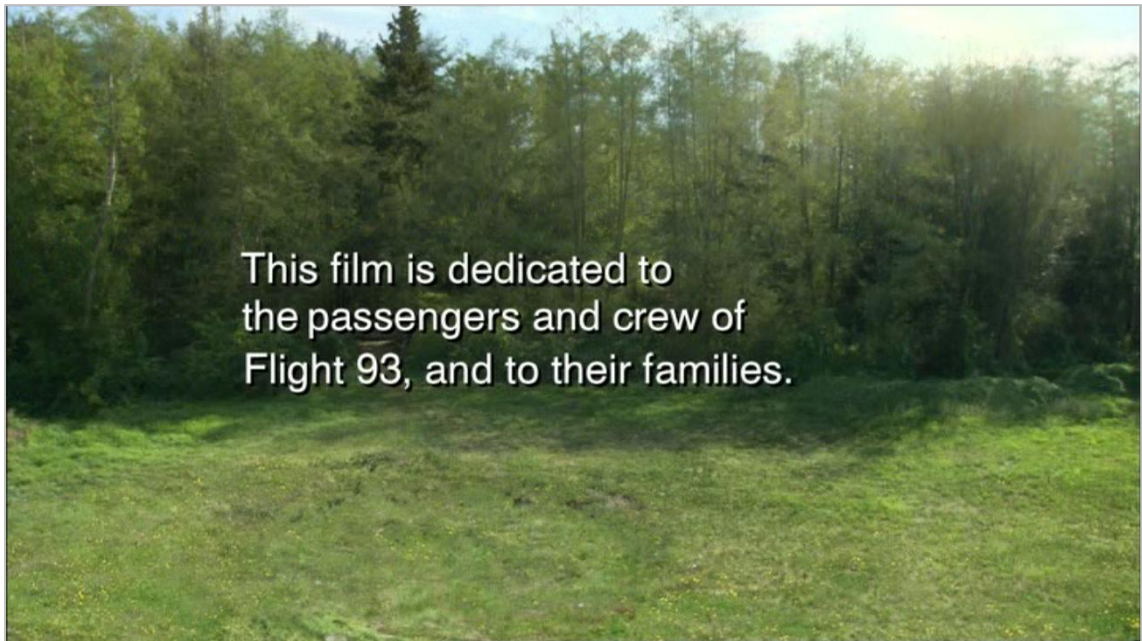
Figure 21: *Flight 93;* the dedication superimposed on the 'healed' landscape.

United 93 does not in fact include any crash sequence; the film ends with a cut to a black screen at the point of impact. There follows a series of white-on-black intertitles summarising events after the crash, and a dedication to 'the memory of all those who lost their lives on September 11th, 2001'. There is no roll-call of the passengers' and crewmembers' names. It is striking that a film which attempts to provide a visual archive of the Flight 93 story includes no image of that story's ending, a moment which, unlike the crash of UA175, is missing from the visual archive of 9/11. Greengrass may have felt that to recreate the crash from the 'eye level' viewpoint the film adopts would simply have been too traumatic in a film the mere existence of which made many people uneasy. More importantly, the omission of a crash scene heightens the film's immediacy. To film it from outside the plane would have destroyed the absorption to which the film aspires; the omission dramatically, even traumatically, cuts short the spectator's involvement at the point of impact. Below I shall argue that the staging of the narrative as an experience of virtual trauma is part of the film's distinctive appeal.

The omission of any post-impact sequence from *United 93* does not, however, mean that the film does not offer a model of remembrance. The discourses of governmentality and commemoration are no less insistent within it, if more subtly presented. In fact the capacity of *United 93* to induce the recognition of communal identity encouraged by the final scene of *Flight 93* was one of the factors at stake in the controversy surrounding the film. As Jordan recognises, 'the "public" […] was revealed to be a collection of individuals' witnessing

separately in theatres, not a collective national body of citizens recognising themselves as such; 'critics did not argue that *United 93* would bring people together, but that it would help individuals cope'.[45] It allowed viewers to 'relive' the experience of the victims and so claim a kind of virtual victimhood, legitimating whatever 'virtual trauma' they may have suffered by locating it in a powerfully embodied experience of spectatorship. It also offered a compensatory fantasy of resistance, going beyond the established facts in order to do so. The Report regards as unlikely the possibility that the passengers breached the cockpit door. By showing the passengers entering the cockpit *United 93* grants them a more active part in foiling the hijackers than may have been the case. It also produces a highly overdetermined image of passengers and hijackers fighting for control of the plane. Greengrass himself referred to this scene as 'a fight for the controls of our world', echoing the 'clash of civilisations' narrative prevalent in the aftermath of 9/11.[46] In this scene an historical and cultural conflict is staged as an existential one. There is also another layer of conflict between authenticity and commerce, or truth and entertainment. This scene encapsulates the tension between the demands of documentary fidelity and entertainment which the film struggles to hold in place. In the shot of passengers and hijackers struggling for control of the aircraft, *United 93* seems to finally diverge from the Report's version of events and opt for visceral entertainment over documentary veracity. The shot also focuses the film's operation as a site of governmentality, offering a model for affective engagement and public conduct. The film's portrayal of the 'citizen soldiers' narrative is not merely a dramatisation of real events; however subtly, it presents an exemplary case of patriotism and exhorts its audience to learn from the passengers' example. In a column entitled 'Civic Duty: Go See *United 93'*, George F. Will of the *Washington Post* writes: 'The message of this movie is: We are all potential soldiers. And we all may be, at any moment, at the war's front, because in this war the front can be anywhere'.[47] The film also allows us to believe that, had we been on UA93, we *would* have been 'citizen soldiers'; we would have sacrificed ourselves to protect our country, or at least risked our lives in order to thwart a terrorist atrocity. *United 93* thus invokes a powerful strand of American national mythology — that of the citizen militia defending freedom — in order to screen the traumatic memory of 9/11 by reframing a traumatic collective experience of loss

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[45] Jordan, p. 210.

[46] Greengrass director's commentary; Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (London: Free Press, 2002).

[47] George F. Will, 'Civic Duty: Go See "United 93"', *Washington Post*, 7 May 2006 <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/05/05/AR2006050501661.html> [accessed 3 August 2012]. Note the dislocation in Will's assertion that 'the front can be anywhere'.

and vulnerability as a story of heroic resistance and sacrifice.[48] In doing so it offers models of exemplary conduct under extreme conditions and of appropriate mourning of the victims of 9/11.

'As if it were real'

So far we have explored the operation of governmentality in the debates surrounding *United 93* and in the visual rhetoric of the film itself. We have traced the interweaving of documentary authenticity and the governmentality of memorial, and the way in which the latter both depends upon the former and is in tension with it. Now we shall examine the slippage between representation and repetition evident in the version of screen performance sought by Greengrass from his cast, and in the rhetoric of trauma structuring many reviews of the film.

Paul Greengrass is a director of mainstream action movies such as *The Bourne Supremacy* (2004) and *The Bourne Ultimatum* (2007), but his background is in politically-inflected television documentary and docudrama. He directed *The Murder of Stephen Lawrence* (1999) and *Bloody Sunday* (2002) for ITV in Britain. Both were docudrama retellings of politically controversial and historically significant miscarriages of justice, based heavily on eyewitness testimony, court records and other official documents. In much the same manner *United 93* was based on the 9/11 Commission Report and the testimony of victims' families, with whom over a hundred interviews were conducted in order to compile a dossier on each passenger which was then given to the actors.[49]

Greengrass went to great lengths to achieve a sense of documentary credibility for *United 93*, employing faux-documentary camerawork, sound and editing techniques. There is little characterisation of individual passengers; we know as much about them as they do about each other, not least because the action unfolds in near-real time. No context is given beyond the cutaways to civilian and military control centres, and there are no external shots once the plane is airborne. The aeroplane interiors were filmed in a disused Boeing 757 fuselage mounted on gimbals, while the screens in the control room sets replayed real data from

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[48] Elaine Scarry, 'Who Defended the Country?', in *Terror, Culture, Politics: Rethinking 9/11* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), pp. 184–205.

[49] David Usborne, 'Courage on a Day of Death', *Independent*, 27 April 2006, section News, p. 16.

9/11.[50] Greengrass shot the film using two handheld cameras with staggered reload times, allowing extended takes of almost an hour which encouraged the actors' absorption in their roles. According to Greengrass 'it enabled all these actors […] to relive a total experience which we then recorded as if it were live'.[51] As mentioned above, nine cast members including Sliney and Fox were 'playing themselves', blurring the line between reconstruction and re-enactment. The 483 visual effects are concealed in accordance with the film's prioritisation of verisimilitude.[52] Greengrass explained that 'the watchword […] was that they be completely thrown away, completely not the centre of your attention'.[53] The tight framing, crosstalk and kinetic camerawork persuasively frame the film as documentary, the narrative recorded rather than constructed. The avoidance of shot-reverse shot structures and real-time presentation construct what Weber calls a 'unitary point of view', an address to the spectator 'in the first person' that encourages a high degree of absorption within the diegesis.[54] The visual and narrative structuring of the film in accordance with documentary conventions thus situates the viewer as a virtual participant in the action, effacing the production of this effect by conventions involving camerawork, sound mixing and editing. This was recognised by reviewers, for whom the film was 'intensely realistic', 'an exercise in immersive cinema' and 'a believable if harrowing depiction of that awful day', which evoked 'a genuine sense of live information capture'.[55] For Roger Ebert, 'To watch *United 93* is to be confronted with the grim, chaotic reality of that September day in 2001'.[56] The film clearly succeeded in Greengrass' aim of allowing the audience 'to walk through 9/11 at eye level'. As one critic put it, 'The handheld camera is an active participant in everything that's going on'.[57] If anything *United 93* allots the film's starring role to the spectator himself.[58] By placing the spectator at the centre of its

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[50] Flintoff. The screens thus 'play themselves' in similar fashion to the archive footage of UA175 hitting the towers.

[51] Greengrass director's commentary. See also; Flintoff; Marks.

[52] Marks.

[53] Greengrass, director's commentary.

[54] Cynthia Weber, pp. 148–149.

[55] Oliver Burkeman, 'The day they hijacked America', *Guardian*, 26 January 2007, section Film <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2006/apr/28/1> [accessed 3 August 2012]; Ben Walters, 'United 93', *Time Out [London]*, 2006 <http://www.timeout.com/film/reviews/83402/united_93.html> [accessed 3 August 2012]; Claudia Puig, 'Wrenching "United 93" is Harrowing in its Realism', *USA Today*, 26 April 2006, section Inside Life <http://www.usatoday.com/life/movies/reviews/2006-04-24-united-93_x.htm> [accessed 3 August 2012]; Marks.

[56] Roger Ebert, 'United 93', *rogerebert.com*, 2006 <http://rogerebert.suntimes.com/apps/pbcs.dll/article?AID=/20060427/REVIEWS/60419006> [accessed 3 August 2012].

[57] David Denby, 'United 93', *The New Yorker*, 2006 <http://www.newyorker.com/arts/reviews/film/united_93_greengrass> [accessed 2 August 2012].

[58] As the film's 'hero', the spectator occupies a slightly different position to that of Thomas Carlyle's Hero discussed in Chapter 1. Carlyle's Hero, removed from the theatre of operations, can visualise it as a

narrative the film structures public memory of 9/11 around a fantasy of effective action rather than the helplessness felt at the time. However, positioning the spectator as active participant rather than passive observer encourages a slippage from one who listens to testimony to one who recounts testimony: from spectator to survivor. Such instability in the audience's position is elsewhere a concern for Dominick LaCapra, who reproaches the canonical trauma theory of Felman and Caruth for encouraging over-identification such that the victim's position is effectively usurped by the audience. The question of the viewer's problematic identification as a passenger in *United 93* will be explored in greater detail below.

The avoidance of recognisable stars was a key factor in the construction of the film's powerful reality effect. Greengrass used non-actors 'playing themselves' in several key roles: 'I put real people into the film […] because that's a way of encoding a certain degree of accountability'.[59] The point of using non-actors is their indexical connection with the events being dramatised. As with the use of archive footage of the impact of UA175 on the World Trade Center, the use of non-actors imparts to *United 93* a *frisson* of the real, a tangible connection to the event similar to that noted by Barthes when looking at a photograph of Napoleon's brother: 'I am looking at eyes that looked at the Emperor'.[60] The mixed cast of actors and non-actors was filmed with unusually long takes, blurring the distinction between acting and acting-out: 'I felt it was no longer acting, it was no longer make believe. They were reliving these events at some quite profound level for us'.[61] Not only did the long takes allow the non-actors to forget the cameras and 'be themselves', they did the same for the professional actors. According to Greengrass the technique 'enabled all these actors […] to relive a total experience which we then recorded as if it were live. And I think that's at the heart of why this film feels so real, to me anyway'.[62] The 'as if' plays an important yet unstable role here. For if all the participants are reliving 'a total experience […] as if it were live', what is the difference between the actors' performances and those who are 'playing themselves'? And what exactly does it mean to 'play oneself' in a film? All forms of realism are constructions; reality is not 'out there' waiting to be apprehended, but must be produced by varying sets of conventions. This is the point of Žižek's argument about the overwhelming desire of twentieth-century aesthetics for an encounter with a Real which exists outside of mediation, and which 'culminates in its apparent opposite,

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totality and thus exert a degree of control over it. The heroes of UA93 relied on information conveyed via telephone in order to grasp the severity of their situation, but were able to influence it thanks to their position at the centre of the action.

[59] Greengrass, quoted in Flintoff.
[60] Barthes, p. 3.
[61] Greengrass, director's commentary.
[62] Ibid.

in a *theatrical spectacle*', of which 9/11 is for Žižek the paradigmatic contemporary example.[63] Greengrass cannot admit that the cinematic realism he is at pains to emphasise is the product of a series of formal and technical conventions. Greengrass chooses a realism of absorption over a theatricality which would acknowledge the film's constructed nature, for example by sudden freeze frames, jump cuts or breaking the 'fourth wall' convention, as in many *nouvelle vague* films. Where once they highlighted the film's theatricality, such effects now signify realism through their association with documentary film.[64]

The use of non-professionals alongside actors has a long tradition in realist cinema, often with the aim of achieving a more 'honest' portrayal of ordinary life. The issue of performance is particularly vexed in docudrama (or 'drama-documentary'), the hybrid nature of which both blurs and sustains distinctions between fact and fiction, recording and construction. According to Stella Bruzzi, in the 'realist aesthetic' of docudrama, 'the role of performance is, paradoxically, to draw the audience into the reality of the situations being dramatised, to authenticate the fictionalisation'.[65] In other words, the actor's performance is a simulation which works to establish the authenticity of the narrative by dissimulating itself *as* performance. The use of people 'playing themselves' takes this argument a step further, on the assumption that the witness is best placed to convey the truth of the situation being restaged. This neglects the fact that, in practice, such non-actors often appear wooden and self-conscious on camera; playing oneself is not as simple as it sounds, and often a trained actor can do a better job.

Greengrass' comments on the filming of *United 93* suggest that all the actors were made to 'relive' the event 'as if it were live'. The extended take thus produces a kind of virtuality in which both actors and non-actors react 'as if' not performing. Yet at the same time the rationale for using actors is that they can deliver a more convincing performance than the amateur. Their performance mediates narrative in such a way as to produce a sense of immediacy. Greengrass himself seems to acknowledge the slippage around the question of performance when he explains, 'The real people guide the scene, and the actors are like tools to build up the intensity. You can't say to a non-actor that you need them to get up to the next

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[63] Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, p. 9.
[64] To acknowledge the constructed nature of his film Greengrass could perhaps have cast a major star whose persona would have overwhelmed the narrative and had the necessary *Verfremdungseffekt*. Nicolas Cage's presence in *World Trade Center* has a similar effect, although there it is probably unintentional.
[65] Quoted in Ward, p. 192.

level. But an actor can set the pace'.[66] Let us note the tension between the 'real people' who 'guide the scene' and the actors who 'set the pace'. Then we may observe that the use of actors to 'build up the intensity' implicitly admits that the film follows a logic of entertainment and suspense, which builds upon yet ultimately overrides that of documentary authenticity, mirroring the anxieties of critics over whether the commercial logic of Hollywood would trump and thereby debase the memorial imperative.

Bill Nichols uses the term 'virtual performance' to describe 'the ways in which *any* of us can be said to be performing as social actors during interactions'.[67] The reason Sliney gives such a good performance in *United 93* may be that he is not consciously performing at all — or at least no more so than he always does in his role as FAA National Operations Manager or any of the other roles he inhabits, often simultaneously, just like the rest of us. Drawing on the work of Foucault, Luce Irigaray and Judith Butler, Nichols suggests that we all constantly perform our own identities in our daily lives. These identities are not necessarily cohesive or consistent: they may alter according to social, psychological or cultural determinants, and one cannot necessarily be privileged over another as 'true'. 'Playing oneself' in the context of *United 93* seems to mean inhabiting the role one occupied at the time of the attacks, rather than exposing some 'authentic' underlying identity. It undermines the privileging of authenticity upon which Greengrass' use of non-actors seems to be based, for if I am playing myself, which self is the source of the supposed authenticity of my performance: the one playing or the one played? The iteration involved quickly opens onto a Derridean *mise-en-abyme*. Can the two be separated? The logic of using 'real people' in docudrama suggests they cannot, or at least that the two can be made to overlap as closely as possible. Yet if this is so, are the non-actors in *United 93* effectively reliving their own trauma for the benefit of a paying audience?

Virtual performance subverts the distinction between truth and fiction, offering a performance which is not one, or which does not know that it is. According to Nichols, 'Virtual performance presents the logic of actual performance without signs of conscious awareness that this presentation is an act'.[68] Sliney's performance is impressive in its lack of 'self-consciousness', apparently granting access to his thoughts and emotions. Documentary often privileges characters who can convincingly 'be themselves' before camera in an emotionally revealing manner; their habitual performance of self apparently reveals their interior life, making that

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[66] Quoted in Flintoff.
[67] Ward, p. 193.
[68] Bill Nichols, *Representing Reality: Issues and Concepts in Documentary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), p. 122.

performance appear real by staging itself legibly for the spectator.[69] Like a trained actor, Sliney 'imparts signs of interiority through nuances of look, gesture, tone, inflection, pacing, movement', but does so apparently unselfconsciously.[70] Furthermore, if Sliney does not know he is acting — performing himself — it is important for the film's claim to authenticity (at least for Greengrass) that the spectator knows that he is *not* acting. On the other hand, the spectator's knowledge that some of the cast are 'playing themselves' interferes with the fiction that everybody is playing him- or herself in a documentary. The effort to ensure that the cast 'relive a total experience […] as if it were live' introduces an element of virtuality which both heightens the 'reality effect' of *United 93* and exposes instability in the model of screen performance supporting the distinction between actors and non-actors.

The transfer between simulation and repetition in the cast's performances is echoed in reviews of *United 93*. Many deployed a rhetoric of bodily affect to frame the film as a physical, embodied experience and even as an ordeal. *USA Today* called it 'unflinching, powerfully visceral and haunting', 'palpably tense and uncomfortable to watch but nonetheless compelling' and 'undeniably the most gut-wrenching and captivating film released this year'.[71] Manohla Dargis in the *New York Times* found it 'good, in a temple-pounding, sensory-overloading way that can provoke tears and a headache'.[72] *Film Comment* found it 'a stark, wrenching and overwhelming viewing experience'.[73] The *Independent* described the film's realism as 'unadorned and merciless'.[74] The tendency was most pronounced in the *Guardian*'s review, which called the film 'a gutwrenching example of ordeal cinema' which attempts 'to face, directly, the terrible moment itself'. Reviewer Peter Bradshaw promised, 'when the lights go down, your heart-rate will inexorably start to climb. After almost half an hour I was having difficulty breathing' and admitted, 'I needed to lie down in a darkened room afterwards'.[75] Such (literally) breathless rhetoric not only suggests Greengrass achieved his ambitions for the film; it both adopts and disavows the appeal to bodily affect common in reviews and promotional material for thrillers and what Linda Williams has called 'body genres': horror, melodrama and pornography. Like Greengrass himself, reviewers judged the film's success

[69] Nichols, p. 120.
[70] ibid.
[71] Puig.
[72] Manohla Dargis, 'Defiance Under Fire: Paul Greengrass's Harrowing "United 93"', *New York Times* (New York, 28 April 2006) <http://movies.nytimes.com/2006/04/28/movies/28unit.html> [accessed 3 August 2012].
[73] Smith.
[74] Usborne.
[75] Peter Bradshaw, 'United 93', *Guardian*, 2 June 2006, section Film <http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2006/jun/02/1> [accessed 3 August 2012].

according to its capacity to generate intense emotional and even physical involvement. Ordinarily such powerful affect is coded as pleasurable, yet the real suffering depicted in *United 93* renders such associations literally unspeakable. Reviewers describe the thrill of watching *United 93* but cannot admit to being entertained by it. As such, the film was framed as trauma: 'This was not a film to be enjoyed, they argued; it was an experience to be endured'.[76] The rhetoric of trauma allows for emotional intensity but separates it from associations with enjoyment. Hence we see a striking number of reviews describe *United 93* as 'unbearable' or difficult to watch, yet also compelling, epitomised by *Time*'s description of the film as 'unbearable – and unmissable'.[77] The film's appeal as visceral, sensational entertainment is here coded as the production of traumatic affect.

The rhetoric of embodiment recognises that the docudrama approach ultimately conflates viewers and passengers, as it 'transforms viewers of *United 93* into not only witnesses to what occurred on that plane but into survivors of the event itself'.[78] The audience are 'survivors in the virtual sense because they have access to the virtual reality of what occurred that day'.[79] The film thus risks inducing a form of virtual trauma in presenting the passengers' experiences as if they were the viewers' own. This would seem to support anxieties around the over-identification with victims of trauma for which trauma theory has been much criticised. Dominick LaCapra has written of the distinction between 'empathic unsettlement' which calls attention to processes of mediation, and over-identification which ultimately disenfranchises the victims of trauma (this is the objection raised against Caruth regarding her students' viewing of Holocaust testimonial videos, mentioned in Chapter 1). The crucial question for LaCapra involves the kind of identification which takes place in the secondary witness: here, the spectator of *United 93*. Empathic unsettlement 'involves a kind of virtual experience through which one puts oneself in the other's position while recognising the difference of that position and hence not taking the other's place'.[80] In the reviews of *United 93* that separation of victim and spectator, primary and secondary witness, seems in danger of collapsing thanks to reviewers' reluctance to frame their response in terms of enjoyment. In the reviews of *United 93* the film itself is framed as a site of trauma which, in line with Caruth's and Felman's theories, is capable of transmitting that trauma directly to the spectator. Such a trauma could

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[76] Jordan, p. 202.
[77] Richard Corliss, 'Let's Roll! Inside the Making of United 93', *Time*, 2006, 70–74.
[78] Cynthia Weber, p. 150.
[79] Ibid.
[80] LaCapra, p. 78.

be described as virtual inasmuch as it 'exceeds the difference between real and unreal'.[81] The unsettlement the film induces in its audience, exemplified by Bradshaw's reaction ('I was having difficulty breathing'), is a consequence of their over-identification with the victims: of their identification *as* a victim of trauma. The reviewers' comments seem to displace LaCapra's distinction between desirable empathic unsettlement and undesirable over-identification with the witness by locating the former within the latter. The film risks allowing the spectator to identify as the victim of a non-virtual trauma and so obscuring the specificity of the actual victims' experiences.

If *United 93* risks inducing virtual trauma in the spectator, its visual rhetoric also attests to what I previously called the trauma of the virtual. I argued in Chapter 1 that the increasing virtuality of experience in contemporary media cultures gives rise to a melancholic desire for embodiment that Žižek, following Badiou, calls a 'passion for the Real'. Trauma theory provides one form of access to the Real by grounding identity in the bodily inscription of experience. The rhetoric of trauma in reviews of *United 93* then attests to the desire to reframe the thoroughly mediated event of 9/11 as an immediate physical experience. However, such efforts problematically position the spectator not only as witness but as victim. In offering the chance to 'walk through 9/11 at eye level' *United 93* comes dangerously close to allowing us the status of victims. The film positions the spectator as a virtual participant in the action and so blurs the distinction between spectator and victim of trauma, but this virtual spectatorship is premised upon the simultaneous acknowledgement and disavowal of the film's mediation of the events on board UA93. I want now to look at how this virtuality is played out within the film text itself and undermines the distinctions between authenticity and performance, immediacy and mediation structuring the critical discourse around the film.

A crisis of visuality

United 93 presents 9/11 as a crisis of visuality, a failure of the civil and military agencies of government to visualise the threat they are faced with, target it and respond accordingly. Elaine Scarry has argued that the story of UA93 exemplifies this failure. Faced with a mortal threat, the passengers were able to do what their government could not: recognise the threat

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[81] Redfield, p. 43.

and mobilise an effective defensive strategy, at the cost of their lives.[82] *United 93* compellingly visualises the crisis and subsequent revolt. It also effectively visualises the crisis in the agencies of government. When not on board UA93, the camera switches between the control centres operated by the FAA in Boston, Cleveland and Newark, and the headquarters of NORAD's North East Air Defense Sector (NEADS) in Rome, New York. These spaces are hives of technology directed at mapping a given sector of American airspace, targeting and tracking whatever traffic passes through it, and taking appropriate action in case of any anomalous behaviour in the system. As with the Situation Room, then, these are nodes of visuality in Carlyle's sense of the Hero's capacity to visualise and control the theatre of operations. In fact, with terrible irony, on September 11 2001 NORAD was engaged in a training exercise, *Vigilant Guardian*, 'which postulated a bomber attack from the former Soviet Union'.[83] The virtual bomber attack was swiftly overtaken by a series of real hijackings, whereupon it became obvious that NORAD was poorly prepared to deal with an enemy already inside the territorial United States.

Much of *United 93* takes place in control centres where nobody is in control. Although the upper echelons of government are never seen, the sense of paralysis and lack of communication is palpable as Colonel Marr vainly seeks presidential authorisation to shoot down any aircraft suspected of having been hijacked. The situation facing the authorities is unprecedented. They simply cannot comprehend the theatre of operations in which they are engaged. Their struggle to control events is framed as a struggle to visualise the battlefield. This can only appear in virtual form via the sophisticated technologies of targeting and visualisation upon which both civilian and military agencies rely (Figure 22, Figure 23). The hijackers' genius is to turn the Americans' technical superiority against them. The hijacked airliners are effectively invisible, indistinguishable from the thousands of other onscreen icons, until they start to behave abnormally. Even when the authorities become aware that several planes have been hijacked, they misinterpret the situation, expecting the hijackers to land the planes and bargain for the passengers' lives. The collision of UA175 with the World Trade Center, seen by civilian and military agencies on television, forces them to confront the reality of their situation, emphasises their distance from the action and highlights the spectacular nature of the attack. Although the visual modality of targeting can allow the subject to act at great distances as in the Situation Room photograph, it can also isolate that subject from the

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[82] Scarry.

[83] National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States, p. 20, n. 116.

scene, as happens in *United 93.* In particular the dispersion of the various control centres impedes communication.

Involved in the crisis in a much more direct and threatening way than the civilian and military personnel, the passengers cannot be spectators. Their fevered whispering and swift decision-making contrasts markedly with the bureaucratic inertia and fractured communications of the officials. Nonetheless, for the authorities the television images convey the horror of the situation with an immediacy beyond their sophisticated targeting equipment. This equipment presents a level of detail both overwhelming (there are several thousand planes in US airspace) and insufficient (they cannot see which planes have been hijacked). The machinery of visualisation fails, leaving the authorities unable to effectively target the threat. One problem is that three of the four hijacked aircraft disable the electronic transponder communicating data on the plane's height, bearing and airspeed. No longer presented as legible information, the planes appear instead as a threateningly opaque image, as seen at the beginning of the 'second plane' sequence in *United 93*. By the time the plane itself is visible to the naked eyes of the controllers in Newark it is too late.

Figure 22: *United 93;* technologies of visualisation dominate the NORAD control centre.

Figure 23: *United 93;* FAA air traffic controllers view the 'theatre of operations' via a computerised display.

One memorable moment in *United 93* sees Sliney give the unprecedented order to ground every civilian aircraft in US airspace.[84] This is the culmination of Sliney's attempt to exert control over the airspace under his command. The air traffic controllers are surrounded by digital maps and diagrams of US airspace showing each commercial flight within it. Through the morning the FAA chiefs struggle to retain control of the 'battlefield' represented on their screens. As the situation worsens, the teeming diagrams become an index of the scale of their task: of the difficulty of identifying possible hijackings thanks to the sheer number of aircraft under surveillance. Sliney takes command of the situation, commissioning a list of suspected hijackings which helps to visualise the field of operations, and restricting movement across increasing portions of U.S. airspace, culminating in the order to ground all aircraft and close the airspace to commercial flights. This cutting of the Gordian knot allows the FAA to finally regain control of the skies. Like Thomas Carlyle's Hero, Sliney is able to assert a degree of control by re-envisioning the theatre of operations. In fact it is precisely this capacity which marks him as a hero. Rather than searching for the needles in the haystack, Sliney shifts the terms of the problem toward action, framing the digital icons once again as objects to be controlled rather than signs to be interpreted. The necessary condition for this action is a visualisation of the battlefield.

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[84] This operation involved the grounding of more than 4200 aircraft in a little over two hours. It was carried out without serious problems and represents the sole example of a bureaucratic apparatus functioning impressively on September 11. See Gavin Hewitt, '9/11: Clear the Skies' (BBC 2, 2002) <http://prism.talis.com/sussex-ac/items/695916> [accessed 8 August 2012].

'A conspicuously modern phenomenon'

Visuality as a mode of control – targeting – is therefore a major theme of *United 93*. As noted above, some reviewers made a link between seeing the film and working through the trauma of 9/11. The decision to watch it was presented as a means of reasserting agency over the memory of the event, even though the virtual memory presented by the film is necessarily speculative and limited in scope, and could not possibly belong to any actual viewer. The film's presentation as a real-time, quasi-documentary reconstruction allows for a prodigiously immersive virtual reality, yet simultaneously precludes any political or historical context. The film proposes to answer the question of *how* 9/11 happened, but never *why*. It presents the hijackers as representative of an archaic anti-modernity rather than the counter-modernity radical Islam may in fact articulate. As a result *United 93* cannot present the hijackers as struggling to cope with the same antagonism that structures the film itself: that between an identity secured in self-presence and a modernity in which 'all that is solid melts into air' through the relentlessly dislocating effects of representation.

Greengrass' documentary approach excludes any real access to the characters' psyches: in fact we barely get their names. Even within these constraints, however, the hijackers remain notably enigmatic. We are offered little insight into their motives, beyond the fact that they are devout Muslims who intend to commit mass murder and suicide in the name of Allah. The lead hijacker, Jarrah, is the most developed. He seems to waver before the hijack, which is eventually initiated by his comrades, and he is shown making a goodbye call to his girlfriend before boarding. 'I love you', he tells her, availing himself of the privilege he will deny the other passengers. The most significant characterisation of the hijackers is in the opening scene. They are shown praying before dawn and shaving their bodies in preparation for martyrdom, intercut with images of New York skyscrapers. The montage 'sets up the forces in play on that day; our conspicuous modernity [...] and young men in medieval rapture'.[85] However, during the sequence a shot of a roadside sign reading 'God bless America' is followed by a brief glimpse of the World Trade Center on the horizon, suggesting a more complex relationship between modernity and religion. Both cultures apparently claim divine validation. The sign recalls Manifest Destiny and the exceptionalism that attends the global exercise of American power and fuels the violent reaction to it. Religion comes to the fore again near the film's end. Just prior to the charge on the cockpit passengers and hijackers are juxtaposed in parallel montage, each group praying to different gods and for different ends. The 'clash of

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[85] Greengrass, director's commentary.

civilisations' in the struggle for the aeroplane's controls is thus framed as a clash of Western modernity with Islamic archaism. Yet once again the opposition is not so clear-cut; the non-secular dimension of Western modernity is apparent, as is the technical sophistication of the hijackers. Greengrass has spoken of his desire to portray 'the hijacking of a religion' as well as an aircraft.[86] Yet no context is provided through which the narrative of a hijacking of Islam might be understood; we see only that these men are Muslims and violent. Khalid Abdalla, who plays Jarrah, has spoken of the 'horrible ironies that a Muslim would certainly catch, like saying "In the name of God the merciful and compassionate" when you slit a throat'.[87] However, Jarrah's prayers are not subtitled, rendering it unlikely that many of the film's Western viewers caught the irony or the implication that Jarrah's fanaticism is a perversion of Islam. In fact, although the motivations of the hijackers are not easy to establish, they are unlikely to have been purely religious. Their leader, Muhammad Atta, seems to have been a complex and difficult man. According to Jason Burke, although intensely religious, Atta 'was far less steeped in the culture, tradition and language of Salafi Islam' than many of his comrades.[88] A will left by Atta in Hamburg lacked 'the Quranic and exegetical references that one would expect from someone who was genuinely familiar with the holy texts'.[89] Atta's concerns in his will were primarily ideological and political. Jarrah adopted a Western lifestyle and had a Turkish girlfriend. Neither conforms to the stereotype of the religious fanatic commonly invoked to explain the phenomenon of suicide attacks.

In its presentation of an archaic Islam at war with modernity, *United 93* obscures the modernity of the violent Islamism represented by the hijackers. The *jihadi* ideology of al-Qaeda and other violent Islamist groups is 'a conspicuously modern phenomenon'.[90] It has prospered in those parts of the world where globalised modernity is experienced as a threat to established cultural values, and the violence and cultural and economic disappropriation which so often accompanies it has been most keenly felt. Malise Ruthven cites several studies of Islamist militants from the 1970s to the 1990s, which highlight commonly shared characteristics of background, training and experience. Valerie Hoffman, author of a 1995 study, concludes:

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[86] Ibid.
[87] Quoted in Flintoff.
[88] Jason Burke, *Al-Qaeda: The True Story of Radical Islam* (London: Penguin, 2004), p. 217.
[89] Ibid.
[90] Retort, *Afflicted Powers: Capital and Spectacle in a New Age of War* (London: Verso Books, 2005), p. 142; On the modernity of political Islam see also Malise Ruthven, *A Fury for God: The Islamist Attack on America* (London: Granta, 2004).

> A consistent pattern emerges […] of fundamentalists drawing heavily from students and university graduates in the physical sciences, usually students with rural or traditionally religious backgrounds. These movements seem to attract the recent beneficiaries of the expanded university systems in all of these countries, people who have, therefore, likely made recent adjustments to a modern urban intellectual and cultural environment after being raised in a fairly traditional milieu.[91]

The activist group Retort quote a similar study from 2004; of nearly two hundred Salafists from North Africa and central and southern Asia, 'almost three quarters were college graduates with a secular education, almost half were "professionals" and 70 percent had joined the jihad in a country in which they had not grown up'.[92] This suggests that the antagonism to which Islamism gives vent is rooted in a distinctively modern experience of cultural and physical dislocation. Retort also argue that Islamism responds to the disenfranchisement of the millions exposed to the spectacle of Western modernity but prevented from attaining its material riches for themselves:

> Never before […] have the wretched of the earth existed in such a bewildering and enraging hybrid state, with the imagery of consumer contentment piped directly into slum dormitories rented out by the night, at cutthroat prices, to hopelessly indebted neo-serfs.[93]

Not only are religion, culture and politics deeply intertwined in Islamism, it answers to an antagonism visualised as never before, as images of plenty are beamed into slums. Perhaps it was inevitable, then, that the most significant response of violent Islamism to the modernity it both represents and rejects would be in the mode of spectacle. If Islam provides the language in which a deep-seated rejection of the economic and cultural imperialism of globalised modernity can be articulated, visuality is the terrain on which its war is being waged.

If Islamism responds to distinctively modern economic and cultural conditions, its history and philosophy are equally marked by modernity. The role of European imperialism in the nineteenth century, the collapse of the Ottoman Empire and the failure of Arab nationalism have each influenced its development.[94] Al-Qaeda has arisen from 'the ruin of the secular nation-state, the liquidation of Left politics in the Muslim world (or of critical secularism of

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[91] Quoted in Ruthven, p. 115.
[92] Retort, p. 150.
[93] Retort, p. 173. As both Ruthven and Retort demonstrate, Islamism is a complex and diverse phenomenon, which although supported by only a tiny minority of Muslims, offers an extremist statement of arguments toward which many are sympathetic. Retort cite a 2004 poll conducted amongst 15,000 Saudis, which found that 'only 3 percent supported Bin Laden "as a leader" but 48 percent supported his political rhetoric'; Retort, p. 135 n. 101.
[94] Ruthven, pp. 72–98; Retort, pp. 142–151.

almost any kind), [and] the ongoing disaster of "urbanisation"'.[95] The central political and intellectual influence on contemporary Islamism is Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian writer and teacher imprisoned, tortured and executed by the Nasser government. His most significant work, *Milestones*, is frequently cited in public statements by Bin Laden. 'No backwoods mullah', Qutb was familiar with post-Enlightenment philosophy and Romantic literature, and valued Coleridge particularly highly.[96] His increasing disillusionment with Western culture was confirmed by a sojourn in America, where he was horrified by what he saw as its shallowness and open sexuality.[97] Disgusted by the corruption and decadence of Egyptian society, Qutb espoused complete rejection of the corrosive influence of Western culture, and a regrounding of public life in Quranic teaching. He rejected the clerical monopoly on interpretation of the Quran and Hadith, instigating a democratisation of the religion, albeit one wherein democracy is conceived as universal submission before Allah. This echoes the impetus of many vanguardist political movements of the European counter-Enlightenment, from anarchism to Communism, which framed their programme in terms of an extension of power to the masses. Pointing to the influence on Islamist thinkers of Marx, Nietzsche and Fanon amongst others, Retort argue that its rhetoric of purity notwithstanding, radical Islamism is 'utterly hybrid', employing tactics and strategies which 'borrow heavily from the Marxist canon: vanguardism, anti-imperialism, revolutionary terror, and popular justice'.[98] Al-Qaeda is a vanguardist movement with a complex relation to modernity: 'The vanguard ideal is a modern phenomenon — even, *especially*, in its wish not to be'.[99] In fact Retort argue that 'Insofar as Hardt and Negri's "multitude" has constituted itself, thus far, as an enduring political force, its most visible face is that of the Islamic resistance'.[100]

Al-Qaeda has prospered thanks in part to its mastery of technologies including the internet, video capture, mobile phone communications and the kind of decentred network organisation valorised as a 'rhizome' by Deleuze and Guattari. The identification of Osama Bin Laden as its figurehead should not detract from the fact that al-Qaeda 'was from the start a modern virtual organisation or, more properly, a modern network with a decentralised power structure'.[101] This has enabled it to operate to some extent 'under the radar' of Western intelligence services, and has made it extremely difficult to combat. The 9/11 attacks displayed a

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[95] Retort, pp. 168–169.

[96] Ruthven, p. 94; p. 75. Both Ruthven and Burke provide much more detailed histories of the complex relationship of Islamism and modernity than I can offer here.

[97] Ruthven, pp. 76–81.

[98] Retort, p. 149.

[99] Retort, p. 184.

[100] Retort, p. 159.

[101] Retort, p. 152.

sophisticated understanding of media culture, transport logistics, airport security and the cultural symbolism of the World Trade Center and Pentagon. At least the leading members of each team were highly trained, technically proficient and well-funded, and capable of passing undetected in the United States for long periods. In his use of video and audio messages distributed through Arabic-language television stations and online, Bin Laden displayed a sophisticated understanding of the power of spectacle and celebrity in global media cultures. Radical Islamism is therefore not the archaic opposite of Western modernity but its obscene double, an internal other inseparable from the unfolding history of globalised Western modernity. This is emphasised by Derrida in an exchange conducted shortly after 9/11 and published in 2004, as well as by Baudrillard in his initial response to the attacks.[102] Derrida frames 9/11 as part of an autoimmunitary process, 'that strange behaviour where a living being, in quasi-*suicidal* fashion, "itself" works to destroy its own protection, to immunize itself against its "own" immunity'.[103] The attacks are therefore to be read as an episode in an ongoing history of violence and countervailing repression. Radical Islamism exceeds the difference between inside and outside; it is both internal to modernity and its counter-movement. The introduction of this historical context disturbs the impression given by *United 93* of a 'clash of civilisations' external to each other. Instead, the final struggle for control of the plane becomes a contest to determine the future of 'modernity'.

Presenting presence

Retort raise the intriguing possibility that at least part of the antipathy expressed by Islamist movements is directed toward the dislocating effect of modernity: its lack of presence, symbolised by the simultaneous pervasiveness and intangibility of television. As the paradigmatic example of globalised media culture, MTV offers a good example. It is everywhere and nowhere at once, recognisably American yet increasingly ubiquitous, dedicated to the perpetual celebration of a hypermediated immediacy. The antagonism is fundamental to modernity in its current incarnation and was bound to give birth to a counter-modernity: as Baudrillard puts it, 'Islam was merely the moving front along which the antagonism crystallised'.[104] Retort analyse the extension of consumerism through the

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[102] Borradori; Baudrillard.
[103] Borradori, p. 94; emphasis in original.
[104] Baudrillard, p. 15.

intensification of mediated spectacle: the spectacle, precisely, of consumption itself. In their broadly Marxist analysis, values are increasingly invested in and communicated through commodities, 'with more and more of the commodity action happening in a supercharged, oneiric realm of appearance'.[105] The increasingly spectacular orientation of modernity evacuates the temporal dimension of everyday experience:

> Modernity, particularly in its consumer society manifestation, is less and less able to offer its subjects ways to live in the present, and to have the flow of time be accepted and inhabited as it happens. And this is precisely because it stakes everything on celebrating — perpetuating — the here and now. Lately it has built an extraordinary apparatus to enable individuals to image, archive, digitalise, objectify, and take ownership of the passing moment. The here and now is not endurable, it seems (or at least, not fully real), unless it is told or shown, immediately and continuously, to others — or to oneself.[106]

The authors argue that such forms of visualisation are often 'a way of deliberately alienating the moment, and putting the *non-lived*, the *non-significant*, at a distance'.[107] Whereas previously commodity culture invoked a utopian future of desires satisfied through consumption, now the commodity is nostalgic and seeks 'to invent a *history*, a lost time of togetherness and stability, that everyone claims to remember but no one quite had'.[108] Commodity culture is ultimately an attempt to forget 'the banality of the present moment', to replace it with nostalgia or messianism.

As a fundamentally mediated event 9/11 troubled exactly that relation between embodiment and experience, memory and identity, self and other, which trauma theory seeks to restore. That disturbance is visible within *United 93* and the discourse surrounding it. It is not difficult to see *United 93* as a way of presenting an experience of the present, a kind of present-ness, which makes the reality of that 'here and now' endurable by visualising and so virtualising it. Thus arises the paradox of a mediated presentation of immediacy, an apparatus that in presenting an experience both 'unbearable — and unmissable' stages acting-out as a form of working through trauma. *United 93* then evokes, and even provokes, virtual trauma as a means to ward off the trauma of virtuality. In allowing the audience to believe they have virtually 'survived' the event, it allows them to place that event: to emplace what was inherently displaced, to mediate what was always already mediated. Retort suggest that commodity culture evokes a 'nostalgia for the present' by fantasising a lost past to replace the vanished present. *United 93* fantasises that lost past as an experience in the present in order

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[105] Retort, p. 179.
[106] Retort, pp. 181–182.
[107] Retort, p. 182.
[108] Ibid.

to support a disavowal, not of the loss of that present, but of its absence. The film does not restore to the audience any lost memory of 9/11: it implants one, thereby repeating the confusion of absence and loss LaCapra diagnoses in much trauma theory.[109] We saw above how reviewers of *United 93* disavowed their enjoyment of the thrillingly intense affect it induces, displacing that enjoyment through the rhetoric of trauma. The film similarly represses its structuring antagonism between immediacy and mediation, presence and absence, displacing that desire for immediacy through the discourses of documentary authenticity and commemorative fidelity. *United 93* thus embodies *and disavows* the very anxieties over the dislocating and unsecuring effects of modernity that Retort suggest fuel Islamic terrorism. Seen in this light the film's presentation of the hijackers as representatives of an atavistic anti-modernity rather than a contemporary counter-modernity is significant. *United 93* cannot show the hijackers as representative of the same antagonism to which the film itself responds. To present Islamism as responding to the loss of self-presence that is a corollary of modernity would intolerably weaken the fundamental opposition the film constructs between passengers and hijackers, 'us' and 'them'.

The banishment of the present characteristic of modernity is visible in *United 93*, paradoxically in the film's strenuous efforts to evoke and mediate an embodied presence. The rhetoric of trauma surrounding the film testifies to its success in mediating a virtual presence that for some reviewers, for better or worse, was evocative of a form of virtual trauma. I have argued here that that very discourse of trauma itself works to ward off another trauma: that of the absence of any unmediated event to which the traumatised spectator may be bodily linked. In other words, in *United 93* virtual trauma works to ward off the trauma of the virtual. The hyper-mediated immediacy it presents is contradictory, and this contradiction becomes most visible in the film's central image: the television-screen shot of the 'second plane'. In that sequence, the oppositions the film constructs between immediacy and mediation, presence and absence, memory and fiction, collapse into each other as 9/11 is replayed as not simply a media event, but at its (absent) heart an event which *had* to be mediated, one which cannot be thought outside of its own mediation.

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[109] LaCapra, pp. 43–85.

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3: **The spectacle of horror:** *Windows on the World*

'Nowadays, books must go where television does not. Show the invisible, speak the unspeakable.'[1] So says 'Beigbeder', the author's proxy in Frédéric Beigbeder's novel *Windows on the World*. The book is an investigation of literature's capacity to respond to the overwhelming visuality of 9/11. In the aftermath of the attacks most writers seemed wary of going 'where television does not', concentrating instead on the experiences of survivors or families of the dead. Beigbeder attempts to account for, satisfy and perhaps undo the voyeuristic fascination aroused by the visual archive of 9/11. In particular the book responds to the images of people falling from the towers, exemplified by Richard Drew's photograph of the 'Falling Man', which is never mentioned yet haunts every page. In a sense the book is an attempt to look at, and beyond, Drew's image: to try to understand why someone might jump to his death from the towers and to explore the fascination the image exerts. Beigbeder suggests that the desire to look at such images may not necessarily be an objectifying or regressive impulse. As an attempt to understand the ethics of representation and in particular the derivation of aesthetic pleasure from depictions of suffering, Beigbeder's novel is in dialogue with Theodor Adorno's meditations on the value and ethics of art 'after Auschwitz'. Beigbeder rejects the assertion that the catastrophe is constitutively 'beyond representation' and that art can only be a witness to ineffability, an assertion the events of September 11 2001 have made increasingly untenable in their complex yet thoroughgoing visuality.

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[1] Frédéric Beigbeder, *Windows on the World*, trans. by Frank Wynne (London: Fourth Estate, 2004), p. 295. Further citations will be given parenthetically in the text.

'Do you think destructions can be beautiful?'

Windows on the World is an investigation of the compromised ethical position of the voyeur of catastrophe. Beigbeder juxtaposes two narratives: that of a man trapped with his young sons inside the World Trade Center on September 11 2001, and that of an author and media celebrity named Beigbeder who muses on the personal and cultural significance of the catastrophe. The novel is composed of short chapters, some only a page long, each representing successive one-minute segments between 08:30 and 10:29 — from shortly before the impact of the first plane until just after the collapse of both towers. This structure presents a sly parody of the 'real time' documentary presentation of various other 9/11 narratives, including the 9/11 Commission Report and *United 93*. The odd-numbered chapters are narrated by Carthew Yorston, a Texan real-estate broker having breakfast with his sons Jerry and David in the Windows on the World restaurant at the top of the North Tower. They describe in graphic detail the horrific last hours of the arrogant, womanising Texan and his sons as they try in vain to escape and eventually jump to their deaths. The tone varies from domestic drama to tragedy, black comedy, heavy-handed satire and even pornography. The even-numbered chapters are narrated by 'Beigbeder', a writer, television personality and dissolute womaniser whose distance from the author himself remains uncertain. These chapters mix memoir; essayistic musings on the relationship of Europe and America, the death of the liberal utopia of the seventies, the shallowness of consumer culture; and reflection upon Beigbeder's reasons for writing the novel. The two narratives overlap and communicate as Beigbeder's sections become more personal and Carthew's more reflective. Both men appear to achieve a form of redemption in the novel's final pages.

In a crucial section Beigbeder visits the exhibition *Ce qui arrive*, curated by Paul Virilio and held at the Fondation Cartier in Paris during the winter of 2002-2003 (123-126). The exhibition's provocation is to frame the history of the accident through aesthetics, to present destruction as beautiful. Virilio presents photographs and film clips of disasters and atrocities, natural and man-made, with only brief captions as contextualisation: from industrial accidents to earthquakes to nuclear tests, and from Chernobyl to Ground Zero in Manhattan. These are juxtaposed with artworks depicting or referencing real-life catastrophes, including 9/11, by Jonas Mekas, Tony Oursler, Wolfgang Staehle and others.[2] Although not mentioned by Beigbeder, Virilio's catalogue essay argues that the 'integral accident' is not a chance

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[2] Paul Virilio, *Unknown Quantity* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2003) The exhibition ran from 29 November 2002 - 30 March 2003.

occurrence or failure of technology, but a systemic corollary of rapid technological development: 'To invent the private car is to produce the *motorway pile-up*. To make craft which are heavier than air fly — the aeroplane, but also the dirigible — is to invent the *plane crash*, the air disaster'.[3] The increasing global integration of technology represents both the fulfilment of an inherent tendency of technology itself and a threat to our very survival as a species. Virilio's thesis echoes Samuel Weber's Heideggerian analysis of technical rationality as targeting outlined in Chapter 1:

> The *local*, precisely situated accident has suddenly given way to the possibility of a *global* accident, which would no longer merely concern 'substances' — the substance of the world in the age of the real time of exchanges — but the knowledge we have of reality, that view of the world which previously underlay our sciences.[4]

Beigbeder is less concerned with Virilio's thesis regarding the inherent destructiveness of technology than with the unsettling effect the images have upon him. He introduces the exhibition with a quotation from Milan Kundera's *The Joke*: 'Do you think destructions can be beautiful?' (123). As he walks through the galleries Beigbeder is both fascinated and moved by the images of catastrophe. He also questions his own complicity in the spectacle: 'I can't shake a feeling of disquiet, the very feeling I have writing this book: does one have the right? Is it normal to be quite so fascinated with destruction?' (124). Virilio's provocation in *Ce qui arrive* is thus Beigbeder's in *Windows of the World*. Both question the ethics of spectatorship and the role of fantasy in horror. The most provocative piece for Beigbeder is Cai Guo-Qiang's video projection *Tonight so Lovely* (2001-2002), which consists of two videos of a fireworks display over Shanghai. For Beigbeder, Virilio here 'unquestionably takes provocation too far […] he dares to establish a link between unadulterated horror and aesthetic beauty' (125). The fireworks display is unabashedly beautiful, and its juxtaposition with images of train wrecks and earthquakes is obscene, where obscenity is a function of placement and the equivalence it implies. Beigbeder seems most troubled by the possible contamination of 'aesthetic beauty' with 'unadultered horror' and the discursive instability which allows it. Disturbingly, the images of disaster refuse to be simply horrific but are themselves beautiful. Beigbeder's enjoyment of the horror as spectacle leaves him ethically compromised:

> Will I be able to look myself in the eye after publishing this book? It makes me feel like throwing up my *Ciel de Paris* breakfast, but I'm forced to admit that my eye develops a taste for the horrific. I love the vast column of smoke pouring from the towers on the giant screen, projected in real time, the white plume against the

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[3] Virilio, p. 24.
[4] Virilio, p. 87.

blue of the sky, like a silk scarf hanging suspended between land and sea. I love it, not only because of its ethereal splendour, but because I know the apocalypse it portends, the violence and the horror it contains. Virilio forces me to face that part of my humanity that is not humanist. (125-126)

Even as Beigbeder registers self-disgust at his enjoyment of the awful spectacle he cannot resist aestheticising it. Furthermore, he confesses his enjoyment is not innocent, arising not despite but *because of* 'the apocalypse it portends'. Perhaps Beigbeder feels what Thomas Keneally, in describing Oskar Schindler's feelings amongst his fellow Nazis, called 'a piquant revulsion': a pleasure all the greater for the trace of moral disgust with which it is spiced.[5] Beigbeder admits to a perverse pleasure derived from knowledge of the suffering the image connotes. The novel explores this divided impulse, split between an ecstatic surrender to scopophilic desire and revulsion directed not at suffering itself but at the shameful pleasure derived from its image. The part of Beigbeder capable of admitting to this pleasure is the part 'that is not humanist'. Yet Beigbeder makes recognition and confession of that pleasure the basis of the novel's ethical claim; its integrity lies in its admission of moral compromise. A rigorous ethics of spectatorship must acknowledge the beauty that subsists in destruction and which lies precisely in its mediation. This knowledge is as old as Western culture itself. In Chapter 1 I quoted the story of Leontion from Plato's *Republic*. Faced with the transgressive spectacle of a pile of corpses, Leontion is aware that his desire is shameful, yet cannot restrain himself from looking at the 'lovely sight'.[6] Ultimately his desire overcomes his ethics. On a similar theme, Lucretius declares that:

> A joy it is, when the strong winds of storm
> Stir up the waters of a mighty sea,
> To watch from shore the troubles of another.
> No pleasure this in any man's distress,
> But joy to see the ills from which you are spared,
> And joy to see great armies locked in conflict
> Across the plains, yourself free from the danger.[7]

A subtle yet disturbing shift distances Beigbeder's postmodern aesthetic from this classical version. Where Lucretius takes 'no pleasure […] in any man's distress', Beigbeder claims to 'love' the image of 9/11 not despite but *because of* 'the violence and horror it contains'.

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[5] Thomas Keneally, *Schindler's Ark*, quoted in Rose, 'Beginnings of the Day: Fascism and Representation', p. 44.

[6] Plato, p. 148.

[7] Lucretius, *On the Nature of the Universe*, trans. by Ronald Melville, Oxford World's Classics (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 36. Note the use of the battlefield as an archetype of visuality, as will later be the case for Thomas Carlyle, who extends the metaphor to cover visuality as such: see Chapter 1.

Beigbeder here seems to acknowledge a sadism of the gaze that Lucretius is at pains to deny. For him aesthesis begins where empathy ends: this is 'the part of my humanity that is not humanist'.

Although *Ce qui arrive* was provocative in explicitly linking technology, destruction and aesthesis, the images included in the exhibition predominantly showed the destruction of machines, buildings and landscapes. Human suffering was implied rather than apparent. Similarly, despite the overwhelming visuality of 9/11 much of the human suffering was invisible to television viewers. Stranded people could be seen waving from the upper floors of the stricken World Trade Center, and occasionally bodies could be seen falling to their deaths, but these images were quickly excluded from television coverage. Richard Drew's famous photograph of the 'Falling Man' appeared in newspapers on September 12 but disappeared from public view for several years thereafter (although it continued to circulate online alongside many other graphic images of the attacks). Few images exist of the scenes inside the towers after they were struck, and none at all from above the impact zones.

To 'go where television does not' in the case of 9/11 therefore means imagining what happened inside the towers and planes, beyond the reach of television cameras, along with the experience of those trapped there. The near-absence of survivors from above the impact points has meant that little information is available about the experiences of those who were trapped and died there. The only evidence of their struggle to survive is in the emails sent and phone calls made to family members and emergency services. Necessarily fragmentary, these give a sense of the victims' ordeal but include little detailed information. That there exists a demand for a more narrative account is borne out by the style and success of the 9/11 Commission Report and *United 93*, both of which impart a sense of immediacy and presence and were praised for doing so. The gripping narratives and thriller-like pacing of *United 93* and the Report counter their claims to objectivity and intensify their appeal as sites of witnessing. Yet as seen in the controversy surrounding *United 93,* any overtly aestheticised account of 9/11 risked accusations of ethical impropriety, especially where it mixed fact and fiction in imaginatively elaborating on the historical record. *United 93* disavowed its aesthetic status by presenting itself as a more or less strictly documentary account. The film relies on its fidelity to the Report to defuse accusations of commercial and aesthetic exploitation of tragedy. With a less faithful approach to its ostensible source material, *Windows on the World* was potentially even more vulnerable than *United 93* to accusations of prurience and moral compromise.

Aesthetics and catastrophe

There is a long tradition of worrying about the ethics of aestheticising others' suffering: the passages from Plato and Tacitus cited above are merely the most famous examples. The figure most associated with that discourse in the modern era is Theodor Adorno. Beginning in the aftermath of Nazi Germany and for two decades thereafter, Adorno formulated and revised a powerful critique of the ethics of art 'after Auschwitz'. In one of the most famous proscriptions of our time, Adorno declared in 1949 that 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric'.[8] Since prised from its original context and somewhat stripped of nuance, widely cited and interpreted, often in ways Adorno himself would almost certainly not have authorised, it has become one of the truisms of our age. The statement inflects a much older suspicion of representation which can be traced back at least as far as the Second Commandment.[9] Like the biblical proscription, the exact meaning and extent of Adorno's dictum has been subject to much debate. Adorno offered the following elaboration of his original argument:

> The so-called artistic presentation of the sheer physical pain of people beaten to the ground by rifle-butts contains, however remotely, the power to elicit enjoyment out of it. The moral of this art, not to forget for a single instant, slithers into the abyss of its opposite. The aesthetic principle of stylisation, and even the solemn prayer of the chorus, make an unthinkable fate appear to have had some meaning; it is transfigured, something of the horror is removed. This alone does an injustice to the victims; yet no art which tried to evade them could confront the claims of justice.[10]

Adorno's pronouncement has often been taken as forbidding any representation of the Holocaust and by implication any other event involving extreme human suffering. However, this is to misunderstand the nature of his argument and to ignore the final clause in the above excerpt. It asserts that to evade responsibility for the catastrophe is a dereliction even worse than to cheapen it by ascribing it a meaning and thus redeeming the victims' suffering. It is important to recognise that the statement 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric' does not actually forbid the writing of poetry; it may be taken as a descriptive statement of the moral status of art rather than a normative command. In fact suffering 'demands the

[8] Theodor Adorno, 'Cultural Criticism and Society', in *The Adorno Reader*, ed. by Brian O'Connor, trans. by Samuel Weber and Sherry Weber (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 195–210 (p. 210). Excellent analyses of Adorno's rethinking of aesthetics 'after Auschwitz' can be found in Michael Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism: The Demands of Holocaust Representation* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), pp. 25–58; Thomas Tresize, 'Unspeakable', *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 14 (2001), 39–66.
[9] See Mitchell, 'The Unspeakable and the Unimaginable: Word and Image in a Time of Terror'; Snyder.
[10] Theodor Adorno, 'Commitment', in *Aesthetics and Politics*, ed. by Rodney Livingstone, Perry Anderson and Francis Mulhern, trans. by Francis MacDonagh (London: Verso, 1980), pp. 177–195 (p. 189).

continued existence of the very art it forbids'.[11] Thus in Adorno's terms art is caught in the face of catastrophe between ignoring the victims' sufferings and travestying them. To paraphrase Beckett, art cannot go on after Auschwitz, yet it must go on because of Auschwitz.

Whilst he never retracted the 1949 statement Adorno did revisit and qualify it, declaring in 1966 that 'Perennial suffering has as much right to expression as a tortured man has to scream; hence it may have been wrong to declare that after Auschwitz you could no longer write poems'.[12] Adorno was concerned to pre-empt readings of his 1949 *Bilderverbot* as condemning art *tout court*. Michael Rothberg argues that in *Negative Dialectics* 'Adorno disallows evidence of the subject's incapacity to represent total horror as grounds for the abdication of art'.[13] He also decries the continuation of a naïve representation equating description of appearances with critique. Especially in 'Commitment', Adorno condemns equally partisan 'commitment' and formalist 'autonomy'. Committed art, in attempting to cancel the distance between art and reality, thinks that to represent the event is to critique it, while formalism 'denies by its absolute claims that ineradicable connection with reality which is the polemical *a priori* of the attempt to make art autonomous from the real'.[14] Art's ethical value begins and ends in rigorous critique of the structures of thought and feeling that extend from the aesthetic into the wider world. Fascism is the extreme example: in Walter Benjamin's phrase it mobilised 'the aestheticisation of politics' on an unprecedented scale.[15] Art is therefore constrained to condemn fascism in the language and forms employed and contaminated by fascism. Instead of ignoring or merely describing the catastrophe art must stage it, instigate it at the level of the aesthetic. The sign of the truly rigorous artwork is that, in Gillian Rose's words, it 'leaves the crisis to the reader' rather than resolving it for her.[16]

Why exactly is it horrific to give the unthinkable meaning? One answer might be that, in attempting to symbolise the unsymbolisable Real, one repeats the movement that precipitated the catastrophe itself. Nazism can be seen as an extreme example of the 'passion for the Real' which Žižek locates as one of the defining fantasies of the twentieth century. It was an attempt to bypass the structures of social reality and directly realise 'the longed-for New Order'; genocide was 'the price to be paid for peeling off the deceptive layers of reality'.[17] If Nazism

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[11] Adorno, 'Commitment', p. 188.
[12] Theodor Adorno, 'Meditations on Metaphysics', in *The Adorno Reader*, ed. by Brian O'Connor, trans. by E.B. Ashton (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), pp. 84–88 (p. 86).
[13] Rothberg, p. 46.
[14] Adorno, 'Commitment', p. 178.
[15] Benjamin, p. 235.
[16] Rose, p. 47.
[17] Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, pp. 5, 6.

attempted a total symbolisation of reality, bringing the Real and the Symbolic into alignment, then to represent the violence of the Holocaust actually repeats the gesture which produced it.

Whereas classical cultures may have found transcendence of suffering in art, Adorno seems concerned not to allow the sublation to take place. We might expect that for Sophocles, to 'make an unthinkable fate appear to have had some meaning' would represent an artistic success: for Adorno this very aesthetic success becomes the sign of ethical failure, because 'something of the horror is removed' thereby. In the face of a horror as overwhelming as the Holocaust and as thoroughly contaminating of the structures of thought and feeling organising our culture, the task of art is no longer to transfigure suffering but to bear witness to it: to carry 'the burden of wordlessly asserting what is barred to politics'.[18] Its aporetic injunction is to bear witness to suffering without redeeming that suffering by making it meaningful:

> 'After Auschwitz, our feelings resist any claim of the positivity of existence as sanctimonious, as wronging the victims; they balk at squeezing any kind of sense, however bleached, out of the victims' fate'.[19]

Yet to bear witness involves an appeal to those structures of thought and feeling compromised by their complicity in the catastrophe: the assertion of a wider human community, a utopian future where social antagonisms are absent, and a political efficacy for art in realising it. The aporia is logically irresolvable, and the challenge for post-Auschwitz culture is to live with it: to pay heed to the simultaneous necessity and obscenity of an art that propounds a set of values implicated in genocide. As Thomas Tresize notes, Adorno implies that to succeed ethically the artwork must 'fail' aesthetically, acknowledging its own inevitably compromised status.[20] For Adorno the exemplary instance of such a rigorously ethical failure lay in Beckett's determination to 'Fail again. Fail better'.[21]

Adorno's theses on the representation of limit events became increasingly influential in the years following his death in 1976, reaching a peak in the 1980s and early 1990s. Since then, however, the dominance of Adornian aesthetics has been challenged. Compare Elie Wiesel's 1978 assertion that 'Auschwitz cannot be explained nor can it be visualised' with the 1997 declaration by Jacques Rancière that 'After Auschwitz, to show Auschwitz, only art is possible,

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[18] Adorno, 'Commitment', p. 194.
[19] Adorno, 'Meditations on Metaphysics', p. 85.
[20] Tresize, pp. 44–45.
[21] Samuel Beckett, 'Worstward Ho', in *Company / Ill Seen Ill Said / Worstward Ho / Stirrings Still*, ed. by Dirk Van Hulle (London: Faber and Faber, 2009), pp. 79–104 (p. 81).

because […] it is art's job to make manifest the invisible'.[22] Partly this was the result of rethinking the relationship of presence and signification in images: thus for Rancière, 'Nothing is unrepresentable as a property of the event. There are simply choices'.[23] This assertion implies a reassessment of Adorno's *Bilderverbot*, which for Dominick LaCapra 'is itself best seen not as a *Verbot* (prohibition) but as a statement concerning the difficulty of legitimate creation and renewal in a posttraumatic condition'.[24] The emphasis in debates around the aesthetics of catastrophe thus shifted from questions of whether the event could be represented to questions of how to do so whilst retaining fidelity to the victims' memory.

The rethinking of the 'limits of representation' also recognised the possibility that 'the concern to articulate moral limits or interdictions on representation can become a strategy for evading a properly ethical confrontation with the event'.[25] An important contribution to the debate was made by Gillian Rose, who in 1998 criticised the privileging of ineffability as 'Holocaust piety'. In a powerful critique, Rose claimed that:

> To argue for silence, prayer, the banishment equally of poetry and knowledge, in short, the witness of 'ineffability', that is, non-representability, is *to mystify something we dare not understand,* because we fear that it may be all too understandable, all too continuous with what we are – human, all too human.[26]

The controversy which greeted Rose's argument was restaged in highly public form in the outcry surrounding the exhibition *Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art*, held at the Jewish Museum in New York in 2002. The exhibition received a fiercely hostile reception thanks to its presentation of the work of twelve young artists who chose to address the Holocaust in what were felt to be unacceptably trivialising terms. Exhibits included Piotr Uklanski's *The Nazis* (1998), a series of 166 photographs of Hollywood actors playing Nazis, including Dirk Bogarde, Frank Sinatra and Clint Eastwood; Zbigniew Libera's *LEGO Concentration Camp Set* (1996); and Alan Schechner's *It's the Real Thing — Self-Portrait at Buchenwald* (1993), wherein the artist digitally inserted himself, a can of Diet Coke in his hand, into a famous Margaret Bourke-White photograph of prisoners at the camp. The exhibition's detractors largely ignored the fact that

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[22] Elie Wiesel, 'Trivializing the Holocaust: Semi-Fact and Semi-Fiction', *New York Times*, 16 April 1978, section Arts and Leisure, pp. 1, 29 (p. 29). Objecting to the television series *Holocaust*, Wiesel complained that in presenting the Holocaust as a dramatic narrative, 'It removes us from the event instead of bringing us closer to it'; Ranciere, *L'Inoubliable*, quoted in Libby Saxton, *Haunted Images: Film, Ethics, Testimony and the Holocaust* (London: Wallflower, 2007), p. 13.

[23] Rancière, *The Future of the Image*, p. 129.

[24] Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 181.

[25] Saxton, p. 2.

[26] Gillian Rose, 'Beginnings of the Day: Fascism and Representation', in *Modernity, Culture and 'the Jew'*, ed. by Brian Cheyette and Laura Marcus (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), pp. 242–256 (pp. 243–244).

the artists were principally concerned not with the Holocaust itself but with its mediation by popular culture, a point well made in James Young's foreword to the exhibition catalogue:

> For a generation of artists and critics born after the Holocaust, the experience of Nazi genocide is necessarily vicarious and hypermediated. They haven't experienced the Holocaust itself but only the event of its being passed down to them. As faithful to their experiences as their parents and grandparents were to theirs in the camps, the artists of this media-saturated generation make their subjects the blessed distance between themselves and the camps, as well as the ubiquitous images of Nazis and the crimes they committed found in commercial mass media. These are their proper subjects, not the events themselves.[27]

Although the juxtaposition of Holocaust imagery and commercial or popular art forms was certainly provocative, and was intended as such, it also raised questions about the mediation of the Holocaust within contemporary culture, both 'high' and 'low'. In other words, for these artists the Holocaust could not be addressed other than through its mediation by popular culture, which was widespread despite the influence of Adorno's proscription in academic circles.

Whereas the Holocaust took years of painful effort on the part of its victims to bring into historical and cultural visibility, 9/11 was intensely mediated from the beginning. Yet in both cases one faces the question of how to do justice to the event's particular resistance to picturing, and to unpick commodified and/or ideologically invested representations. The difficulty for artists dealing with 9/11 is not only one of speaking adequately of the unspeakable or maintaining the event in public memory, but of how to picture something that is already its own representation, without simply repeating that image. Finally, although their relationship to visuality is very different, both the Holocaust and 9/11 can perhaps be the source of a certain perverse *jouissance* of the obscene image, from the 'fascist chic' of films like *The Night Porter* (1974) to the gruesome photographs from 9/11 visible on the internet. Already in the 1970s, Susan Sontag discerned the presence of a seductive glamour in fascism intimately linked with its veneration of domination and death.[28] The possibility of a 'pornographic' spectatorship of 9/11 and Holocaust imagery testifies to the cultural currency of both, and to the conflicting investments on the part of their respective audiences. The most successful of the works in *Mirroring Evil*, such as Uklanski's, highlighted the pervasive mediation of the Holocaust in popular culture and questioned the desire of which such representations might be an expression.

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[27] James Young, 'Looking into the Mirrors of Evil', in *Mirroring Evil: Nazi Imagery/Recent Art*, ed. by Norman L. Kleeblatt (New Brunswick, NJ: The Jewish Museum; Rutgers University Press, 2002), p. xvii.

[28] Susan Sontag, 'Fascinating Fascism', in *Under the Sign of Saturn: Essays* (London: Penguin Classics, 2009), pp. 73–108.

Windows on the World can be read as adopting a similar approach to that of the artists represented in *Mirroring Evil*, focusing not on the event itself but on its highly mediated relationship to its audience. As consumers of the spectacle of 9/11, we were and are distanced from the attack even as we watched it unfold live on television. Despite the apparently intimate and immediate access offered by television, the images remain enigmatic. Taking the spectacle of 9/11 as a cultural given, *Windows on the World* addresses the desire to see what happened 'inside' or beyond the surface of the image. In doing so the book performs the task of critique: not to answer the questions on everyone's lips, but to ask why these are the questions being asked. This is perhaps one reason why the book may be described as 'tasteless' or even obscene; it addresses issues that cannot be framed within a 'proper' response to the event, as they determine the terms of that propriety. The impetus behind *Windows on the World* is to understand our fantasmatic investment in the image of the World Trade Center and in the spectacle of its destruction, and to anatomise the ethics of spectatorship in contemporary media culture.

The world pictured: writing photographically

In the aftermath of 9/11 writers from Martin Amis to Don DeLillo to Ian McEwan were asked to respond to the attacks. The request implies a degree of faith in literature's capacity to describe, contextualise and somehow explain the attacks and the images they produced.[29] Most of the published responses, and the novels which came later, visibly struggle to fulfil the demand. Amis' 'The Second Plane', written a week after the attacks, is a good example.[30] Like many such accounts, Amis mingles description of the television images, personal experience of the event (in this case his wife's) and an attempt to find the appropriate historical context. Amis returns to the image of the second plane, memorably described as 'eagerly alive and galvanised with malice' as it 'smeared itself into the South Tower', as if he cannot avoid replaying the footage in his writing.[31] The repetition dramatises the difficulty of describing images that simultaneously demand and resist language. Literature, and in particular that realism or naturalism based on the wager that language can visualise a scene, seems

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[29] It should be obvious by now that my argument arises from a sense that 'the attacks' and 'the images they produced' cannot be clearly or finally separated.
[30] Amis, pp. 3–10.
[31] Amis, pp. 3, 6.

threatened by the intense visuality of 9/11. Literary realism, it has been argued, developed partly in response to the influence of photography on public consciousness in the mid-nineteenth century.[32] Its emphasis on description transposed photography's apparent delivery of 'the thing itself' through a minutely detailed account of its appearance. Both photography and literary realism offer up the world as the image of itself:

> Writing that aims to be taken as realistic is "photographic" in that it promised to give readers access to a world on the other side of mediation and sought to do so by offering certain kinds of visual information. What is more, the writing we now call realism provided this information in such a way that the reader would recognise it as indeed belonging to the objects and people of the world themselves.[33]

Realism is premised on an assumed isomorphism between photography and writing, image and text. Detailed description evokes a visual image in the reader's mind, the immediacy of which recalls and is dependent upon photography. If realism induces an effect like photography, the pervasive imagery of 9/11 undermines in advance any literary attempt to access a reality 'behind' that imagery. How can one get 'behind' the surface of an event defined by its imagery? Language too easily falls into redundant description of those images. Hence Amis' and others' struggle to do more than simply describe what we have all already seen.

In a review of Don DeLillo's novel *Falling Man* (2007), Andrew O'Hagan indicts the failure of novelists to contend with the spectacular force of the television images of 9/11. His objection centres on the issue of mediation, here represented by the figure of simile:

> Those authors who published journalistic accounts immediately after the event failed to see how their metaphors fell dead from their mouths before the astonishing live pictures. It did not help us to be told by imaginative writers that the second plane was like someone posting a letter. No, it wasn't. It was like a passenger jet crashing into an office building. It gave us nothing to be told that the South Tower came down like an elevator at full speed. No, it didn't. It collapsed like a building that could no longer hold itself up.[34]

O'Hagan seems to be asking that literature be more like photography or television. Whereas photographic and televisual images tend to efface their mediation and so encourage a high

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[32] See Nancy Armstrong, *Fiction in the Age of Photography: The Legacy of British Realism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Carol Schloss, *In Visible Light: Photography and the American Writer, 1840-1940* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1989).

[33] Armstrong, p. 26.

[34] Andrew O'Hagan, 'Racing Against Reality', New York Review of Books, 2007 <http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/2007/jun/28/racing-against-reality/?pagination=false> [accessed 11 September 2012].

degree of absorption in the image, literature — or more precisely, the literary, here represented by the self-conscious striving for effect via simile — is irreducibly theatrical. Reading that 'the second plane was like someone posting a letter', we cannot forget that this account has been written, that it is a representation of the event, whereas the photographic image can fool us into thinking (into allowing ourselves to believe) that it presents the thing itself. Similarly, Beigbeder's description of the plume of smoke from the towers as 'like a silk scarf hanging suspended between land and sea' (125-126) interposes the writer's desire to produce an effect between reader and text, and between language and image, blunting its effect. Literature's failure to disguise its mediation as does the photograph apparently invalidates its effect, for O'Hagan at least. The banality of each comparison admits defeat in advance, as if the writer cannot find language to summon the wounding immediacy of the images and settles instead for 'quivering bathos'.[35] It is important to note that O'Hagan rails against theatricality, the visible striving for effect, rather than against simile itself. Nonetheless O'Hagan himself employs simile pared to the point of tautology: 'It was like a passenger jet crashing into an office building'. O'Hagan dramatises literature's reliance on the figural even as he indicts it. The loop recalls the conception of realist literature as 'like photography' described above. O'Hagan seems to desire from literature a level of immediacy, of readerly absorption, equivalent to that of the photograph or television image. Textual markers of authorial presence such as overripe simile undermine this absorption. Yet the effort at immediacy is paradoxical, for O'Hagan demands it of a literary mode, realism or naturalism, that is itself premised upon a simile: its capacity to induce an effect 'like a photograph'.

As a manifesto then, O'Hagan's review enacts the tension between absorption and theatricality identified by Michael Fried in Modernist painting. Beginning with the critic Denis Diderot in the eighteenth century and continuing in various forms through the writing of Roger Fry and Clement Greenberg, Fried traces an aesthetic committed to denying 'the primordial convention that paintings are made to be beheld'.[36] This aesthetic of absorption, manifest in work by painters from Chardin to Cézanne to Mondrian and Olitsky, is in tension with an opposing aesthetic of theatricality running from Manet and which, in 'Art and Objecthood', Fried discerns in minimalism and the current of 'postmodern' art.[37] The distinction ultimately comes down to the question of intentionality and the role of the beholder in generating

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[35] O'Hagan.

[36] Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 93.

[37] Michael Fried, 'Art and Objecthood', in *Art and Objecthood: Essays and Reviews* (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 148–172.

meaning. Whereas theatricality involves a more or less explicit appeal to the beholder, the absorptive aesthetic demands that the artwork cannot look like it is trying to be an artwork.

As Fried recognises, the paradigmatic example of an artwork the aesthetic appeal of which is independent of its author's intention is the photograph, at least as theorised by Barthes in *Camera Lucida*.[38] Barthes' valorisation of the *punctum* as the source of photography's power is anti-theatrical in that the *punctum* is that aspect of the image which escapes intention: 'it says only that the photographer was there, or else, still more simply, that he could not *not* photograph the partial object at the same time as the total object'.[39] The bypassing of authorial intention in photography, itself arising from suppression of the artwork's acknowledgement of the beholder, thereby transforms indifference to the beholder into what Walter Benn Michaels calls a 'programmatic […] *appeal* to the reader or beholder'.[40] Thus theatricality is 'not exactly — or not only — the opposite of absorption, it is the inevitable outcome of the radicalisation of the logic of absorption'.[41]

Photography is a technology which, in erasing or at least minimising traces of its own mediation, purports to provide immediate access to the world. If photography is anti-theatrical in its indifference to authorial intention, it is also profoundly theatrical in that the capacity to make a picture of anything, anywhere transforms everything, everywhere into a picture. This is the horizon of Armstrong's argument regarding the relationship of literary realism and photography; the prevalence of photographic images in the mid-nineteenth century produced a 'shadow archive composed of what might be described as image-objects, neither image nor object, yet the ultimate source of meaning for both'.[42] This 'shadow archive' preceded and structured realism's claim to present the world in largely visual terms. Through photography Heidegger's metaphor is literalised and the world becomes a picture.

The tension between absorption and theatricality in modern art and above all in photography can now be mapped onto the relationship of literary realism and photography underlying O'Hagan's condemnation of literariness. Even as he criticises authors' prose for lacking the

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[38] I am relying here on the summary of Fried's argument by Walter Benn Michaels: Walter Benn Michaels, 'Neoliberal Aesthetics: Fried, Rancière and the Form of the Photograph', *nonsite.org*, 2011 <http://nonsite.org/issues/issue-1/neoliberal-aesthetics-fried-ranciere-and-the-form-of-the-photograph> [accessed 7 December 2012].

[39] Barthes, p. 47.

[40] Benn Michaels.

[41] Benn Michaels. Compare Žižek's assertion that the twentieth-century 'passion for the Real' ironically 'culminates in its apparent opposite — in a *theatrical spectacle*, from the Stalinist show trials to spectacular terrorist acts'. Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, p. 9.

[42] Armstrong, p. 27.

immediacy of photography, O'Hagan expresses the desire that literature somehow exceed images, that it 'go where television does not'. Against self-consciously literary writing he offers the example of journalism, the directness of which conveys an immediacy equivalent to and yet in excess of photography:

> After the "nonfiction novel," after the New Journalism, after several decades in which some of America's most vivid writing about real events was seen to be in thrall to the techniques of novelists, September 11 offered a few hours when American novelists could only sit at home while journalism taught them fierce lessons in multivocality, point of view, the structure of plot, interior monologue, the pressure of history, the force of silence, and the uncanny. Actuality showed its own naked art that day.[43]

Whereas photography provides a transparent record of appearances, through devices such as 'multivocality, point of view, the structure of plot, interior monologue', language plumbs the interiority denied the camera. The emphasis on journalistic language implies that its greater immediacy (its 'naked art') results from a reduced emphasis on the author function. Placing a lower premium on linguistic invention, journalism attained a greater fidelity than literature to the events of September 11. Journalistic accounts were more immediate, and therefore more effective, than literary interpretations. However, the immediacy O'Hagan demands is not restricted to journalism. As an example he cites DeLillo's own *Libra*, which recounts an alternative history of the Kennedy assassination:

> He had readers in the corner of that room at the Book Depository, practically squeezing the trigger with Oswald, feeling the press of his eye on the scope. But *Falling Man* is a distillation of fear and grief over real-life drama next to which the 9/11 Commission Report reads serenely and beautifully. Open that report at any page and you will find a breathtaking second-by-second account of that morning, and of the hijackers' backgrounds, that will make DeLillo's novel seem merely incapacitated.[44]

In his unfavourable comparison of *Falling Man* with the 'breathtaking second-by-second account of that morning' found in the 9/11 Commission Report, O'Hagan reveals what he wants from literature after 9/11.[45] It is what Greengrass wanted from *United 93*: to allow the audience 'to walk through 9/11 at eye level'.[46] More than that, it should narrate the protagonists' stories from the inside, allowing the reader inside their heads as did DeLillo in *Libra*. In appealing for a literature 'that could bring us to know what might have been going through the minds of those people as they fell from the building — or going through the minds

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[43] O'Hagan.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Greengrass; director's commentary.

of the hijackers as they met their targets', O'Hagan seems to demand that literature 'go where television does not', filling in what is missing from the visual archive of 9/11, *and* that it do so in a 'photographic' manner which effaces its own mediation and the author's intentions.[47] Literature must stage 9/11 without drawing attention to the fact. The aesthetic is aligned with theatricality and opposed to truth, as so often in critical debates around witnessing.

O'Hagan suggests that journalistic description has not only an effective but a moral edge over literary creation. However, even the most rigorous documentary account includes a degree of invention. In the passage quoted above O'Hagan argues not that journalism spurns literary tropes, but that it made better use of them. 'Better' in this instance seems to mean 'less theatrical'. Journalism at its best uses literary effects such as multivocality and interior monologue without drawing attention to them, in order to 'let the facts speak for themselves'. Stripped of the overt mediation of literariness and the author function, journalistic writing offers a 'window on the world'. Yet the effect of immediacy is just that: an effect produced by particular conventions which imbue the text with a degree of visuality. It is striking that the list of tropes O'Hagan offers could be used to describe narrative film as well as literature. Once again the transaction between verbal and visual is complex and deeply embedded. The phrase 'naked art' is also telling: 'naked' suggests a stripping-away of the mediation implied by 'art'. It recalls descriptions of photography as direct transcription, Fox Talbot's 'pencil of nature', whilst yet retaining an authorial presence: for what else can 'art' refer to? O'Hagan's prose thus dramatises the tension between absorption and theatricality underlying influential theories of literary realism, modern art and photography, and which I shall argue can also be seen in *Windows on the World*.

Imagining disaster

As *United 93* is warranted by the documentary authority of the 9/11 Commission Report, *Windows on the World* is based on a journalistic account of 9/11 constructed from archival research, phone transcripts and interviews with survivors and witnesses. Jim Dwyer and Kevin Flynn's *102 Minutes* shares the Report's combination of thriller pace and subject matter,

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[47] O'Hagan.

factual and contextual detail, and the pathos of real-life tragedy.[48] Originally published in the *New York Times,* it was later expanded into a book with the same title. The longer version includes detailed information on the history and construction of the World Trade Center, the political and commercial interests vying for control of it, the organisational and equipment failures that hindered rescue efforts, and the reasons for the towers' eventual collapse. An impressively researched and presented work, it debunks some of the more deceptive official rhetoric around the attack (which sought, for example, to suppress knowledge of the faulty equipment which fire-fighters and police had complained about, and the inter-agency rivalries which hindered the rescue efforts). Yet like the Report, *102 Minutes* to some extent disavows its own theatricality. As it switches between different groups of trapped or escaping people, interspersed with a countdown to the towers' collapse ('8:46 North Tower, 91st Floor, American Bureau of Shipping, 1 hour 42 minutes to collapse'), the report inevitably recalls the tropes of thriller and disaster films and 'airport novels'. Within their journalistic frames of reference, neither version of *102 Minutes* can reflect upon this haunting of its documentary mode by fictional genre characteristics. The authors skilfully employ the tropes — 'multivocality, point of view, the structure of plot, interior monologue, the pressure of history, the force of silence, and the uncanny' — for which O'Hagan lauds the journalism of 9/11, yet cannot reflect upon their use of them for fear of undermining the objectivity and hence the authority of their account. These tropes are integral to the book's 'breathtaking second-by-second account', but to interrogate their usage would undermine the absorption the book so successfully encourages. In short, *102 Minutes* cannot reflect upon the conditions of production and reception which structure its account. Both versions are presented as acts of reportage and reconstruction but never imagination. Although imagination is an essential faculty in writing and reading such a text, neither it nor the desire which drives it and the production of the narrative as a whole can be acknowledged or questioned within the terms of *102 Minutes* itself.

In *Windows on the World* Beigbeder does more than simply recount events within the stricken towers; he imagines them and reflects upon the ethical stakes of producing art from others' suffering. The effort implicates the reader, whom the book addresses in its opening sentence: 'You know how it ends: everybody dies' (1). If we know how it ends, why read on? The implicit answer is that we want to see *how* it ends, to glean the details of a story we already know

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[48] Jim Dwyer and others, '102 Minutes: Fighting to Live as the Towers Died', *New York Times*, 26 May 2002 <http://www.nytimes.com/2002/05/26/nyregion/26WTC.html> [accessed 14 September 2012]; Jim Dwyer and Kevin Flynn, *102 Minutes: The Untold Story of the Fight to Survive Inside the Twin Towers* (London: Arrow, 2005).

involves extreme suffering and a terrible death for the principal characters. The opening sentence's theatrical gesture is repeated in the minute-by-minute structure and parallel montage of Carthew's and Beigbeder's viewpoints.[49] The narrative repeatedly short-circuits readerly absorption, often immediately after a particularly graphic or lyrical passage in which that absorption could be expected to be at its most intense. Take the example of the pair of adulterous stockbrokers trapped in the restaurant with Carthew. We first encounter them before the attack as Carthew eavesdrops on their breakfast conversation; they are smart yet cynical, materialistic and shallow. After the crash, the two draw closer emotionally without dropping their wisecracking banter. Carthew imagines the man thinking of the future he will never share with his lover:

> He slowly realized their affair would end here, in this room with its off-white walls. She was a ravishing blonde; he could imagine her as a child, her pink cheeks, her hair blown back, a corn-fed blonde running through a meadow in a flower-print dress, a field of wheat or rye, holding a kite, that kind of shit. (156)

The pathos in Carthew's version of the man's fantasy is sharply punctured by the final clause, undoing the effect produced by the preceding sentences in a moment of 'quivering bathos'. This 'failure' highlights the fact that the fantasy itself is a romantic cliché which the text both offers and satirises. In another example, Kristiaan Versluys points to a passage wherein Carthew and his sons try to escape through a burning stairwell (63-66). The detailed description of their ordeal is suddenly short-circuited as Carthew describes his physical appearance and then muses on his relationships with his sons and his own father. As Versluys argues, this 'cannot possibly be construed as the reflections of the character in a time of crisis. Rather it [...] comprises the thoughts of a self-conscious narrator, playacting in front of his putative readers'. [50]

By the standards of conventional realism the characters are poorly-drawn and stereotyped. One critic accused Beigbeder of being 'simply incapable of writing a conventional narrative or creating autonomous fictional characters', framing the novel according to the same criteria of immediacy and absorption upon which O'Hagan draws and which Beigbeder continually subverts.[51] If Carthew is an obviously fictional construct, the figure of 'Beigbeder' is barely fictionalised. Carthew and Beigbeder communicate (148-150), echo and eventually blur into

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[49] It may also parody their use in thrillers including *United 93* and the television series *24*.

[50] Kristiaan Versluys, *Out of the Blue: September 11 and the Novel* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), p. 125.

[51] Josh Lacey, 'Minute by Minute', *Guardian*, 11 September 2004, section Review <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2004/sep/11/featuresreviews.guardianreview17> [accessed 23 August 2012].

one another. Both are self-centred womanisers who deserted the mother of their children, are unable to commit to their lovers and are ashamed of their indulgent lifestyles. Faced with imminent death Carthew regrets his selfishness and vows to marry his girlfriend Candace if he survives. Beigbeder rushes home from a trip to New York to propose to his girlfriend Amélie. In fact, whilst in New York Beigbeder briefly meets a model called Candace who may be Carthew's old girlfriend (229-230). Both men can trace their family history back to the earliest days of the American Republic; Carthew is distantly related to John Adams, while an ancestor of Beigbeder's was wounded at the battle of Bunker Hill. Near the novel's end Beigbeder claims that his grandmother's maiden name was Grace Carthew Yorstoun, suggesting either a blood tie with Carthew or the source of the character's name (296, 299). As the novel progresses Carthew becomes more expansive as he surveys his life, while Beigbeder's own personal crisis comes to dominate his sections. Beigbeder's relatively trivial emotional pain thus threatens to supplant the suffering of Carthew and his sons, in a possible parody of the claims to traumatisation of those who witnessed 9/11 on television that nonetheless poses the question of what kinds of pain can be regarded as trivial, and by whom.

Versluys bemoans the lack of 'dialectical tension' due to insufficient differentiation of the two voices.[52] This apparent failure nonetheless provokes reflection upon the mediated reality the text describes. Beigbeder characterises the book as an 'autobiographical novel' and 'a two-way mirror behind which I hide so I can see and not be seen' (235, 236). The novel thus inhabits the French tradition of *autofiction*: 'a narration, usually in the first person, that mixes fiction and reality, not always in clearly distinct fashion', as in the work of Serge Doubrovsky, Georges Perec and Patrick Modiano.[53] *Windows on the World* can also be classed as what Bruno Blanckeman calls an *autofabulation*, which includes a mixture of autobiography and fabrication presented as fact and often employs the device of a double narrator, and as an *actufiction* which weaves its fiction around an armature of contemporary social and political events; Michel Houellebecq's *Platform* (2001) and Beigbeder's own *99 francs* (2000: published in English as *£9.99,* 2002) are recent examples. All these tendencies within recent French fiction interlace fact and fiction, textual and extra-textual reality. Fiction borrows the authority of documentary, whilst reality becomes infected by a certain fictionality of the kind often marked by the simile 'like a movie'.

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[52] Versluys, p. 135.
[53] Alain-Philippe Durand, 'Beyond the Extreme: Frédéric Beigbeder's *Windows on the World*', in *Novels of the Contemporary Extreme*, ed. by Alain-Philippe Durand and Naomi Mandel (London: Continuum, 2006), pp. 109–120 (p. 110).

The novel teems with intertextual references to songs, films, poetry and literature, often popular in nature, which suggest an alternative form of naturalism. Rather than mimic the visual descriptiveness of photography, the book warrants its representation via the endless referentiality of popular culture. Beigbeder quotes or refers to the biblical story of the tower of Babel, the *Michelin Green Guide*'s entry on the Windows on the World restaurant and the U.S. Immigration Service entrant questionnaire; songs by Burt Bacharach, Kander and Ebb, Nirvana, J-Lo and Cat Stevens; and writers including Whitman, Poe, Baudelaire, Auden, Henry Miller and J.D. Salinger. In the passage in the burning stairwell discussed by Versluys, Carthew describes himself via his resemblance to Bill Pullman, Robin Williams, and George W. Bush. The quoted media image supplants the realist description as a mode of visualisation.

In the above discussion of realist literature's remediation of photography I referred to Nancy Armstrong's description of the 'shadow archive' produced by photography's gradual penetration of nineteenth-century popular culture. The interaction of literature with this pervasive yet ill-defined archive constituted 'a shared set of visual codes' which 'operated as an abstract standard by which to measure one verbal representation against another'.[54] Thus 'the kind of visual description we associate with literary realism refers not to things, but to visual representations of things, representations that fiction helped to establish as identical to real things'.[55] Literary realism thus invokes photography not as a source of access to an extra-discursive reality but as an archive of recognisable images upon which to draw. Beigbeder's manoeuvre in *Windows on the World* is to make realism's dependence upon an archive of images explicit; there is no pretence that the text refers to anything other than a quoted image. The reality to which its 'realism' refers is always already mediated by popular culture and does not exist independently of it. Neither Beigbeder nor Carthew can imagine a reality outside the circuits of exchange and transcoding which knit together the culture they inhabit alongside the reader. In fact Carthew fictionalises 9/11 for the benefit of his sons as it happens around them, telling them the disaster is a theme park ride or adventure game staged for their entertainment (58-59). His act recalls Roberto Benigni's film *La vita è bella* (1997), which centres around a father's attempt to protect his son from the knowledge that they are imprisoned in a concentration camp (Carthew in fact mentions Benigni at this point). Carthew's fictionalisation, in recoding the disaster as entertainment, deploys the gambit of Beigbeder's novel within the confines of the event itself. The effort to aestheticise his and his sons' peril as

a way of mitigating its horror offers a dark parody of Lucretius' joy in 'the ills from which you are spared'.

Windows on the World's oscillation between realist and hyperrealist modes, absorption and theatricality, produces something like the 'empathic unsettlement' Dominick LaCapra advocates as the foundation of an ethical form of traumatic writing. As described in Chapter 2, empathic unsettlement 'stylistically upsets the narrative voice and […] allows for a tense interplay between critical, necessarily objectifying reconstruction and affective response to the voices of the victims'.[56] It mediates the identification of reader with witness, the balance of absorption and theatricality. It thus discourages both an excessively distanced 'objectivity' which would miss the affective truth of the trauma narrated; and an insufficiently distanced account that, in encouraging the reader's over-identification with the witness, would risk erasing the historical specificity of the trauma. LaCapra discerns the latter danger in the work of Caruth and others, and in the wider tendency of trauma theory to claim in effect that 'we are all victims'. However, LaCapra warns against the reduction of empathic unsettlement to textual formulae which become empty clichés: one thinks of the use of black-and-white for flashback in cinema or the pious witnessing of ineffability in some trauma theory. Beigbeder's achievement is to find a means toward inducing empathic unsettlement which mediates the reader's affective involvement in the text, conveying an awareness of his characters' suffering whilst guarding against over-identification. 'Postmodern' self-referentiality has become the kind of lazily repeated formal trope LaCapra warns against; however, in *Windows on the World* Beigbeder highlights the text's theatricality in order to dramatise the ethical stakes of aestheticising suffering. The constant shifting between absorption and theatricality induces empathic unsettlement, transforming a formal disruption of readerly involvement into an ethical check on the reader's investment in the narrative and the characters' suffering.

Any pathos the reader may experience in the novel's descriptive passages is sharply undermined by the bathetic deflation that follows it. The more Beigbeder appears to offer intensely realistic descriptions of horror, the more theatrical they seem and the more aware is the reader of the text's production of aesthesis from suffering. Of Thomas Keneally's *Schindler's Ark* (the basis for Steven Spielberg's *Schindler's List*), Gillian Rose argues: 'the ironic, sustained glibness of the style is its integrity: it leaves the crisis to the reader'.[57] The same is true of *Windows on the World,* which 'succeeds' ethically only by 'failing' aesthetically. In staging its aestheticisation of catastrophe and so highlighting the compromised nature of the

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[56] LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 109.
[57] Rose, 'Beginnings of the Day: Fascism and Representation', p. 246.

pleasure it provides, the novel 'leaves the crisis to the reader'. In this way the novel's ethical integrity resides in the exposure of its lack of integrity. This can be seen clearly in an important section occurring almost exactly halfway through the novel (148-149). Two short chapters offer starkly contrasting accounts of the motives and state of mind of someone prepared to jump from the tower to certain death. In the first, Beigbeder suggests that the decision may be a desperate attempt to exert some degree of control, to choose the manner of one's end rather than wait to be consumed by the flames:

> They choose the swan dive, the vertical farewell. […] They are human because they decide to choose how they will die rather than allow themselves to be burned. One last manifestation of dignity: they will have chosen their end rather than waiting resignedly. Never has the expression 'freefall' made more sense. (148)

Beigbeder's attempt to give meaning and dignity to the deaths of those who jumped is immediately and vehemently undermined by Carthew, speaking from inside the towers:

> Bullshit, my dear Beigbeder. […] You don't jump 1,300 feet because you're a free man. You jump because you're a hunted animal. You don't jump to preserve your humanity, you jump because the fire has reduced you to a brute beast. The void is not a rational choice. It's simply the only place that looks good from up there, somewhere you ache for, somewhere that doesn't slash your skin with white-hot claws, doesn't put out your eyes with searing-hot pokers. The void is a way out. The void is welcoming. The void stretches out its arms to you. (149)

The reader is offered a redemptive interpretation of the jumpers' motivations, only to have it brutally snatched away. The tactic highlights the reader's investment in the redemptive reading denied him. Taken together, these two passages offer a vivid example of the part empathic unsettlement can play in refuting falsely redemptive narratives of suffering. According to LaCapra:

> At the very least, empathic unsettlement poses a barrier to closure in discourse and places in jeopardy harmonising or spiritually uplifting accounts of extreme events from which we attempt to derive reassurance or a benefit (for example, unearned confidence about the ability of the human spirit to endure any adversity with dignity and nobility).[58]

If the unpresentable appears in *Windows on the World* it does so here, in the choice between burning and falling. The possibility of a facile and compromised redemption of suffering was, as we have seen, one of Adorno's major objections to the naïve representation of catastrophe. Here that redemption is invoked in order to be denied. However the denial is itself complex. The second extract seems to refute the first from a position of real experience — the victim of

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[58] LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, pp. 41–42.

violence disputing the dandy's speculations — but Carthew is a fictional construct with no greater moral authority than Beigbeder. Both possibilities are speculations proffered by the author in different voices. The text thus offers a commentary on its own commentary upon the effects of extreme suffering on human agency. In his discussion of the trope of ineffability in relation to Adorno's *Bilderverbot*, Thomas Tresize suggests that the unpresentable exposes the limits of any particular representation rather than of representation as such. In perhaps the clearest example of Beigbeder's attempt to 'go where television does not', *Windows on the World* presents opposed versions of the narrative's central horror yet refuses the dialectical synthesis. The result is neither a totalising representation of catastrophe, nor a witnessing of sublime ineffability. Instead opposing possibilities are held in suspension for the reader to adjudicate, or to refuse to do so.

'Show the invisible, speak the unspeakable'

Throughout the novel Beigbeder reflects upon his motives for writing it. He describes the book as 'an attempt — doomed, perhaps — to describe the indescribable' (55), thereby placing it in dialogue with Adorno's reflections on the ethics of art 'after Auschwitz'. Adorno's name has often been invoked to authorise the witness of ineffability. To argue such a position in respect of 9/11, an event intensely and comprehensively mediated from the beginning, may be untenable. Can one place 'beyond representation' an event that has been, and always already was, overtaken by its own representation? How can literature respond to the intense visuality of 9/11? In *Windows on the World* Beigbeder suggests the answer is to prompt critical reflection upon the ethical stakes of that theatricality. Faced with the paradigmatic televisual spectacle of catastrophe, 'books must go where television does not. Show the invisible, speak the unspeakable' (295).

In the initial effort to find a way out of the towers Carthew witnesses horrific scenes of suffering which he describes in gruesome detail. At one point he passes by a couple of 'human torches':

> Two bodies in flames near the elevator doors, skin red and black, lidless eyes, hair turned to ashes, faces peeling away, covered in blisters fused to the melted linoleum. From the movement of their chests we could tell they were still alive. The rest of their bodies still as statues. (81)

This may appear to be an example of literature describing the unspeakable horrors television cannot show. Yet the figures' suffering is still a spectacle for Carthew, as indicated by his use of the phrase 'human torches', the flippancy of which does not imply sympathy for the victims. This may be the kind of realism O'Hagan seems to demand: dispassionately descriptive yet gruesomely immediate. Yet such quasi-photographic descriptions of the horrors inside the towers merely extend the problematic spectacularisation of suffering into an area inaccessible to television cameras, if anything further violating the victims' dignity. Instead *Windows on the World* suggests that an ethical literary response to suffering is to resist spectacularisation through literature's capacity to involve the viewer imaginatively and emotionally, and above all to provoke critical reflection upon its own representation. Carthew follows the portrait of charred bodies by the elevators with a description of the smells inside the towers:

> The dense smoke stank of melted rubber, burning plastic, charred flesh. The cloying scent of airplane fuel, sickly and terrifying, powdered bones and human flesh turned to ashes. A mixture of toxic waste, pungent diesel and the crematorium; the sort of thing you might smell driving past a factory, the sort of smell that makes you hold your breath and step on the gas. If death has a smell, it must be this. (81-82)

Olfactory description is powerfully evocative and beyond the reach of television; employed by literature it transmutes imagined bodily proximity into a moral involvement absent from the distancing effect of spectacle. Showing the invisible here takes the form of translating smells, thoughts and emotions into language with a directness unavailable to even the most intrusive camera. Similarly the contrasting motivations for jumping from the towers cited above both present a psychological immediacy arguably beyond the camera's reach, and in their juxtaposition expose that immediacy as a construction, provoking a degree of critical reflection in the reader to which the television viewer is rarely exposed. News television for example tends to discourage reflection upon its construction of such effects as 'liveness' or 'newsworthiness'.

Later Carthew again describes the horrific scenes inside the towers missing from the visual archive of 9/11:

> [The networks] didn't show the falling limbs, the fountains of blood, the melded sections of steel, flesh, and plastic. You didn't smell the burning electrical cables, the whiff of a short circuit amplified by 100,000 volts. You didn't hear the animal cries, like pigs with their throats cut, like calves torn limb from limb; only these were not calves, but minds capable of pleading. (261)

Here the emphasis shifts from the visual description of the first sentence to the olfactory and auditory impressions of the following two. The final clause insists the reader recognise the

humanity of those who suffered. This passage is followed by an impassioned plea for the moral necessity of looking at images of violence in order to bear witness to the victims' suffering. Carthew indicts the hypocrisy of arguing that it is indecent to look at another's pain when that rule is not applied universally. Instead he asserts that it is indecent *not* to look:

> I'm sorry? Decency? Important not to upset children? Morally wrong to turn victims' suffering into tabloid television? Offensive to the families of the victims? It's not as if we use kid gloves when the carnage takes place overseas. […] This carnage of human flesh is disgusting? It's reality that is disgusting — and refusing to look at it, more so. (261-262)

Beigbeder appears to indict the hypocrisy of separating the representation of suffering from the affect of horror which should accompany it, such that we can look at images of suffering overseas that do not affect us intensely thanks to our lack of empathy with the victims, but recoil from showing the suffering of those 'like us'. To look and not be horrified is as scandalous as to refuse to look for fear of being horrified: the first response accepts suffering, the second ignores it. For Beigbeder the task of literature in the aftermath of catastrophe is to refuse both options. The suffering of others demands that we confront our capacity to witness and even enjoy it when mediated in conventionally determined fashion. This is perhaps for Beigbeder an authentic form, even the only authentic form, of witnessing. Yet authenticity is precisely what is undermined by the novel's continually ironic reflexivity. In addition to the counter-absorptive tactics described above, the 'piquant revulsion' aroused by the descriptions of suffering and horror highlights the dubiety of the aesthesis the text produces and the desire it indulges.

As the novel enters its final act, Beigbeder explains that he will no longer provide graphic descriptions of the sights in the tower:

> I have cut out the awful descriptions. I have not done so out of propriety, nor out of respect for the victims, because I believe that describing their slow agonies, their ordeal, is also a mark of respect. I cut them because, in my opinion, it is more appalling still to allow you to imagine what became of them. (272)

To 'allow' the reader to imagine suffering recognises the desire to do so. Furthermore, to be forced to imagine suffering makes the reader's complicity in the aestheticisation of that suffering all the more obvious. I can claim that I do not 'really' want to look at a photograph or read a description of suffering, but in imagining scenes of suffering I must take greater responsibility for the act and for the desire which motivates it. Once more Beigbeder 'leaves the crisis to the reader'.

The role of imagination in the apprehension of catastrophe is the novel's undeclared theme. A fiction, perhaps especially one based in fact, depends upon its author's imaginative capacities. To some degree we can understand an event only to the extent to which we can imagine it; even the most rigorously factual testimony asks its audience to imagine themselves in the place of the witness. Finally, imagination, in its capacity to prepare us for extreme situations, can help confront fear or assimilate trauma. In 'The Imagination of Disaster', Susan Sontag argues that science-fiction films help normalise the unimaginable threat of species extinction or nuclear holocaust. Echoing the Freudian language of excess and assimilation later to become prevalent in trauma theory, Sontag claims that, 'One of the things that fantasy can do is to normalise what is psychologically unbearable, thereby inuring us to it.'[59] Sontag is here in opposition to Adorno, for whom to 'make an unthinkable fate appear to have had some meaning', to make it psychologically bearable, is a moral obscenity. For Sontag, to imagine the worst is a deep-seated human impulse, preparing us for its occurrence or seeming to prevent it by framing it as fantasy. What other way is there of living with the spectre of 'absolute negativity'?[60]

Even when confronted with the catastrophe it may still be necessary to imagine it. This is the point made by Philip Gourevitch, writing of his visit to the site of a massacre in Rwanda shortly after the genocide of 1994:

> I had never been among the dead before. What to do? Look? Yes. I wanted to see them, I suppose; I had come to see them […] and here they were, so intimately exposed. I didn't need to see them. I already knew, and believed, what had happened in Rwanda. Yet looking at the buildings and the bodies, and hearing the silence of the place […] it was still strangely unimaginable. I mean one still had to imagine it.[61]

It is unclear whether Gourevitch's effort of imagination helps him to confront the horrific reality or to distance it, but it seems to be psychologically necessary. *Windows on the World* requires the reader to imagine the horrors inside the World Trade Center. And despite the rhetoric of ineffability which surrounds such events, we find that we *can* and even must imagine it. How many of us, watching the television images of 9/11, said to ourselves or to others, 'I can't imagine what must be happening in there', whilst at some level doing just that? The role of imagination in apprehending catastrophe is something to which *Windows on the*

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[59] Susan Sontag, 'The Imagination of Disaster', in *Against Interpretation* (London: Penguin, 2009), pp. 209–225 (p. 225).
[60] Adorno, 'Meditations on Metaphysics', p. 86.
[61] Philip Gourevitch, *We Wish to Inform You That Tomorrow We Will Be Killed With Our Families* (London: Picador, 2000), p. 16.

World repeatedly draws the reader's attention, firstly by highlighting Beigbeder's fictionalisation of the event, and later by compelling the reader to do likewise and imagine it for him- or herself.

Beigbeder's decision to 'cut out the awful descriptions' does not spare the reader the account of Carthew's psychological agony as he faces the choice between burning and falling. He moves through fear, denial, anger, panic, breakdown, resignation and finally acceptance of his fate. After David dies of the burns he has suffered, Carthew decides to jump from the towers. The long, stream-of-consciousness sentence which follows ends thus:

> […] hold on tight to me, Jerry, I love you, come with Daddy, we're going home, we're taking your little brother home, come and surf the clouds of fire, you were my angels and nothing will ever split us up again, heaven is being with you, take a deep breath and if you're scared, all you've gotta do is close your eyes. (290)

Carthew jumps, his sons in his arms. The description of their fall is unabashedly redemptive:

> Our mouths gradually distorted from the speed. The wind made us make curious faces. I can still hear Jerry laughing, holding tight to my hand and to his little brother's, plummeting through the heavens. Thank you for that last laugh, O Lord, thank you for Jerry's laugh. For a split second, I really believed we were flying. (290)

The chapter ends there, with Carthew and his sons in mid-air. The awful moment of impact is omitted, in contrast with the description of the death of another man who earlier tried to parachute to safety: 'Jeffrey literally exploded on the plaza, killing a fire-fighter and the woman he was rescuing' (202). The mixture of horror and black comedy in that passage is replaced by a sentimental image of Carthew in an ecstatic airborne embrace with his sons. In fact all three live on as ghosts who haunt the site and call the reader to remember: 'We three are the burning phoenix which will rise from its ashes' (300). Like Beigbeder's speculation on the motivations of jumpers extracted above, the redemptive tone of Carthew's death scene recalls Adorno's objection to the humanist impulse evident in 'committed' literature, which invariably 'implies, purposely or not, that even in so-called extreme situations, indeed in them most of all, humanity flourishes'.[62] Such is the problematic implication of the description of Carthew's death, which inflects it as a screen memory concocted to protect the reader from the possibility that Carthew did not go gently into the Manhattan earth: that his last moments were full of fear, pain, loneliness and blind, animal despair. Here, as virtually nowhere else in

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[62] Adorno, 'Commitment', p. 189.

the text, Beigbeder seeks to protect the reader from the horror of Carthew's final moments.[63] Carthew's death offers the kind of redemption Adorno and LaCapra find so problematic. As discussed above, LaCapra presents empathic unsettlement as a barrier to 'harmonising or spiritually uplifting accounts of extreme events from which we attempt to derive reassurance or a benefit (for example, unearned confidence about the ability of the human spirit to endure any adversity with dignity and nobility)'.[64] Beigbeder, despite structuring his text around an oscillation between absorption and theatricality which undermines redemptive affect, here provides just such a 'spiritually uplifting' account, redeeming at the last the horror it has portrayed.

In fact it is possible to compare the non-reflexive aestheticisation of Carthew's death to the controversial 'shower scene' in *Schindler's List* (1993). The scene shows a group of female inmates of Auschwitz entering what they, along with the viewer, believe to be a gas chamber. As the camera watches through a spyhole in the door, the shower heads emit water and the women are temporarily saved, allowing the viewer a deeply problematic pleasure. Spielberg was fiercely criticised on several levels: for tantalising the viewer with the prospect of an 'obscene' spectacle of mass murder; for allowing the women a reprieve which is highly unrepresentative given that millions were in fact gassed in such chambers; and for failing to force the viewer's recognition that he or she is watching from the position of the Nazi guards.[65] For Gillian Rose, at this point the viewer is 'suspended at the limit of the decency of witness':

> water, not gas — to show the death agonies would exceed the limit of permissible representation; but water, not gas, induces the regressive identification [...] with the few women who are saved.[66]

When water, not gas, pours from the shower heads the viewer is allowed to share in the women's relief, despite their suffering having been presented as a spectacle for his or her enjoyment. Ironically, Carthew mentions the film himself. Describing Jeffrey's failed attempt to parachute to safety using a tablecloth, he admits, 'I would have liked to be able to say that he made it, but people would simply criticise me for the same reason they criticised Spielberg when he had water gush through the nozzles in the gas chambers' (202). The reference to

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[63] Granted, Carthew may have achieved peace in his acceptance of his death and that of his sons. The sudden equanimity and religiosity are unconvincing, given that two minutes earlier, Carthew was angrily protesting that he does not deserve to die, that whatever misery his country has inflicted on the terrorists or their countrymen, he is not responsible.

[64] LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, pp. 41–42.

[65] For a detailed analysis of the film and its reception see Yosefa Loshitzky, *Spielberg's Holocaust: Critical Perspectives on 'Schindler's List'* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997).

[66] Rose, 'Beginnings of the Day: Fascism and Representation', p. 246.

Schindler's List underlines the failure of the description of Carthew's death, which offers us the equivalent of water, not gas. Although Carthew dies, the redemptive tone of the passage grants the reader a falsely uplifting end to the narrative. At this crucial point the text does not encourage reflection on the reader's ethical position but instead presents his death as redeeming the suffering which precedes it. Here the crisis is not left to the reader but repressed, permitting a regressive identification that indulges what Rose calls 'the sentimentality of the ultimate predator'.[67]

Not only does the novel end with a potentially obscene transfiguration of horror into spiritual uplift; the English translation removes two significant passages, both of which employ obscenity in one form or another to counteract absorption and provoke reflection upon the ethical stakes of the narrative. In the English translation, the chapter '10:10' consists of two sentences: 'In Windows on the World the customers were gassed, burned and reduced to ash. To them, as to so many others, we owe a duty of memory' (274). The French edition reads differently: 'The Windows on the World was a luxury gas chamber. Its clients were gassed, burned and reduced to cinders as at Auschwitz. They deserve the same duty of memory.'[68] The comparison between 9/11, a disaster involving the loss of around 3000 lives, and the moral obscenity of Auschwitz is itself obscene; in removing it the translation withdraws the moral shock it provokes. The idea of a 'luxury gas chamber' is particularly troubling, and recalls the *Prada Deathcamp* and *Giftgas Giftset* by Tom Sachs included in *Mirroring Evil*. Yet the moral provocation of the parallel forcefully raises the question of the ethics of aestheticising suffering that is the stake of Beigbeder's novel. In replacing outrage with something approaching piety ('To them, as to so many others, we owe a duty of memory') Beigbeder blunts the force of his novel's ethical critique.

The second excision is from the chapter '10:15'. The French version's three-page pornographic scene, in which the two adulterous traders describe their fantasies of degrading each other whilst engaging in anal sex, is missing from the English edition, which ends with the pair's post-coital declarations of love. When Carthew admits that, 'despite the stench of death and the unbearable heat, it's really hot to watch them', the effect differs widely between versions. The uncut sex scene implicates the reader in a pornographic voyeurism in the context of suffering and death. The likely discomfort of the juxtaposition once again opens up space for a crisis in

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[67] Ibid.

[68] Frédéric Beigbeder, *Windows on the World* (Paris: Editions Grasset & Fasquelle, 2003), p. 322, translation mine. In fact, the French version includes the phrase *'page coupée'* in parentheses at the end, which alerts the reader to a further excision of the text. The phrase is repeated on p. 365 of the French edition (p. 300 of the English edition), after a brief description of the North Tower's collapse.

the reader that would provoke reflection upon the voyeuristic aspect of the novel as a whole, a space denied by the excision of the sex scene.

These excisions go beyond cutting out the 'awful descriptions' in order that the reader may imagine them. The first excised section makes a parallel between 9/11 and the moral obscenity of the Holocaust; the second uses pornographic imagery to ram home the fact of Carthew's voyeurism and by implication the reader's. Taken together they juxtapose sexual desire, voyeurism and mass murder, and so intensify the novel's equation of scopophilic desire and the spectacle of suffering. If Beigbeder is arguing that 'It's reality that is disgusting — and refusing to look at it, more so' (262) then the excision of these scenes surely weakens his case. In cutting the passages Beigbeder renders them obscene, unfit to be seen or read lest they arouse inappropriate affect in the reader, whereas elsewhere in the novel he appears to argue for a moral responsibility to look at scenes of destruction and to acknowledge the ethically compromised pleasure that can result. Beigbeder has claimed the cuts were his decision, taken to protect the feelings of American readers: 'When you talk to people who saw it, who lived it and survived ... I didn't want to hurt them.'[69] The implication that no American will read the French edition or hear of its extra content is especially spurious given that the quote is taken from an interview published in an American newspaper. It also consigns the passages to a supplementary status both inside and outside the text. Placed under erasure, they haunt the English text and so exemplify the complex visuality I identify here as a distinguishing feature of the most interesting responses to 9/11.

Staging the obscene

In its presentation and concealment of explicit imagery and questioning of the ethics of spectatorship, the book investigates the discourse of obscenity. 'Obscene' means 'offensive to the senses, or to taste or refinement; disgusting, repulsive, filthy, foul, abominable, loathsome' and also 'offensive to modesty or decency; expressing or suggesting unchaste or lustful ideas;

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[69] Carol Memmott, 'Tearful "Windows on the World"', *USA Today*, 31 March 2005, section *Life*, p. D5; Alain-Philippe Durand cites a letter from Beigbeder in which he asserts that the US publishers demanded several excisions: 'I rejected several of their demands but gave in on others, such as the comparison between the Windows on the World and Auschwitz which, according to them, could result in a pointless scandal. Same thing for the reduced fist-fucking scene in the towers'. Durand, p. 114.

impure, indecent, lewd'.[70] Obscenity is the means by which certain kinds of representation are rendered illegitimate, not suitable for general exhibition owing to their degrading or corrupting nature. Most commonly articulated in sexual terms, obscenity can also refer to other horrors including violence, poverty, sickness or death. Whether sexual or not, it 'most often connotes excess, violence, and transgression'.[71] Not only corrupt but corrupting, it threatens to arouse inappropriate affect in the unwary viewer. And it is this response that is being regulated: the desire to see and to take pleasure in images or descriptions of states of intimate and extreme bodily sensation, principally pain or sexual ecstasy. Most obscene of all is the mixing of Eros and Thanatos, the pleasure aroused by representations of suffering and death.[72] The origins of the word are disputed. Its source has been identified as the Latin *scena* meaning 'stage', 'obscene' thus meaning literally 'offstage', that which must not appear on the stage of representation.[73] It is in this sense that Oedipus' incest and self-blinding are obscene. Classical obscenity is almost always a visual proscription. The obscene act can be dramatised offstage but not on onstage; it may be heard but not seen.

The second possible source of 'obscene' is in *caenum*, meaning 'dirt, filth, mire or excrement'. It was associated with the penis or genitals: thus, 'In Roman literature *obscenum* expressed an aesthetic aversion (ugly) and a moral one (immoral) and a material one (disgusting). […] The word obscene is on the border between moral and aesthetic denigration.'[74] Whether its root is in dirt or in display, obscenity hinges on the designation and transgression of a 'proper' place. Dirt, after all, is famously matter out of place. To be obscene is to be out of place, bringing onstage what should be off, displaying what should remain hidden. As one definition puts it, 'obscenity derives its meddling power from being there, but not at centre stage.'[75] Obscenity troubles the boundary between onstage and off, between visibility and obscurity. 'Obscene' simultaneously marks the offending object as excessively, transgressively visible and banishes it to a netherworld of semi-visibility, illegitimate yet ineradicable. The double movement in the discourse of obscenity — of marking the proper place of an object or image and

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[70] J.A. Simpson and Weiner, p. 656 (vol. X).

[71] *Encyclopedia of Aesthetics*, ed. by Michael Kelly, 4 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), III, p. 386.

[72] As such, discussions of obscenity tend to revolve around the acceptability of sadomasochism or violation. See Linda Williams, 'Second Thoughts on Hard Core: American Obscenity Law and the Scapegoating of Deviance', in *Dirty Looks: Women, Pornography, Power*, ed. by Pamela Church Gibson and Roma Gibson (London: BFI, 1993), pp. 46–61.

[73] Ludwig Marcuse, *Obscene: The History of an Indignation*, trans. by Karen Gershon (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1965), p. 12. Marcuse cites Havelock Ellis as one source of this etymology. See also Linda Williams, *Hard Core: Power, Pleasure, and the 'Frenzy of the Visible'* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), p. 282 n.4.

[74] Marcuse, p. 12.

[75] Kelly, III, p. 389.

simultaneously registering its transgression of that placement — echoes the double movement of emplacement and displacement that marks technics, as described in Chapter 1. Where television both places the world before the subject and endlessly displaces it in the very act of presentation, 'obscene' as a judgement both banishes the image offstage and registers its presence on the scene. In fact it summons the image in order to demand its banishment.

Echoing Foucault's hypothesis of a compulsion to 'speak sex' in the late nineteenth century, Linda Williams has coined the term 'on/scenity' to describe how efforts to designate certain materials or the practices of certain social groups obscene and unfit for public display persistently bring those very images and practices into the public domain in the act of decrying them:

> On/scenity is the gesture by which a culture brings onto the public scene the very organs, acts, "bodies and pleasures" that have heretofore been designated ob-off-scene, that is, as needing to be kept out of view, locked up in what Walter Kendrick has named the Secret Museum.[76]

As an illustration of on/scenity Williams cites the example of Senator Jesse Helms. Arguing in 1989 against public funding of artists whose work he deemed obscene, Helms brandished copies of sexually explicit photographs by Robert Mapplethorpe in the U.S. Senate, demanding his audience look at the images and recognise their obscenity. As Williams explains:

> The exhortation to look at the dirty pictures represents a paradoxical bringing on/scene that violates the very ob/scenity Helms seeks to enforce. […] This contradictory gesture — of bringing *on* what the exhibitor defines as obscenity in order to keep it off — seems to me the very quintessence of on/scenity.[77]

For Williams, on/scenity is the product of an attempt to define in ever greater detail exactly what constitutes obscenity, thanks to increasingly liberal attitudes toward sexually explicit and violent imagery and the consequent increase in their public visibility. The more images of sexualised or violated bodies pervade art, advertising, film and news reports, the more important it becomes to define what constitutes an unacceptable image. Yet the more precise such definitions become, the more they themselves bring the proscribed material onscene, producing the very visibility they would circumscribe.[78]

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[76] Linda Williams, *Hard core*, p. 282; See also Linda Williams, *Porn Studies* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 1–23.

[77] Linda Williams, *Hard core*, p. 286. She also cites Andrea Dworkin's inclusion, in Pornography, of detailed descriptions of the kind of pornography Dworkin wished to ban, which could themselves be read as pornographic.

[78] Williams reports that the difficulty of defining obscenity through explicitness led to a move toward defining particular acts or practices, rather than images, as obscene in U.S. law. The practices

If on/scenity brings onstage the very material it wishes to banish offstage, perhaps *Windows on the World* can be read as enacting 'off/scenity', whereby the novel banishes offstage the very thing it wishes to highlight: the 'awful descriptions' which Beigbeder includes in and then excludes from his novel. The text thus brings onstage what has heretofore remained hidden: the desiring gaze that would feast upon the spectacle of horror, and the production of that desire as obscene, something the existence of which cannot be publicly acknowledged. *Windows on the World* forces the reader to account for his investment in the spectacle of horror: firstly through Beigbeder's questioning of his own motivations and by implication the reader's ('Will I be able to look myself in the eye after publishing this book? (125)), and secondly through the text's repeated movement between absorption and theatricality.

This is not the 'negative sublime' that arose in response to Adorno's critique of the implication of representation within the social and conceptual structures which gave rise to Auschwitz. The negative sublime is based on the premise that the catastrophe cannot be represented, or that it must not because it cannot be framed within an ethical representation, and that consequently the artwork can only bear witness to the catastrophe's absence from or excess of representation. For Beigbeder in *Windows on the World*, the catastrophe of 9/11 is all too available for representation; the novel takes the reader's familiarity with the iconography of 9/11 as a given. Yet human suffering remains conspicuously absent from the visual archive of 9/11, particularly in the television images which tend to present a spectacle deprived of empathetic affect. In Beigbeder's view it is the task of literature to explore the human suffering excluded from the television images, and the ethical demand involved in witnessing it. *Windows on the World* therefore examines the role of imagination in the apprehension of disaster. It proceeds from a recognition that, even faced with an overwhelmingly visual catastrophe, and despite or perhaps because of the comprehensive mediation of the event, there remained a gap in the archive: 'I mean one still had to imagine it'. This is the task of literature: to 'go where television does not', and to imagine the event which every reader has already seen.

The self-justifying nature of memory can allow us to believe our response to the television images of 9/11 was more straightforward, and nobler, than was perhaps the case. Accustomed as we are to thrilling at spectacles of sublime destruction on cinema and television screens, is it not possible — likely, even — that some of that fascinated awe should be found in our

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circumscribed tend to be those of sexual minorities defined against a presumed heterosexual norm: 'Thus in the definition of obscenity, explicitness has given way to the deviant sexuality of the 'other', defined in relation to a presumed heterosexual, non-sadomasochistic norm that excludes both fellatio and cunnilingus'. Linda Williams, 'Second Thoughts on Hard Core', p. 49.

reaction to a spectacle of violence which, whilst horrifyingly real, nonetheless aped so closely the form of those fantasies? Fredric Jameson claims that 'The visual is essentially *pornographic*, which is to say that it has its end in rapt, mindless fascination.'[79] As Carolyn J. Dean demonstrates, the term 'pornographic' has a wide currency and a usefully vague meaning, but it seems to link spectatorship with a purported atrophy of the capacity for empathy, for a fellow-feeling with an other conceived *as* other rather than simply a narcissistic projection of the self:

> Pornography figures our relationship to suffering so potently and concisely because it is both full of meaning and an empty category and so is never only a sexual metaphor for political pathology […] In the figure of pornography, critics have intertwined the two narrative strands conventionally used to define morally problematic positions relative to the suffering of others: insufficient feeling for the other and disingenuous feeling for the other, who is but a screen for the projection of one's own excitement.[80]

The failure of empathy named by the figure of pornography marks the difficulty of appropriate witnessing of suffering an in intensely mediated culture. Excessive distance results in the numb 'exhaustion of empathy', an increased exposure to images of violence purportedly resulting in a reduced capacity for affect.[81] Insufficient distance induces over-identification with the other whose otherness is replaced by a self fantasised in the other's place.[82] Pornographic spectatorship as improper affect testifies to a crisis of separation between self and other, framed by the mediation of that other's pain or sexual arousal as object for a beholding subject. *Windows on the World* stages that tension between over-identification and objectification in its oscillation between absorption and theatricality, between an involved and a reflective reader. The novel thus dramatises the ethical crisis induced by aestheticising suffering: what is the ethical status of the undoubted pleasure such spectacles provoke? The question reaches back to Plato's tale of Leontion and undoubtedly further; in *Windows on the World* Beigbeder demonstrates its centrality to the mediated spectacle of horror that was 9/11.

Windows on the World stages 9/11 beyond its mediation by television and brings onstage the human suffering excluded from media coverage of the event. Beigbeder presents trauma in an 'inappropriate' manner, foregrounding theatricality and deflating pathetic affect. He thus

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[79] Fredric Jameson, *Signatures of the Visible* (London: Routledge, 2007), p. 1.
[80] Carolyn J. Dean, 'Empathy, Pornography, and Suffering', *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies*, 14 (2003), 88–124.
[81] See Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (London: Penguin, 1979); Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (London: Penguin, 2004).
[82] LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, pp. 43–85.

rejects the equation of anti-theatricality with moral rigour implicit in O'Hagan's criticism of 9/11 literature. Likewise Beigbeder's employment of the aesthetics of spectacle refuses the 'witness of ineffability' which rightly or wrongly invokes the name of Adorno. I have argued that *Windows on the World* employs theatricality and the morally questionable aesthesis of suffering in aid of a deeply serious investigation of the ethics of art in the face of catastrophe. Whereas, as Tresize recognises, for Adorno the artwork must fail aesthetically to succeed ethically, *Windows on the World* dares to 'fail' ethically in order to question what shape an aesthetic response to suffering might take. In other words, the novel's aesthetic and ethical 'failure' is the source of its integrity as both an artwork and an ethical response to suffering. As Gillian Rose said of *Schindler's Ark,* Beigbeder's novel 'leaves its crisis to the reader'.

Windows on the World fails precisely when it avoids leaving its moral crisis to the reader. The description of Carthew's death encourages a redemptive identification with the victims of catastrophe of the kind that underpins the objections of Adorno, LaCapra and others. The excision of the reference to the gas chambers at Auschwitz and the pornographic sex scene between the two traders similarly spares the reader's awareness of his compromised ethical position in deriving aesthetic pleasure from such scenes. The sex scene is particularly important as it frames the reader's gaze as pornographic and the pleasure of the text as potentially obscene. Like Beigbeder's visit to *Ce qui arrive* (and to a lesser extent the twinned chapters on the motivations of 'jumpers'), and unlike the passage describing Carthew's final jump from the tower, this passage stages the act of looking and questions rather than merely indulges the desire which motivates it. *Windows on the World* is most powerful when it takes the mediation of disaster as its object and forces an examination of the pleasure to be had therefrom. It is at these points that Beigbeder genuinely goes 'where television does not', both staging and questioning the spectacle of horror.

4: 'Turn it into living tissue, who you are': staging trauma in *Falling Man*

Monday, late morning, just under a week since 'the planes'. Lianne Neudecker, a thirtysomething freelance editor, is in the Manhattan apartment of her mother, Nina Bartos. Nina is a retired professor of art history, cultured and patrician yet 'finally and resolutely old' following knee-replacement surgery.[1] They discuss the events of the past week, in particular the sudden reappearance at Lianne's door of her estranged husband Keith, a lawyer who survived the collapse of the World Trade Center. Nina has always disapproved of Keith and worries over the effect of his return on Justin, Keith and Lianne's ten-year-old son. They are interrupted by the arrival of Nina's lover Martin. An art dealer always between cities, rumpled and permanently jetlagged, he may or may not have a wife in Paris and may or may not have been involved with terrorist groups in Germany in the seventies. While Nina dresses for the day, Martin sips a beer and talks with Lianne about 'the things everyone was talking about' (42).

Lianne loves the timeless quality of Nina's apartment: its spartan, slightly forbidding elegance. Most of all she loves the two still life paintings by Giorgio Morandi, a present from Martin. Muted yet quietly commanding, they show clusters of common objects on a table top, depicted at the edge of abstraction yet insistently tactile (Figure 24). Lianne seems attracted by the paintings' inwardness, their indifference to the world:

> These were groupings of bottles, jugs, biscuit tins, that was all, but there was something in the brushstrokes that held a mystery she could not name, some

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[1] Don DeLillo, *Falling Man* (London: Picador, 2007), p. 9. Subsequent references to this book will appear in parentheses in the text.

reconnoitre inward, human and obscure, away from the very light and colour of
the paintings. (12)

Despite their patient exploration of the process of looking, they resist too straightforward an account of that experience. If anything, it is their refusal to allow seeing to be translated into saying that resonates with Lianne, who loves Kierkegaard for making her feel 'that her thrust into the world was not the slender melodrama she sometimes thought it was' (118). That strange copula, 'human *and* obscure', locates the paintings' power in their reticence; despite their modest address Lianne glimpses barely-registered shapes swimming in the murky depths below the reach of language. Perhaps they echo Lianne's sense of the ineffable in herself or the world, or her desire for it.

Figure 24: Giorgio Morandi, *Still Life,* 1956. Oil on canvas, 30.5 x 30 cm. Private collection. While it is impossible to be sure which of Morandi's works DeLillo has in mind, not least because of their similarity, this serves as a representative example.

Nina returns; she and Martin argue about the meaning of and motives behind the attacks. Martin's talk of history, foreign policy and economics contrasts with Nina's raw anger at the attackers' presumption of holy mandate and ruthless indifference to suffering. As Nina drifts into a doze, Martin turns to scrutinise the Morandis on the wall. He claims to see the towers of the World Trade Center in two tall, dark shapes amidst the group of objects. Lianne looks; she too sees the towers. No longer timeless, aloof from politics and history, the painting is remade as Lianne stands before it, suddenly seeming to reflect an event that occurred half a century after its production. Turning back to the room, Lianne briefly sees it as a still life before 'the human figures appear, Mother and Lover' (111).[2] Through the intercession of art, psychic and external realities briefly intermingle, each affecting the other.

Nina disagrees: 'It's a work that rejects that kind of extension or projection. It takes you inward, down and in. That's what I see there, half buried, something deeper than things or shapes of things' (111). Despite Nina's argument, however, it is worth noting the repetition of the doubled letter 'L' (in you'll, I'll, all and wall) in the conversation which follows:

> Lianne knew, in a pinprick of light, what her mother was going to say.
> She said, "It's all about mortality, isn't it?"
> "Being human," Lianne said.
> "Being human, being mortal. I think these pictures are what I'll look at when I've stopped looking at everything else. I'll look at bottles and jars. I'll sit here looking."
> "You'll need to move the chair a little closer."
> "I'll push the chair right up to the wall. I'll call the maintenance man and have him push the chair for me. I'll be too frail to do it myself. I'll look and I'll muse. Or I'll just look. After a while I won't need the paintings to look at. The paintings will be excess. I'll look at the wall." (111-112)

The shape of the towers haunts Nina's language as she refutes their presence in the painting. Nina reasserts the conventional reading of Morandi as uninterested in history and politics, focused purely on the experience of seeing and on the objects' materiality. The dispute over the painting thus echoes that between Nina and Martin over 9/11 as the expression of either specific historical circumstances or a fundamental antipathy of Islam and the West. Should painting and terrorist spectacle be understood in terms of politics or ontology? If terror can recalibrate the aesthetic, as it does for Martin and Lianne, can the aesthetic then assimilate terror? Can it stage some aspect of what terror does to us that is beyond the reach of discourse, as 'human and obscure' as the two dark smudges in the Morandi painting?

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[2] The scene in Nina's apartment is actually split into four separate sections spread throughout the novel. I discuss the significance of this fragmentation in greater detail below.

The visual similarity of Morandi's paintings invests them with a certain multiplicity whereby they appear to haunt each other. 'As soon as you settle upon any painting by Morandi, another, only slightly different, comes to mind', argues Donna De Salvo: 'the seeming neutrality and consistency of Morandi's work leaves room for projection'.[3] Projection is a common response to Morandi's paintings. Observers repeatedly describe the objects in terms of other things, despite (or because of) their studied anonymity. For architect Sarah Jackson, 'they are walled towns'; Carlo Ludovico Ragghianti sees 'cathedrals rather than bottles'.[4] Lianne's and Martin's architectural interpretation of the dark objects is thus not unusual. If anything, Morandi's work plays upon the relation between reference and description, saying and seeing. Is it possible for a cigar to be just a cigar, a bottle merely a bottle? Or do we need images to show us what we cannot say, to stage a relationship to the world that is felt as much as known, remembered as much as understood? In the above passages DeLillo suggests that the image can articulate something beyond the capacity of narrative, that it is possible to see in it something that cannot easily be turned into saying.

Lianne's and Nina's encounters with the Morandis are framed in terms of dissolution and absorption, of the interpenetration of perception and memory, subject and object. Morandi continually returned to the same group of objects, arranging them carefully in configurations which differ only fractionally and repeating this practice over decades.[5] Each painting is therefore both singular and multiple, self-sufficient and representative of the oeuvre as a whole. According to Matthew Gale, 'Morandi explores his position in the world through a process of continual re-addressing, and thereby raises questions about experience that echo those of such contemporaries as Giacometti and Sartre'.[6] While it is unlikely that Morandi read Merleau-Ponty's phenomenological explorations of vision, the two draw similar conclusions about space and the nature of seeing from their engagement with Cézanne. As with Cézanne, it takes sustained, patient attention to get the most from Morandi's work. For Gale, 'Time passes perceptibly through these paintings [...] They suggest self-reflection'.[7]

Over the course of the novel the paintings stimulate in Lianne a reflection on identity and loss. Lianne has lost her father, has almost lost her husband and is soon to lose her mother. The paintings seem to both stage and restore that loss, to summon its pain and enable her to

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[3] Donna M. De Salvo, 'Memento Morandi', in *Giorgio Morandi* (London: Tate, 2001), pp. 10–15 (p. 10).

[4] Donna M. De Salvo, *Giorgio Morandi* (London: Tate, 2001), pp. 56, 15.

[5] The similarity of Morandi's paintings makes it difficult to say which ones Nina owned; my own guess would be that they come from the period 1948-1955, but I have no hard evidence to support this. There are various potential candidates, but isolating one seems beside the point.

[6] Matthew Gale, 'White Bottle - Red Earth', in *Giorgio Morandi* (London: Tate, 2001), pp. 86–101 (p. 99).

[7] Gale, p. 96.

mourn. Through her engagement with art, in the shape of the Morandi paintings and the performance artist known as Falling Man, Lianne is led to renewed awareness of her own vulnerability, and the losses both real and imagined which structure her identity. These encounters enact a self-shattering like that experienced in trauma, such that Lianne is left wondering where she ends and the world begins. The artworks' staging of self-shattering and self-recognition allows Lianne to conceive vulnerability not as a crisis of selfhood but as its fundamental condition.

As we saw in Chapter 1, for Leo Bersani sexuality begins in an experience of self-shattering which, through a primary masochism, is coded as pleasurable. Art then 'repeats the replicative movement of sexuality as a domesticating and civilising project of self-recognition'.[8] The aesthetic stages the experience of self-loss and self-recovery that structures sexuality itself rather than merely an aberrant version of it. This sounds very much like a psychoanalytically-inflected version of the Kantian sublime. However, I want to emphasise not the self-securing movement by which the subject recovers its unity in identifying with the transcendent power of *logos*, but the renewed awareness of vulnerability and the subject's dependence upon the other which the experience can induce, and the ethics of care for the other it implies. Through the disruption of her psychic interiority Lianne comes to a deeper knowledge of her dependence upon shifting, unpredictable relations with others. In *Falling Man* the image mediates trauma, reproducing its disruption of the subject's integrity yet staging that disruption such that the subject can recognise herself as always potentially coming undone. Through art I recognise myself as always fallen: thrust into a world of which I am a part and yet from which I am apart.

Art and terror

Few contemporary writers are as closely associated with themes of terror and media spectacle as DeLillo. His 'pet obsessions' are 'conspiratorial plots, the intoxicating nature of crowds, modern art, the schism between image and reality'.[9] Plots and conspiracies are rife, film and television are constant presences and the set pieces with which DeLillo frequently opens his

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[8] Bersani, p. 111.
[9] Sam Anderson, 'Code Red', *New York Magazine*, 2007
<http://nymag.com/arts/books/features/31521/> [accessed 10 October 2012].

books often feature crowds partaking in some kind of media spectacle, as in the Moonie wedding at the start of *Mao II* (1991) or the famous description of the 1951 World Series baseball game which opens *Underworld* (1997). Artists and terrorists crop up repeatedly in DeLillo's books and seem to share the same ambition, if not each other's means. The man in a room paring down his life to its kernel of truth is a recurring figure, and the object on his desk can be a book or a bomb. Both are designed to distil something of history into an image. As DeLillo put it in a 1991 interview, 'True terror is a language and a vision. There is a deep narrative structure to terrorist acts, and they infiltrate and alter consciousness in ways that writers used to aspire to'.[10] Time and again he juxtaposes art and terror, from the Texas Highway Killer in *Underworld* to the descriptions of Douglas Gordon's art installation *24 Hour Psycho* that bookend *Point Omega*. In *Mao II* the shadowy terrorist bagman George Haddad tells reclusive novelist Bill Gray that 'the more clearly we see terror, the less impact we feel from art'.[11] If anything, Martin's and Lianne's reaction to the Morandis refutes Haddad's argument: their experience of terror renews the impact of the paintings.

The eerie prescience of DeLillo's work was much commented upon in the aftermath of the attacks. As one critic put it, 'The man has been writing the post-9/11 novel for the better part of four decades'.[12] According to Andrew O'Hagan, 'It is his interest in the conjunction of visual technology and terrorism that really sets DeLillo's mentality apart — a setting apart which also put him on the road to having September 11 as his subject long before the events of that day happened'.[13] Such was his association in public consciousness with themes of terror and spectacle that it seemed DeLillo *had* to respond to 9/11 in some fashion. His initial response took the form of an essay published in the December 2001 issue of *Harper's* magazine.[14] The essay consists of eight short sections including musings on the histories of technological modernity, global capitalism and conflict between the West and its others; impressionistic

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[10] Vince Passaro, 'Dangerous Don DeLillo', *nytimes.com*, 1991 <http://www.nytimes.com/books/97/03/16/lifetimes/del-v-dangerous.html> [accessed 14 December 2012].

[11] Don DeLillo, *Mao II* (London: Vintage, 1992), p. 157. The statement is often interpreted as reflecting DeLillo's own opinion, but he has sought to distance himself from it, pointing out that the words are those of a fictional character; see Mark Binelli, 'Intensity of a Plot', *Guernica: A Magazine of Art & Politics*, 2007 <http://www.guernicamag.com/interviews/intensity_of_a_plot/> [accessed 10 October 2012] In light of the argument advanced here it is worth noting that in this interview DeLillo claims that *Falling Man* began with 'a visual image: a man in a suit and tie, carrying a briefcase, walking through a storm of smoke and ash'.

[12] Tom Junod, 'The Man Who Invented 9/11', *Esquire*, 2007 <http://www.esquire.com/fiction/book-review/delillo?src=soc_fcbk> [accessed 10 October 2012].

[13] O'Hagan.

[14] DeLillo, 'In the Ruins of the Future'; the essay was also published in Britain by the Guardian newspaper. See Don DeLillo, 'In the Ruins of the Future', *Guardian*, 22 December 2001, section Review <http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2001/dec/22/fiction.dondelillo> [accessed 4 November 2012].

descriptions of post-9/11 New York; and the experiences of members of DeLillo's family who lived near to 'Ground Zero'. The essay thus stages the debates over the meaning of 9/11 in its conjunction of different narratives and modes.[15] According to Marco Abel, in 'Ruins' DeLillo 'puts the notion of response at stake', showing that 'what an event means is always already shot through with how it appears'.[16] What can be said of 9/11 then depends upon how it is seen. The essay explores the relationship between imagery and narrative and shows that seeing is already a response and a form of meaning-making.

DeLillo advocates the creation of a 'counter-narrative' that will disrupt the developing 'official' narratives of 9/11 as an act of war perpetrated by madmen, as a return of the repressed, or as part of a global 'clash of civilisations'. It would also counter the spectacular power of the visual archive by offering an alternative framing of the event. The counter-narrative reflects the event itself in its multiplicity and contradiction. Immediately after describing 'the huge antenna falling out of the sky, straight down, blunt end first, like an arrow moving backward in time,' DeLillo declares that, 'The event itself has no purchase on the mercies of analogy or simile'.[17] The phrase reveals DeLillo's understanding of literary language as merciful, shielding the reader from the wounding force of the event. This was the objection raised by O'Hagan, as seen in the previous chapter: that the figural in language acts as a barrier, interposing the writer's consciousness between reader and event. O'Hagan seemed to want literature to allow the reader to 'walk through 9/11 at eye level', in Paul Greengrass' resonant phrase, and implied that the writer should obtrude as minimally as possible into the text.[18] Like Beigbeder, DeLillo rejects this demand for transparency, insisting on a more assertive role for literature in mediating trauma. Thus 'language is inseparable from the world that provokes it', even when the relation between the two is put in doubt.[19] DeLillo frames the event as sublime, 'so vast and terrible that it was outside imagining even as it happened', yet insists on literature's value in the aftermath:

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[15] One mode which DeLillo does not employ is the obituary. In the autumn of 2001 the *New York Times* published obituaries of almost 2,000 victims of the attacks. The series, known as 'Portraits of Grief', was widely acclaimed and published in book form in 2002. See *Portraits: 9/11/01: The Collected 'Portraits of Grief' from the New York Times* (New York: Times Books, 2002); For insightful essays on the Portraits see David Simpson, pp. 21–53; Simon Stow, '*Portraits 9/11/01*: The *New York Times* and the Pornography of Grief', in *Literature after 9/11*, ed. by Ann Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn (London: Routledge, 2008), pp. 224–241.
[16] Marco Abel, 'Don DeLillo's "In the Ruins of the Future": Literature, Images, and the Rhetoric of Seeing 9/11', *PMLA*, 118 (2003), 1236–1250 (p. 1236).
[17] DeLillo, 'In the Ruins of the Future', p. 39.
[18] Greengrass, Director's commentary.
[19] DeLillo, 'In the Ruins of the Future', p. 39.

> In its desertion of every basis for comparison, the event asserts its singularity. There is something empty in the sky. The writer tries to give memory, tenderness, and meaning to all that howling space.[20]

Where the witness of ineffability is concerned to keep open an empty space of non-meaning at the centre of the event, DeLillo proposes, if not to fill it in, then to give it 'memory, tenderness, and meaning'. His effort to do so in 'Ruins' takes the form of a layered, multi-vocal crossing of narratives and images that does not aim toward a totalising portrait of the event but offers alternative ways of conceiving it: a fragment of the 'hundred thousand stories crisscrossing New York, Washington, and the world'.[21] This, presumably, is the counter-narrative.

In addition to these shifts in tone, the essay is punctuated by textual images: 'men running in suits and ties, women who'd lost their shoes, cops running from the skydive of all that towering steel' and 'gray ash covering the cars and pavement, ash falling in large flakes, paper still drifting down, discarded shoes, strollers, briefcases'.[22] One paragraph consists simply of a list of such images that interrupts the movement of the text:

> The cell phones, the lost shoes, the handkerchiefs mashed in the faces of running men and women. The box cutters and credit cards. The paper that came streaming out of the towers and drifted across the river to Brooklyn back yards: status reports, résumés, insurance forms. Sheets of paper driven into concrete, according to witnesses. Paper slicing into truck tyres, fixed there.[23]

In Chapter 3 I discussed the critical conception of literary realism as a linguistic mediation of photography's visual descriptiveness. Realism convinces to the extent that it can 'give readers access to a world on the other side of mediation […] by offering certain kinds of visual information', and this information is modelled on the detailed description of appearances made available by photography.[24] These textual images ultimately refer to the visual images of photography rather than to objects in the world; the reality of realism is thus a function of citation and of the image. In the passage above DeLillo cites examples from the visual archive of 9/11, highlighting their familiarity. These images have become embedded in public consciousness like the sheets of paper wedged into truck tyres. DeLillo simply cites them, their mute presence disrupting efforts to assimilate the attacks within a known horizon. They parse the irreducible visuality of the event whilst retaining something of its resistance to discourse,

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[20] Ibid.

[21] DeLillo, 'In the Ruins of the Future', p. 34. One such story of terror and escape is recounted; two-thirds of the way through the narrator reveals that the protagonist, Marc, is his (presumably DeLillo's) nephew. The effect is disorienting, as is the sudden shift in tone which introduces the story into the essay itself.

[22] DeLillo, 'In the Ruins of the Future', p. 34; p. 34; p. 37.

[23] DeLillo, 'In the Ruins of the Future', p. 35.

[24] Armstrong, p. 26.

what Cathy Caruth calls trauma's 'affront to understanding'.[25] These flashes of memory are both traces of the physical event and metonymic fragments of the image-event. Neither wholly integrated within the narrative movement of the essay nor external to it, they are like the photographic images reproduced alongside it. These gloomy monochromes — the rusting prow of a liner named 'United States', the Statue of Liberty small and vulnerable amidst telegraph poles, a warship patrolling the Hudson River — hover between record and symbol, and materialise the essay's themes of loss and trauma whilst remaining irreducible to them. The textual images which pepper DeLillo's essay suspend the movement between presentation and interpretation, seeing and reading, that the essay initiates, signalling the resistance of the event to interpretation at the same time as they incorporate it within language.

One theme running through the essay is the relationship of 'Us and Them', and the possibility of accommodating cultural otherness. DeLillo suggests that the attacks were motivated by resentment of the relentless worldwide extension of 'Western' (specifically American) values:

> It is the high gloss of our modernity. It is the thrust of our technology. It is our perceived godlessness. It is the blunt force of our foreign policy. It is the power of American culture to penetrate every wall, home, life, and mind.[26]

The attacks reversed this threatening penetration, breaching the divide between a rich but paranoid West and its others: 'Our world, parts of our world, have crumbled into theirs'.[27] One effect of the attacks has been to change America's view of itself and its position in the world, to make it feel vulnerable. This self-shattering is echoed in the structure of a text riven by contradictory narratives. As an attempt to understand or explain the faceless otherness of the terrorists, it fails. Instead this facelessness is presented as the terrorists' weapon; we see them only in the violent traces they smear across our screens. If the terrorist is invisible to the society he infiltrates, neither does he quite see his victims. In fact the terrorist's 'edge, his strength' is his capacity to ignore the humanity of those he will destroy, to live alongside them and yet remain apart, isolated within their world.[28] 'We' are as invisible to him as he is to us.

DeLillo invokes the antagonism between a future-oriented Western modernity and a medieval theocracy which it threatens with obsolescence. The terrorists are an extreme manifestation of a cultural identity that imagines itself threatened by 'the power of American culture to

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[25] Caruth, *Trauma*, p. 154.
[26] DeLillo, 'In the Ruins of the Future', p. 33.
[27] DeLillo, 'In the Ruins of the Future', p. 33.
[28] DeLillo, 'In the Ruins of the Future', p. 34. I am aware that this image falsely masculinises terrorism. However, in this case the image is accurate, as all of the known hijackers involved in 9/11 were male.

penetrate every wall, home, life, and mind'.[29] That culture colonises everything with which it comes into contact, translating its difference into a homogenised global return of the same. Yet the same could perhaps be said of a religion that conquered by both book and sword, imposing a common language and culture on its adherents. Neither culture, in these terms, is able to accommodate difference, the presence of the other within its boundaries. The question of how to see and to accommodate otherness at both individual and cultural levels drives the formal and narrative movement of 'Ruins of the Future'. In *Falling Man* DeLillo would explore these themes in greater depth.

A crisis of imagination

In *White Noise* (1985), *Underworld* (1997) and *Cosmopolis* (2003) DeLillo conjured sweeping landscapes of paranoid history and continually migrating capital that seemed definitively postmodern, whatever that might mean. *Falling Man* (2007) continues the tighter, domestic focus and pared-down language debuted in *The Body Artist* (2001), along with its forensic delineation of psychological trauma. The novel follows Lianne and Keith through the days and years after Keith's narrow escape from the World Trade Center. At first they hesitantly rekindle the embers of their failed marriage but gradually drift apart again, each unable to articulate to the other the effect 9/11 has had upon them. Lianne raises Justin more or less alone whilst Keith, bewildered by his survival, submerges himself in the enervated world of professional poker. A series of short inserts running parallel to the main narrative follows Hammad from a mosque in Hamburg to recruitment by a shadowy group of plotters, secret training in America, and imminent oblivion in a hijacked aircraft. The book's title refers to Richard Drew's famous photograph of a man falling to his death from the towers, and to a performance artist who jumps from various locations around New York and then dangles in mid-air, held aloft by a harness, in the posture of the man in Drew's photograph.

Perhaps inevitably, the critical response to *Falling Man* was somewhat mixed. In comparison with DeLillo's previous work *Falling Man* felt 'small and unsatisfying and inadequate'.[30] This was a common criticism of early '9/11 novels', but in DeLillo's case the disappointment was

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[29] DeLillo, 'In the Ruins of the Future', p. 33.

[30] Michiko Kakutani, 'A Man, a Woman and a Day of Terror', *New York Times*, 9 May 2007, section E, p. 1.

exacerbated by the sense that this was very much his home territory. For Andrew O'Hagan, 'the meeting of September 11 and Don DeLillo is not so very much a conjunction as a point of arrival, and a connection so powerful in imaginative terms that it instantly blows DeLillo's lamps out'.[31] O'Hagan's review is particularly interesting as it articulates an objection latent in many negative reactions to the book. He seems to feel let down, even angered by DeLillo's failure to describe and analyse 9/11 with the visionary clarity with which he foretold it. O'Hagan faults DeLillo for both the 'failure [...] to imagine September 11' *and* for needing to imagine it at all. As a writer DeLillo depends upon resources of imagination far outstripped by the incredible spectacle of the event itself. The passage from O'Hagan's review discussed in the previous chapter bears repeating here:

> September 11 offered a few hours when American novelists could only sit at home while journalism taught them fierce lessons in multivocality, point of view, the structure of plot, interior monologue, the pressure of history, the force of silence, and the uncanny. Actuality showed its own naked art that day.[32]

O'Hagan adopts a position commonly espoused in the aftermath of catastrophe; the event itself was so overwhelming as to defeat any attempt at imaginative recreation. Yet the dissatisfaction with existing representations testifies to a resistance to interpretation in the images of the event, and to a desire to overcome that resistance. As we saw in the last chapter, O'Hagan seems to demand a minimally theatrical representation that can compete with the irrefutable television images. He opposes journalistic immediacy to the overt mediation of literary prose, calling for a mode of writing about 9/11 that effaces its own mediation of the event. Behind this hostility to the figural lies the old attack on art's deceptiveness, its seductive promise of something it cannot deliver: the experience of the thing itself. Yet as we have seen, the realism O'Hagan appears to demand is premised upon a simile whereby its effect is 'like a photograph'.

O'Hagan's valorisation of journalistic immediacy is nevertheless couched in rhetorical terms, both in the construction of its argument (the eloquence of O'Hagan's writing, the pressure of repeated short phrases) and in the tropes it credits journalism with using effectively. Multivocality, point of view, plot structure, interior monologue — O'Hagan annexes these novelistic devices to the service of 'actuality', condemning the theatricality of art and its implied corruption of the event's moral impact upon the onlooker. O'Hagan suggests that literature needs the tension between mediation and transparency suggested by the phrase 'naked art'. Overt theatricality such as we have seen in Beigbeder's *Windows on the World*

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[31] O'Hagan.
[32] Ibid.

loses the connection to an extra-textual reality upon which the moral force of art depends: such is the thrust of O'Hagan's argument. Yet we have seen how Beigbeder's novel dramatises that very tension between absorption and theatricality that for O'Hagan is the source of literature's affective power. It is the overt aestheticism to which O'Hagan objects in the examples he gives, their domestication of the visceral force of the images they describe. To say that the impact of the second plane 'was like posting a letter' is for O'Hagan not only formally inadequate, but a moral failure. And it is the domesticating effect of the figurative — the use of art and the art world, as in many of DeLillo's novels, as 'a place where cultural anxieties are made compact and fashionable' — to which O'Hagan seems most strongly to object.[33] Art makes of terror something middle-class New Yorkers can discuss in their tastefully furnished apartments while the real thing, the kind of terror that demolishes skyscrapers, lurks outside in the smoking rubble of Ground Zero. Even Frank Rich's largely positive review suggested that *Falling Man*'s success lies in turning away from the artistic performance of 'Falling Man' to the real horror of the falling man glimpsed by Keith as he struggles to help his dying friend Rumsey in the stricken tower:

> This time the falling men and women tumble before the reader with no safety harness, no net of simile or irony, nothing to break their fall. It is not performance art but the real thing [...] [34]

For DeLillo to recreate as performance art the image of a man jumping from the towers to certain death is for O'Hagan 'a form of intellectual escapism'.[35] The conversion of the horrific sight of a man 'who chose air over fire' into the most esoteric form of contemporary art becomes the figure of DeLillo's failure to do justice to the event — a turn from the real to the figural which is implicitly cast as a moral failure.[36]

DeLillo is criticised, then, for framing his response to the catastrophe on an intimate, domestic scale and for exploring trauma through the mediation of art. Perhaps these criticisms betray a demand that DeLillo somehow capture 'the real thing' that we television viewers missed, to compete with and surpass those images.

In an important essay on the post-9/11 novel, Richard Gray laments 'the groping after a language to say the unsayable that characterises much of the fiction devoted to the new forms

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[33] O'Hagan.

[34] Frank Rich, 'The Clear Blue Sky', *New York Times*, 27 May 2007, section Books / Sunday Book Review <http://www.nytimes.com/2007/05/27/books/review/Rich-t.html> [accessed 10 October 2012].

[35] O'Hagan.

[36] Ibid.

of terror'.[37] The crisis of imagination provoked by 9/11 is registered in the widespread recourse to the language of trauma in the first wave of post-9/11 literature, which draws on 'the sense of those events as a kind of historical and experiential abyss, a yawning and possibly unbridgeable gap between before and after'.[38] This gap appears in 9/11 literature as a disjunction between the world-historical scale of the event and the domestic narratives that have arisen from it. Unable to articulate a new language in which to narrate 9/11, writers fell back into the familiar structures of domestic crisis and resolution, thereby rendering the unfamiliar familiar:

> [Many] of the texts that try to bear witness to contemporary events vacillate [...] between large rhetorical gestures acknowledging trauma and retreat into domestic detail. The link between the two is tenuous, reducing a turning point in national and international history to little more than a stage in a sentimental education.[39]

Gray's assumption that the domestic is insignificant in comparison to the world-historical scale of 9/11 itself trivialises the domestic and the personal. Its domesticity notwithstanding, however, *Falling Man*'s disjointed, repetitive structure and its account of the aesthetic as a means toward recognition of a primary self-shattering vulnerability, do not simply 'assimilate the unfamiliar into familiar structures', but strive to respect trauma's 'affront to understanding' without placing it beyond representation.[40] *Falling Man* stages trauma in the movement between the visual and the verbal: in the descriptions of Lianne's interactions with Morandi's paintings and the performances of Falling Man, and the forms of self-recognition they make possible. Where DeLillo's best-known work delineated the conditions of modernity which made 9/11 possible, even inevitable, *Falling Man* explores the experience of survival, the time when 'Everything [...] is marked by after'(138). Rather than establishing a context for the event, as he did in 'Ruins', plugging it into a network of capital flows, ideological projects and shadowy cabals in the pages of security briefings, in *Falling Man* DeLillo is concerned to delineate its effects on bodies, on relationships, on the intimate structure of lives and memory.

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[37] Richard Gray, 'Open Doors, Closed Minds: American Prose Writing at a Time of Crisis', *American Literary History*, 21 (2009), 128–148 (p. 132).
[38] Richard Gray, p. 130.
[39] Richard Gray, p. 134.
[40] Caruth, *Trauma*, p. 154; Richard Gray, p. 134.

Trauma and repetition in *Falling Man*

Early in the novel DeLillo provides a visceral metaphor for the invasiveness of trauma. The doctor treating Keith for injuries suffered in the towers tells him of the grisly after-effect of suicide bombings known as 'organic shrapnel':

> In those places where it happens, the survivors, the people nearby who are injured, sometimes months later, they develop bumps, for lack of a better term, and it turns out this is caused by small fragments, tiny fragments of the suicide bomber's body. The bomber is blown to bits, literally bits and pieces, and fragments of flesh and bone come flying outward with such force and velocity that they get wedged, they get trapped in the body of anyone who's in striking range. (16)

The gruesome phenomenon literalises Caruth's assertion that in trauma 'the outside has gone inside without any mediation'.[41] It is notably echoed in DeLillo's description of the television footage of the second plane striking the towers: 'this was the footage that entered the body' (134). Trauma is figured as self-shattering, implying a conception of mourning or recovery as exfiltration of the otherness that has invaded the subject. This is in fact Keith's response, which is largely unsuccessful, leaving him trapped within compulsive acting out which sustains his denial of the traumatising loss of psychic integrity he has suffered. I will argue that in *Falling Man* DeLillo argues for a different approach to trauma as enacted in Lianne's gradual accommodation of the knowledge of her primary vulnerability. This accommodation is arrived at largely through her interaction with artworks, in the form of paintings by Morandi and the performances of Falling Man.

Kristiaan Versluys describes *Falling Man* as 'a portrait of pure melancholia without the possibility of working-through or mourning', which 'unfolds as a series of ineffective holding actions against death and despair'.[42] Indeed, in its movements of suspension, repetition and return the text enacts the effect of the trauma it describes. The narrative is fragmented and discontinuous, shifting focus from Lianne to Keith to Hammad. Lianne and Keith seem equally unable to articulate their struggle to assimilate the event they refer to as 'the planes'. The narrative is marked by repeated returns to the scene in Nina's apartment (8-13, 41-49, 111-116, 144-149); Hammad's story interrupts the focus on Keith and Lianne (77-83, 171-178, 237-239); the book ends where it began, with Keith stumbling out of the roaring apocalypse of the towers.

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[41] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, p. 59.
[42] Versluys, pp. 15, 23.

However, the novel's foreclosure of any possibility of working through trauma is not as complete as Versluys maintains. In her repeated encounters with artworks Lianne comes to renewed awareness of the interdependence of self and other, psychic and social realities, which appears to mitigate the trauma she suffers. The interleaving of repetition and difference staged in the aesthetic appears key to Lianne's altered self-awareness. In previous chapters I cited Leo Bersani's thesis that the aesthetic begins in repetition of a masochistic self-shattering experienced by the infant unable to assimilate the stimulus of its mother's love. For Bersani the aesthetic is the repetition of a repetition, which 'repeats the replicative movement of sexuality as a domesticating and civilising project of self-recognition'.[43] Bersani thus links repetition and self-recognition through the aesthetic. The repetitions of a primary self-shattering in sexuality and then art induce a movement from trauma to agency and finally to reflective self-recognition. DeLillo makes the same connection in *Falling Man,* whereby the staging of experience in the aesthetic allows Lianne to recognise herself as irreducibly vulnerable, always threatened by self-shattering in her primary exposure to the other. The staging of this process of self-shattering and self-recovery in the aesthetic is not itself traumatic. It offers a means by which Lianne can recognise the loss she has suffered and accept her corporeal vulnerability rather than seek to overcome or deny it.

According to Cathy Caruth the traumatic event is not in fact experienced at the time of its occurrence:

> The pathology consists, rather, solely in the *structure of its experience* or reception: the event is not assimilated or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated *possession* of the one who experiences it.[44]

An intense stimulus that invades the psyche without warning, the traumatic event is excluded from consciousness and instead preserved intact and pristine in the unconscious, from where it insistently strives to enter consciousness through the repetitive symptoms familiar in traumatic neurosis. The continual psychic return to the traumatic event does not repeat it but is part of an attempt to produce the event as a memory to which the subject can lay claim. The iteration of the event is therefore an attempt to reassert agency, to possess what possesses the subject.

Trauma represents the eternal return of the same outside the cycle of renewal and rebirth identified with organic life and the domination of the pleasure principle. Traumatic repetition therefore produces stasis; in 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle' Freud links it with the death

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[43] Bersani, p. 111.
[44] Caruth, *Trauma*, p. 4.

drive's tendency toward an inert, non-differentiated state. Shlomith Rimmon-Kennan summarises Freud's argument for the existence of two qualitatively different kinds of repetition: 'Constructive repetition emphasizes difference, destructive repetition emphasizes sameness (i.e., to repeat successfully is not to repeat)'.[45] Constructive repetition repeats difference and is thus fundamentally temporal, although the precise nature of that temporality is problematic. Destructive repetition, organised around the pure repetition of sameness, is at heart conservative and ultimately outside of time. Traumatic repetition is static, retreating within a timeless repetition of the same — a repetition which nevertheless leads back to death. To be constructive and serve the pleasure principle, repetition must somehow transmute the event repeated, giving the subject some degree of control over the process of iteration and thus relaying the trauma of loss into the pleasure of reproduction. In Freud's example of the '*fort/da* game' played by his grandson, the boy achieves a degree of mastery over the absence of his mother by replaying it in a scenario of which he is in control. It is the *difference* of his game with the cotton reel from the experience of his mother's absence, together with the infant's control over the pattern of repetition, which allows it to become pleasurable. The infant recognises himself through his repetitive throwing and recovery of the reel. This contrasts with the traumatic repetition that possesses the subject and returns him to the moment of traumatic inscription, inscribing him in a scenario over which he has no control.

Repeatedly throwing himself off buildings and then dangling in space suspended by a rope, Falling Man repeats the child's gesture of throwing the cotton reel over the edge of his cot. Where the child repeats the disappearance of his mother, Falling Man repeats the horrific sight of bodies falling from the towers. His performances also cite the repetition of those falls in the by-now familiar photograph, and its subsequent temporary 'disappearance' from public view.[46] Whereas the child gains pleasure by causing the reel's reappearance, Falling Man is eventually reeled in by the police, that symbol of reassuring authority and paternal Law, who thus 'prevent' his fatal impact with the ground.[47] Freud points out that in the *fort/da* game the child is in fact staging a double absence — that of the mother and of the repression which 'absents' the episode from the child's consciousness.[48] The game thus brings to presence an absence. Falling Man repeats the absence of the dead, who were largely invisible except in the images

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[45] Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan, 'The Paradoxical Status of Repetition', *Poetics Today*, 1 (1980), 151–159 (p. 153).

[46] There have been several attempts to identify the figure in Drew's photograph, none of which have been conclusive. See Junod, 'The Falling Man'.

[47] It may be significant in this context that in the aftermath of 9/11 the NYPD, along with the fire service and other public agencies, were widely lauded as heroic protectors and rescuers rather than their (perhaps more common) image as an instrument of justice and punishment.

[48] Rimmon-Kenan, p. 155.

of those who jumped from the towers, and the repression or repetition of this absence in the censorship of those images.

Rimmon-Kenan's distinction between constructive and destructive repetition can be mapped onto the distinction between melancholic acting out of trauma in displaced form, and successful mourning based on recognition and processing of the blockage in symbolisation the trauma presents. In 'Remembering, Repeating and Working Through' Freud associates bodily acting-out with resistance to interpretation, such that 'the compulsion to repeat […] takes the place of the impulse to remember'.[49] Dominick LaCapra argues that 'the broader concepts that include, without being restricted to, melancholia and mourning are acting out and working through'.[50] Melancholia as a form of blocked or unsuccessful mourning is marked by a retreat from the world, the subject fixated upon a loss she cannot name and is thus compelled to repeat, whereas effective mourning promotes recognition of and reflection upon the loss suffered. Successful mourning involves articulating the loss and redirecting the psychic energy devoted to the lost object toward a re-engagement with the external world.

LaCapra cautions against clearly separating the two, however. Although Freud says little about their correlation, working through seems to be a third term in which remembering and repeating are combined. According to Laplanche and Pontalis, 'It is a constant factor in treatment, but it operates more especially during certain phases where progress seems to have come to a halt and where resistance persists despite its having been interpreted'.[51] Similarly, the process of mourning may be interminable and elements of acting out may persist alongside working through:

> acting out may well be a necessary condition of working through, at least for victims. Possession by the past may never be fully overcome or transcended, and working through may at best enable some distance or critical perspective that is acquired with extreme difficulty and not achieved once and for all.[52]

The different formations are visible in Keith and Lianne's reactions to 'the planes'. As he exits the towers, the traumatised Keith can no longer tell where he ends and the world begins. After receiving treatment for minor physical injuries, Keith initially seems to be recovering well, even

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[49] Sigmund Freud, 'Remembering, Repeating, and Working Through', in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle and Other Writings*, trans. by John Reddick, The New Penguin Freud (London: Penguin, 2003), pp. 31–42 (p. 37).
[50] LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 66.
[51] Jean Laplanche and Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, *The Language of Psychoanalysis*, trans. by Donald Nicholson-Smith (London: Karnac, 2004), p. 488.
[52] LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 70.

if he has 'not quite returned to his body yet' (59). The repetitive exercises he must perform to heal his damaged wrist seem broadly restorative:

> These were the true countermeasures to the damage he'd suffered in the tower [...] the counting of seconds, the counting of repetitions, the times of day he reserved for the exercises, the ice he applied following each set of exercises. (40)

The exercises are physically and psychically curative; in 'going slow, easing inward' (66) Keith gathers himself into his body, re-establishing the boundaries of his subjectivity. However, by the end of the book Keith is still clinging to the reassuring ritual (235-236). No longer working upon his body, the ritual instead supports a fantasy of recuperation masking real stasis. Instead of the constructive repetition which rooted Keith in bodily experience, the exercises now enact a destructive repetition supporting Keith's disavowal of the loss of his friend Rumsey, whose death in the towers Keith witnessed. The exercises have become a form of acting out which 'takes the place of the impulse to remember', protecting Keith from recognition of the loss he has suffered.

Keith organises his post-9/11 life around poker, the game at once a dramatisation of luck and a means of forgetting the death of Rumsey. Before 'the planes' both men took part in a weekly game; where previously the ritual helped Keith disavow the failure of his marriage, now it allows him to forget and deny the death of his friend. In the course of the novel Keith begins to re-establish his failed marriage and then sabotages it once more, absenting himself from the family home and withdrawing into the enervated world of professional poker. Flitting between placeless hotel rooms and timeless casinos in the desert, Keith seems adrift in melancholia, in which 'the depressed, self-berating and traumatised self, locked in compulsive repetition, is possessed by the past, faces a future of impasses, and remains narcissistically identified with the lost object'.[53] Poker stages a fantasy of crisis and 'survival': there will always be another hand, another game. The game dramatises decision-making, but always the same decision:

> always, in the crucial instant ever repeated hand after hand, the choice of yes or no. Call or raise, call or fold, the little binary pulse located behind the eyes, the choice that reminds you who you are. (212)

There is no real contingency in poker, only a series of statistically calculable possibilities crystallised in the endlessly repeated decision to 'call or raise, call or fold'. Cards and chips refer to nothing but themselves, time is marked only by the circular rhythm of the cards. Where Lianne's encounters with art dramatise her insertion in the world and offer a means to mourn the loss of her mother, Keith finds in poker a means of isolating himself and disavowing

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[53] LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 66.

the vulnerability which sociality begets, a vulnerability epitomised in the unmourned loss of Rumsey: 'These were the times when there was nothing outside, no flash of history or memory that he might unknowingly summon in the routine run of cards' (225). At the novel's end Keith is still 'easing inward', trapped in melancholic fixation on the loss he cannot assimilate and driven to continually repeat his chance survival in the fall of a card.

If for Keith the loss of Rumsey repeats that of his failed marriage, so Lianne's feared loss of Keith in the towers repeats the unmourned loss of her father. Nineteen years ago, Jack Glenn shot himself on discovering that he was suffering from Alzheimer's disease. Lianne now runs a weekly 'storyline session' for Alzheimer's sufferers. The sessions fulfil a double function for Lianne; through them she repeats the loss of her father, while in some way reclaiming the time taken from her by his premature death: 'These people were the living breath of the thing that killed her father' (62). In their stories the group connect with each other and recognise themselves as a group, performing their identities in a way gradually becoming impossible outside the sessions as they lose 'the adhesive friction that makes an individual possible' (30). Lianne's work with the Alzheimer's patients dramatises the very things that Keith attempts to ward off through absorption in poker: time, narrative, memory and sociality. Where Keith opts for absorption in an attempt to deny his trauma, the Alzheimer's group offers a form of theatricality which helps Lianne to assimilate hers.

After the group narrate their experiences of 'the planes', they ask Lianne for hers. She obliges, telling them of Keith's reappearance, her fears for Justin and the future, her increased nervousness in public places. As she talks Lianne wants to put her memories in order, to fit them into a narrative, 'one thing following sensibly upon another. There were moments when she wasn't talking so much as fading into time, dropping back into some funnelled stretch of recent past' (127). If, as Shoshana Felman maintains, traumatic knowledge 'can only happen through the testimony', it is through her testimony before the group that Lianne claims the traumatic memories as her own, beginning to possess what had formerly possessed her.[54] Shortly afterward Lianne remembers her last telephone conversation with her father, 'some minutes or hours [...] before he gazed into the muzzle blast', in which he told her the story of her conception (130). Lianne's interaction with these people struggling to maintain the 'adhesive friction that makes an individual possible' allows her to transmute acting out into working through and to finally mourn the loss of her father.

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[54] Felman and Laub, p. 51.

Through the stories they tell, the group stage identity as a function of repetition and difference, narrative and memory. The sessions allow the group members, even if only fleetingly, to articulate what they are losing. The sessions therefore encourage mourning, defined by LaCapra as:

> a homeopathic socialisation or ritualisation of the repetition compulsion that attempts to turn it against the death drive and to counteract compulsiveness — especially the compulsive repetition of traumatic scenes of violence — by re-petitioning in ways that allow for a measure of critical distance, change, resumption of social life, ethical responsibility, and renewal.[55]

The question that remains to be asked is whether the sessions can fulfil this function for the Alzheimer's patients, who face a long, inevitable decline into self-loss and incoherence. The question of whether the sessions can allow them to work through a disaster which has not yet happened is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it raises the possibility that the main beneficiary of the sessions is Lianne herself.

Organic shrapnel and a 'living still life'

Not for nothing do we speak of being 'lost in contemplation' of a painting or 'absorbed' in a book. And yet this loss of self is also a form of self-consciousness, a way of recognising the self in its interaction with (occasionally its ravishment by) an external non-self. If in trauma I am absented from my own experience, in aesthetic contemplation I become present to myself in the encounter with otherness. Lianne's engagement with the Morandi still lives hanging in her mother's apartment also produces something like what DeLillo elsewhere calls a 'living still life': the paintings seem to 'stop time, stretch it out, or open it up'.[56] The paintings *shift*; they exist in time along with their audience, and appear capable of screening Lianne's fears, desires and memories. If the traumatised Lianne experiences spatial and temporal disruption, the paintings stage that disruption in tangible, concrete form. On seeing the towers or her mother 'in' the paintings, Lianne is faced with the question of where that spectral image is located: in her mind, in the painting, or somewhere in between. The image stages the shifting connections and dislocations which define and disrupt Lianne's identity. Presence and

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[55] LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 66.
[56] Don DeLillo, *The Body Artist* (London: Picador, 2001), p. 107; Part of what would become *Falling Man* was first published as a short story in *The New Yorker* in 2007, under the title 'Still-Life'. Don DeLillo, 'Still-Life', *New Yorker*, 2007, 63–69.

absence, psychic and external realities, memory and fantasy, fear and desire are interwoven in her absorption in looking. Nonetheless, in figuring the interpenetration of self and world the paintings allow for a reconstitution of Lianne's subjectivity around that experience of dislocation. Fractured and complex it may be, but the encounter with the paintings is Lianne's; she recognises herself as the subject of that encounter in the same way as does the infant who plays the *fort/da* game. The terms of her self-presence are simultaneously exposed and put in question. Her very absorption in the image provokes a certain theatricality in which she recognises herself as vulnerable, contingent and embedded in the world. In Bersani's terms, self-recognition arises from self-shattering; self-securing is a function of unsecuring.

Art's capacity to stage trauma, and the tension between absorption and theatricality embedded in the aesthetic, are vividly enacted in the performances of Falling Man. His appearances disrupt the narrative, forming somewhat static set pieces as do the textual images in 'Ruins of the Future'. He appears in each of the novel's three sections: once near the beginning as Lianne picks up Nina from Grand Central Station; again at the end of the central section as she leaves her weekly storyline session in Harlem; and in the final section when she comes upon his obituary in a newspaper. On the first occasion she misses the fall; he is already dangling from the elevated roadway outside the terminal as she arrives. A crowd is watching and traffic building up around the spectacle. Lianne is momentarily captured by 'the awful openness of it [...] the single falling figure that trails a collective dread' (33) before making her way back into the terminal to meet Nina. At this point she is still somewhat distanced from the event: aware of what is happening and the reference being made to those bodies falling from the towers, but not herself engaged as a participant in the performance, not yet an addressee.

Lianne's second encounter with Falling Man forms the novel's fulcrum. The episode unfolds in parallel montage; as Lianne leaves her storyline session in Harlem and heads homeward, Keith and Justin approach from downtown, hoping to intercept her. Lianne wanders deep in thought, troubled by the sense that the group is approaching its inevitable end. She becomes aware of a suspension of activity on the street, people's attention drawn to something overhead, almost directly above her on the elevated train line. A man is climbing out onto a maintenance platform alongside the track, 'white male in suit and tie', and she knows who it is: 'This is who he had to be' (159, 160). Time seems to slow as he readies himself and waits above her head. Lianne is trapped, caught up in the event. As a train comes past, he jumps and is held, dangling twenty feet up with 'blood rushing to his head, away from hers' (168). Briefly transfixed, Lianne tears herself away, breaking into a run before gathering herself and eventually intercepting Keith and Justin.

Vividly described down to the positions of Lianne and the various bystanders of whom she is hyper-aware, the scene unfolds with the awful inevitability of a nightmare or flashback. Lianne looks around, hoping for a spark of recognition, an acknowledgement of shared experience: 'This was too near and deep, too personal. All she wanted to share was a look, catch someone's eye, see what she herself was feeling' (163). She has a momentary premonition of how the fall will look to the passengers on the subway train, who will not see the harness arrest his fall:

> There was one thing for them to say, essentially. Someone falling. Falling man. She wondered if this was his intention, to spread the word this way, by cell phone, intimately, as in the towers and in the hijacked planes. (165)

Caught unawares like the train's passengers, Lianne is possessed by a repetition of the trauma she has not witnessed. Fleetingly she thinks of a friend of Keith's rumoured to have jumped, 'in a high window with smoke flowing out' (167). Painfully aware of her presence on the scene, she is yet unable to withdraw. Where the Morandi paintings and her testimony to the Alzheimer's group allowed her to recognise herself as the subject of the experience, this scene possesses her, leaving her 'stretched so tight across the moment that she could not think her own thoughts' (165). When the man jumps he jolts to a halt directly above Lianne in an over-proximity that remains unbridgeable:

> There was something awful about the stylised pose, body and limbs, his signature stroke. But the worst of it was the stillness itself and her nearness to the man, her position here, with no one closer to him than she was. She could have spoken to him but that was another plane of being, beyond reach. (168)

The man seems to invade Lianne's psychic and bodily space, yet remains beyond the reach of understanding. The stillness is not the frozen instant of a photograph but a held breath, tensed and expectant. Falling Man's performance restores what the notorious photograph omits: the corporeal presence of a body in space. It expands the petrified instant of the photograph into an embodied duration, arousing in Lianne an intense awareness of her own body and its physical relationship to the body dangling in space above her head. She is absorbed into, captured by, the performance, and sensitised to the physical proximity of the body dangling above hers.

As the traumatised subject is estranged from her own experience, we are always outside the photograph, even (especially) when we are pictured within it. The linkage of photography and trauma has a long history, from Walter Benjamin to Roland Barthes to Ulrich Baer.[57] This

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[57] See Benjamin; Barthes; Baer.

lineage emphasises the complex temporality of the photographic image: what Barthes calls the *noeme* of photography, the 'that has been' combining past presence with present absence.[58] The moment it immortalises is constitutively past, its present sealed off from our own; this is its pathos. In André Bazin's famous description the photograph preserves the object, 'enshrouded as it were in an instant, as the bodies of insects are preserved intact, out of the distant past, in amber'.[59] Falling Man's performances are haunted by a photograph that, more than most, carries the imprint of death suspended forever in timeless stasis. Yet they are not photographic, but produce instead a *tableau vivant* that restores to the infamous image the duration of lived time. The *tableau vivant* forms a kind of 'living still life', which stretches time, opens it out. For Peter Boxall 'the body of the artist, suspended in mid fall, and occupied overwhelmingly by the absent body of an unnamed other, suggests that the narrative time in which recovery might take place has been suspended, arrested'.[60] This is true insofar as Falling Man enacts the recurrence of the traumatic past, disrupting the onward thrust of narrative. Yet one should not underestimate the *presence* of Falling Man as performer, nor the durational 'body time' his dangling figure performs. As much as the performance 'brings the event back, as if in a kind of déjà vu', it does so in a powerfully realised present shared by performer and audience as they, no less than he, hang suspended *in time*.[61] Against the 'that has been' of the photograph, the performance stages a 'liveness' reminiscent of rolling television news, the exemplary instance of which is 9/11 itself. Where the televisual image induces spatial dislocation, as discussed in Chapter 1, Falling Man's performance instigates a temporal displacement, its liveness shadowed by the past which haunts it. Its temporality is complex and resistant to description, but it is precisely this complexity upon which I want to insist; the performance cannot be straightforwardly aligned with circular repetition of a past moment but, in its mediation of that moment and its photographic record, contains an appeal to the present of its articulation and to the presence of both artist and audience.

LaCapra identifies mediation as a crucial factor differentiating acting out from working through, melancholia from mourning. Thus:

> In acting out, the past is performatively regenerated or relived as if it were fully present rather than represented in memory and inscription, and it hauntingly returns as the repressed. Mourning involves a different inflection of

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[58] Barthes, pp. 76–77.

[59] Andre Bazin, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image', in *What is Cinema? vol. 1*, trans. by Hugh Gray (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004), pp. 9–16 (p. 14).

[60] Peter Boxall, *Since Beckett: Contemporary Writing in the Wake of Modernism*, Continuum Literary Studies (London: Continuum, 2009), p. 175.

[61] Ibid.

> performativity: a relation to the past which involves recognising its difference from the present — simultaneously remembering and taking leave of or actively forgetting it.[62]

The sight of Falling Man dangling above her induces in Lianne a strange mix of absorption and self-awareness. The experience contains aspects of both the compulsive repetition associated with acting out trauma, and the more reflective 're-petitioning in ways that allow for a measure of critical distance' that facilitates working through. As described above, LaCapra insists on the linkage between the two processes, such that 'Melancholia may be necessary to register loss, including its lasting wounds, and it may also be a prerequisite for, indeed a component of, mourning'.[63] Falling Man's performance seems to dramatise that interweaving of mourning and melancholia for which LaCapra argues, restaging the trauma as a powerfully affecting experience, yet significantly altering the event in its re-enactment. The artist's mediation of the photographic image shifts the performance from destructive to constructive repetition, moving from acting out to working through the trauma. In fact LaCapra's claim that acting out repeats the past 'as if it were fully present rather than represented in memory and inscription' recalls both O'Hagan's demand for the immediacy of 'naked art' and Greengrass' desire to 'walk through 9/11 at eye level'. If we follow LaCapra then the theatricality which counters absorption allows space for mourning rather than the acting out promoted by absorptive transparency.

As 'Falling Man' the performer doubles for the figure in the photograph and for the thousands of unburied dead whose pulverised bodies literally hang in the air of New York. Yet in the nature of performance art the performances, like Drew's photograph, are both singular and part of a series. Each both recalls and reframes the others, along with the photograph they cite and the desperate act it records. This combination of repetition and difference would surely be legible to the performances' audiences. In contrast to the infinite, perfect iterability of the photograph, the performances are singular events dependent for their effect upon the physical presence of both artist and audience, yet haunted by the absence of the dead they invoke. They thus manifest that tension between presence and absence, singularity and iteration integral to the structure of traumatic experience. There were undoubtedly an enormous number of images of the missing and dead in circulation after 9/11, from the handmade posters plastered over makeshift shrines all over lower Manhattan to the quasi-official commemorative effort of the *Portraits of Grief*. As David Simpson recognises, however, these

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[62] LaCapra, *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, p. 70.
[63] Dominick LaCapra, *History and Memory After Auschwitz* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998), p. 183.

efforts at mourning were carefully individuated, each referring to a particular life lost.[64] Effacing his own identity, the figure of Falling Man provides a universal image of the missing and dead upon which efforts to mourn those losses can focus.

Coming across Falling Man's obituary in the novel's final section, Lianne learns his name was David Janiak. In an ironic contrast with the *Portraits of Grief* the obituary is brief and sketchy, and fails to satisfy Lianne. Searching online she finds more information, yet knowledge of his identity and biography fails to diffuse his mystique: 'She could believe she knew [...] all the others she'd seen and heard that afternoon, but not the man who'd stood above her, detailed and looming' (224). The distance between them as he hung above her was both conduit and barrier. Lianne finds photographs documenting many of his falls, alongside the Drew photograph which was Janiak's reference point. Yet the performances 'were not designed to be recorded by a photographer', such pictures as exist being taken by witnesses or professionals who happened to be nearby (220). In fact there are no photographs of the fall Lianne witnessed: 'She was the photograph, the photosensitive surface. That nameless body coming down, this was hers to record and to absorb' (223). The photographic negative to which Lianne compares herself registers an image instantaneously, but it takes time and work to develop and fix that image, to make of it a picture. Equally it takes time, effort and the dramatisation of self-presence art provides for Lianne to 'develop' the image of the trauma which haunts her.

The event she and Keith refer to as 'the planes' is not the only trauma staged for Lianne in Falling Man's performance. Before jumping the man turns toward the train, looking 'into his death by fire' (167). The phrase evokes the memory of Lianne's father, who years earlier 'gazed into the muzzle blast' of his shotgun (130). As she runs blindly downtown Lianne is seized by the thought 'Died by his own hand' (169), again stirring her father's ghost. In seeking 'a crack in the world' in which to fit her encounter with Falling Man, Lianne is also striving to assimilate the death of her father. The performance repeats in displaced form her inability to predict or prevent her father's death, or to absorb his loss in the years since. In a way her father's ghost has been hanging above her 'with no one closer to him than she was' (168) yet still beyond the reach of language. In struggling to 'absorb what she saw, take it home, wrap it around her, sleep in it' (210) as she later does with the Morandi, Lianne is equally struggling to finally accept the loss of her father.

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[64] David Simpson, pp. 21–53.

'Something she'd always known'

In the time after 'the planes' both Keith and Lianne struggle to deal with a loss neither can acknowledge. Keith has lost several friends from his poker group, including his best friend Rumsey. Struggling to understand his trauma and survival, he remains trapped in melancholic repetition which buttresses his denial of corporeality and finitude. In the book's final section, Caruth's assertion that in trauma 'the outside has gone inside without any mediation' is staged by DeLillo in an extraordinary sentence passing from Hammad to Keith as plane collides with skyscraper:

> A bottle fell off the counter in the galley, on the other side of the aisle, and he watched it roll this way and that, a water bottle, empty, making an arc one way and rolling back the other, and he watched it spin more quickly and then skitter across the floor an instant before the aircraft struck the tower, heat, then fuel, then fire, and a blast wave passed through the structure that sent Keith Neudecker out of his chair and into a wall. (239)

DeLillo's prose enacts the very invasion that trauma describes, passing from Hammad's perspective to Keith's in mid-sentence. The passage recalls the metaphor of 'organic shrapnel' from earlier in the novel (which, thanks to the circular structure, postdates this scene). As Peter Boxall recognises, 'The moment of impact is one at which partitions give way' and before meets after, plane meets building, terrorist meets victim, two worlds collide.[65] However, Keith does not subsequently have the opportunity to frame this experience of self-shattering and thereby take possession of it through the 'domesticating and civilising project of self-recognition' enacted in the aesthetic.[66] He does not see Falling Man's performances and may be unaware of them, and whilst he is a witness to Florence's testimony, he does not make her a witness to his own story. Lacking any means to screen his anxieties and memories as do the Morandis for Lianne, Keith must suffer the crisis internally. He responds by dissolving into the world: or rather, into the non-world represented by the poker circuit. He is unable to see himself as an embodied being in the world, separate from it but immersed within it. The single exception occurs out in the desert, where Keith gazes at Las Vegas shining in the darkness. The city becomes an image, something of which he is a part yet from which he is apart. The image mediates the encounter of self and other, figure and ground, dramatising their interconnection and differentiation.

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[65] Boxall, p. 186.
[66] Bersani, p. 111.

Lianne's fear that she has lost Keith redoubles the loss of her father which she is still unable to mourn. More than Keith, however, she is able to frame her experience of trauma, even if obtusely in coded fragments. Lianne wants 'to absorb everything' (105), to make her world a part of herself; Keith wants to make himself a part of his world, to disappear into it. The aesthetic prompts Lianne to mourn: in the Morandis she sees reflected both the towers and her mother's apartment; her testimony to the Alzheimer's group allows her to take possession of the memory of her father's death; and the performance art of Falling Man stages trauma in mediated form, inducing self-recognition from the consciousness of self-shattering. The mediation of art is crucial in Lianne's movement from acting out toward working through, to her development of the capacity to mourn her loss. It allows Lianne to place herself 'in the picture': neither to isolate figure from ground nor to immerse one in the other, but to accept the contingency of any separation, the porosity of her boundary with the world. On the morning after Keith and Lianne make love for the first time since 'the planes', Lianne is getting ready for her morning run. She presses her naked body to a full-length mirror and holds herself there 'for a long moment, nearly collapsed against the cool surface, abandoning herself to it' (106). The gesture conflates self-abandonment and self-assertion, possession and divestment. The mirror retains the shape of her body as a fogged mark, slowly fading as Keith comes out of the bathroom. Lianne is present in both her body and in its trace on the mirror, yet captured by neither; part of her lies outside herself, in her imprint on the world. This blurred avatar is slowly dissolving, just like her corporeal self, and gives back to her something of what she is. The imprint on the mirror is something like a 'living still life', picturing the residue of bodily presence in time. In it Lianne can recognise herself as an embodied, temporal being.

Traumatised by an event in which 'the outside has gone inside without any mediation', the temptation for the victim of violence is to retreat into paranoid reinforcement of the boundary, to seal oneself off from the world lest one be exposed again, or to abdicate the task of separation altogether and dissolve into one's environment. The first impulse is paranoid in origin, the second schizophrenic. To successfully work through trauma one must come to an acceptance of one's vulnerability: of the impossibility of complete autonomy and the risk of psychic or physical violence that must be endured as a result. Freud is not very clear about what exactly 'working through' means, but it seems to require an accommodation with loss rather than cancellation or redemption of it. The question is how to deal with vulnerability, how to live with it rather than overcome or eradicate it. For Judith Butler the experience of loss reveals our primary vulnerability and the social constitution of subjectivity: 'something about who we are is revealed, something that delineates the ties we have to others, that

shows us that these ties constitute what we are, ties or bonds that compose us'.[67] Where Freud conceives trauma as psychic wounding resulting from a breach of the organism's integrity by a sudden and overwhelming stimulus, Butler argues that in the experience of loss we are brought to the realisation that the self is always permeable, incomplete and in dialogue with an outside. In grieving the loss of another we are often unsure of what exactly in the other we have lost. Butler suggests it is that part of oneself which consisted of the relation to the lost other. In mourning we are more aware than ever of the ties that bind us to others and through which our identity comes into being:

> I find that my very formation implicates the other in me, that my own foreignness to myself is, paradoxically, the source of my ethical connection with others. I am not fully known to myself, because part of what I am is the enigmatic traces of others.[68]

In this reading of subjectivity, vulnerability is the irreducible price of agency. For Butler, following Levinas, the ethical relation begins in the acceptance of one's dependence upon the other, which includes the possibility that one may be the object of the other's violence. Butler suggests mourning can renew awareness of this primary dependency upon the other:

> Many people think that grief is privatising, that it returns us to a solitary situation and is, in that sense, depoliticising. But I think it furnishes a sense of political community of a complex order, and it does this first of all by bringing to the fore the relational ties that have implications for theorising fundamental dependency and ethical responsibility.[69]

Butler extrapolates the subjective realisation of vulnerability in the experience of loss to describe the United States' collective reaction to 9/11. On top of the physical loss of life the U.S. suffered the cultural loss of 'the prerogative, only and always, to be the one who transgresses the sovereign boundaries of other states, but never to be in the position of having one's own boundaries transgressed'.[70] This is the argument that 9/11 represents a 'fall into history' for the United States as a culture. The impact of 'the second plane' marks the end of its apparent immunity to the violence associated with processes of globalisation of which it is one of the principal agents. It is also the fall suffered or chosen by Falling Man, stimulating Lianne's renewed awareness of the linkage of agency and vulnerability.

The paradigmatic response to trauma calls for a working through based on the narration of one's experience of loss. In taking control of traumatic memory in this way, the traumatised

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[67] Butler, p. 22.
[68] Butler, p. 46.
[69] Butler, p. 22.
[70] Butler, p. 39.

subject assimilates the event into conscious memory and reconstitutes the self which has been fragmented. It might be said of *Falling Man* that whereas narrative serves to reconstitute the subject fragmented by trauma, as in the stories told by Lianne's Alzheimer's sufferers, the visual artwork stages that very dispossession Lianne feels and that, according to Butler, is a fundamental feature of subjectivity itself. Lianne is able to make limited accommodation with the vulnerability and exposure to the other that trauma dramatises. Rather than the threatening corporeal invasion figured by the metaphor of organic shrapnel, in her encounters with artworks Lianne experiences self-recognition through self-shattering in a manner not itself traumatic. If her encounter with Falling Man enters Lianne's body, it does so as an experience of which she can feel herself the subject, not as the missed encounter of trauma. Where the traumatic event is registered in its absence from consciousness, the mediation of that event in Falling Man's performance allows Lianne to begin assimilating the trauma, to 'find a crack in the world where it might fit' (168). The account of her experience suggests an interlacing of acting out and working through, melancholic return and mourning, as theorised by LaCapra. Her encounter with Falling Man becomes for Lianne a 'living still life' in a very different way from the Morandi, yet one which is ultimately connected through its disruption of the boundaries between inside and outside, body and image, absorption and theatricality.

The 'counter-narrative' of which DeLillo speaks in 'Ruins of the Future' is in *Falling Man* given a visual inflection that cannot be reduced to spectacle, for it disrupts the separation of image and beholder. I have argued that 9/11 potentially induced a virtual trauma in the beholder, the dislocating effect of the mediated images arousing a desire for embodied experience that responses to 9/11 seek to satisfy or examine in varying ways. In *Falling Man* Lianne's insistently material relation to the artworks she encounters, a materiality inseparable from those works' theatricality, both answers that desire for embodied experience and allows the transmutation of trauma into mourning through Lianne's recognition of her primary vulnerability. If, as Butler argues, 'grief contains the possibility of apprehending a mode of dispossession that is fundamental to who I am', the image seems to offer a means of staging that dispossession rather than attempting to overcome or disavow it.[71] Even in Lianne's solitary confrontation with the artwork, the temporal and social nature of her being is revealed. In *Falling Man* the image stages selfhood as always coming undone, predicated upon what exceeds it. Yet the realisation of this dispossession leads not to crisis, as in trauma, but to a paradoxically increased self-awareness, a renewed appreciation of the mutual dependence of self and other. In her encounters with Morandi's paintings and with Falling Man Lianne is

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[71] Butler, p. 28.

able to project the crisis outward onto the artwork. In doing so she encounters the limits of her self-possession. Once again this carries echoes of the sublime, wherein the aesthetic mediation of an overwhelming stimulus renders it restorative rather than traumatising. The discourse of sublimity tends, especially in its Romantic incarnation, to emphasis the self-sufficient resilience of a subject capable of conceiving an experience that exceeds its capacity of presentation. In *Falling Man*, however, the emphasis is on the moment of disarticulation rather than that of reaffirmation, on the self's implication in the other rather than its mastery of it. It is after all difficult to imagine a painter further removed from Romantic bombast than Morandi. In *Falling Man* self-shattering produces humility in Lianne's awareness of her dependence on a world that exceeds her and to which she is irremediably exposed.

Three years after 'the planes' Nina is dead, Martin once again somewhere in Europe. The Morandis have been returned to him at Nina's insistence. Their relationship appears to have foundered, partly as a result of their disagreement over the attacks. With mixed feelings Lianne visits an exhibition of Morandi's work in a gallery in Chelsea: 'Because even this, bottles and jars, a vase, a glass, simple shapes in oil on canvas, pencil on paper, brought her back into the midst of it' (209). As she looks around the gallery one painting in particular holds her attention:

> It was a variation on one of the paintings her mother had owned. [...] She could not stop looking. There was something hidden in the painting. Nina's living room was there, memory and motion. The objects in the painting faded into the figures behind them, the woman smoking in the chair, the standing man. (210)

Nina haunts the painting as did the towers three years previously. Looking takes Lianne 'down and in' yet also outside of herself, melding perception and memory, world and psyche, art and life. The staging of loss in her response to the painting is not traumatic for Lianne but allows her to recognise the loss as part of who she is. This becomes clear in her response to the drawings hanging in the gallery's office:

> She examined the drawings. She wasn't sure why she was looking so intently. She was passing beyond pleasure into some kind of assimilation. She was trying to absorb what she saw, take it home, wrap it around her, sleep in it. There was so much to see. Turn it into living tissue, who you are. (210)

In Lianne's effort to assimilate the Morandi into her very being she is learning to absorb the impact of her parents' deaths. In this moment, as in *Falling Man* as a whole, the image becomes a site in which self-recognition arises from the staging of a prior self-shattering. The image stages not the subject's self-sufficiency but its lack thereof, its interdependence with the

world of which it is a part. Lianne's identity is paradoxically affirmed in the experience of its contingency.

As she undresses one night, Lianne pulls a T-shirt over her head. The gesture momentarily interweaves memory, body and world:

> [...] it wasn't sweat she smelled or maybe just a faint trace but not the sour reek of the morning run. It was her, the body through and through. It was the body and everything it carried, inside and out, identity and memory and human heat. It wasn't even something she smelled so much as knew. It was something she'd always known. [...] It was a small moment, already passing, the kind of moment that is always only seconds from forgetting. (236)

In this moment Lianne carries over the awareness of her interdependence with the world, and of the vulnerability that is the price of agency, from the theatricality of the aesthetic into her everyday existence. The 'small moment, already passing' that briefly ruptures the weave of her consciousness and reveals its essential terms is akin to the fleeting epiphanies provoked by the Morandis and by Falling Man. The T-shirt is imbued with a trace of her presence in the world which thus gives back to her what she is, as the crowd in which she once became lost whilst in Cairo gave her something of herself: 'she was forced to see herself in the reflecting surface of the crowd. She became whatever they sent back to her' (184). Lianne's encounter with trauma is repeatedly mediated by the aesthetic. Her dialogue with the Morandis permeates the narrative, framing it as a discourse on looking and interiority. Her history of loss and the unacknowledged trauma she bears is refracted through her encounters with Falling Man. It is thus through the aesthetic that Lianne comes to self-consciousness, to experience herself as both subject and object of perception, forever held in suspension, in thrall to what lies outside of herself.

The accommodation with vulnerability to which Lianne comes is ambiguous, however. The novel leaves her 'ready to be alone, in reliable calm, she and the kid, the way they were before the planes appeared that day, silver crossing blue' (236). This suggests a lingering desire to return to a time untainted by trauma and to isolate the mother-son dyad from the wider world. One can detect the same nostalgic desire for security present in her earlier effort to 'absorb what she saw, take it home, wrap it around her, sleep in it' (210). True to Richard Gray's criticism, Lianne appears to be retreating into an identity defined in literally familiar terms. The 'enigmatic traces of others', to use Butler's phrase, which constitute Lianne's identity as a social subject, must also include her relationship to those whose otherness is more deeply marked: the obvious example being Elena, the neighbour whose Middle Eastern music provokes an aggressive reaction from Lianne. Lianne's socially constituted identity

clearly does not include the kind of otherness Elena represents. Keith's position within this tight family unit remains uncertain. The boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, shared allegiance and experience which constitute the domestic relation are here troubled and contingent. The aesthetic can stage the disruption of selfhood caused by trauma, but this in itself is no guarantee of successful assimilation. There is always the risk of disavowal, of a refusal to recognise vulnerability as the price of agency and subsequent retreat into fantasised self-sufficiency. Such in fact turned out to be largely the reaction of the Bush administration, and perhaps of the United States as a culture, to the trauma of 9/11: President Bush announced as early as September 21 2001 that the time for grieving was past, superseded by the time for vengeful action to restore the loss.[72]

Mourning is both necessary and potentially interminable yet, *pace* Versluys, *Falling Man* does not present 'a portrait of pure melancholia without the possibility of working-through or mourning'. Instead it stages the psychological disruption wrought by trauma through the tension between self-shattering and self-recognition staged in Lianne's encounters with artworks, and suggests that mourning demands recognition of the ineradicable vulnerability arising from our constitutive openness to the other. This is the basis of Butler's claim for the ethical value of mourning. Trauma can serve as the point of departure for a reconceptualisation of political community:

> To be injured means that one has the chance to reflect upon injury, to find out the mechanisms of its distribution, to find out who else suffers from permeable borders, unexpected violence, dispossession, and fear, and in what ways […] the dislocation from First World privilege, however temporary, offers a chance to start to imagine a world in which that violence might be minimised, in which an inevitable interdependency becomes acknowledged as the basis for global political community.[73]

The fragile promise of DeLillo's 'counter-narrative' is thus that in recognising a primary vulnerability to which we are all equally subject (even if, as Butler recognises, that vulnerability is globally distributed in 'radically inequitable ways'), the possibility of a recalibration of our relationship to the other is nonetheless held open.[74] *Falling Man* offers one version of that 'counter-narrative' and the promise it contains of an accommodation with trauma.

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[72] 'A Nation Challenged; President Bush's Address on Terrorism Before a Joint Meeting of Congress', *New York Times*, 21 September 2001, section U.S. <http://www.nytimes.com/2001/09/21/us/nation-challenged-president-bush-s-address-terrorism-before-joint-meeting.html> [accessed 17 December 2012].

[73] Butler, pp. xii–xiii.

[74] Butler, p. 30.

5: **Luc Tuymans' *Still Life* and the monstration of 9/11**

In 1955 the artist and teacher Arnold Bode staged *Documenta*, an exhibition of international modern art, in his hometown of Kassel in central Germany. He aimed to reintroduce culture to the blasted landscape of post-war Germany and to rehabilitate the public perception of modern art, which had been subjected to ridicule and contempt by the Nazis, most notoriously via the exhibition of 'degenerate art' staged in Berlin in 1937. The exhibition was a huge success, and has been repeated at (mostly) five-year intervals ever since. *Documenta* has grown steadily in scale and cultural prestige to the point where it now dominates Kassel and defines the city's international reputation; the exhibition spans multiple venues, typically involves over one hundred artists and draws upwards of half a million visitors during its hundred-day run.[1] Ranked alongside the Venice and Whitney biennials, *Documenta* is 'one of the foremost venues at which the current cultural politics of the art world is laid out'.[2] A serious attempt to survey and critique contemporary artistic production across several continents, it serves as a bellwether for the art world, an indicator of present health and future trends. Recent *Documenta* have sought to expand or interrogate the canon of contemporary art by including artists from outside the Western mainstream, and to highlight or critique the relationship of contemporary art with politics, mass media, consumer culture or global capital. Whilst not always unequivocally successful in realising these ambitions, as an institution *Documenta* has been enormously influential in determining the political and cultural valency of contemporary art.

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[1] 'Documenta Archive for the Art of the 20th and 21st Centuries', *Documenta Archive* <http://documentaarchiv.stadt-kassel.de/miniwebs/documentaarchiv_e/07895/index.html> [accessed 28 September 2012].
[2] Thomas McEvilley, 'Documenta 11', *Frieze*, 2002, pp. 80–85 (p. 82).

Documenta 11 was structured as a series of five 'platforms'. The first four consisted of a series of lectures and colloquia held around the world over a year beginning March 2001, intended 'to probe the contemporary problematics and possibilities of art, politics, and society'.[3] The fifth platform was the exhibition itself, held in Kassel from June 8 to September 15 2002. Chief curator Okwui Enwezor and his team chose to base the exhibition around the question of 'how contemporary art in all its different forms can continue to develop in a dialectic relationship to the entirety of global culture'.[4] Specifically, the curators wanted 'to find out what comes after imperialism.'[5] The exhibition thus included an unusually high number of artists from countries outside the dominant Euro-American axis of contemporary art, whilst much of the art shown was 'clearly informed by issues that until now have been generally deemed to be beyond art's purview'.[6] These issues often involved power and representation; many works proposed alternative views of existing histories or institutions (Bodys Isek Kingelez, Yinka Shonibare, the Atlas Group, Chohreh Feyzdjou) or depicted sites of struggle and contested histories (David Goldblatt, Zarina Bhimji, Black Audio Film Collective). Of course, in an exhibition as large as *Documenta 11* it is tendentious to identify trends and themes too readily; one of the most prominent spaces was given over to the Dutch conceptualist Hanne Darboven, not usually classed as a politicised artist.[7] Nonetheless, many critics noted the prevalence of lens-based media and a strongly documentary approach to subject matter. Although this was welcomed as progressive and politically engaged, some raised concerns that many artists, and the show itself, seemed to ascribe an innate criticality to documentary forms. For *Modern Painters'* Georg Imdahl, 'remarkably many works [seemed] satisfied using a documentary technique without any additional alterations'.[8] James Meyer, writing in *Artforum*, worried that '[although] the effort is admirable, Documenta 11's concept of political art as documentary does not encompass a reflexive approach to the exhibition itself'.[9] Critics questioned whether a straightforwardly documentary approach to 'real world issues' was sufficient to produce the

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[3] 'Platform5_Documenta11', *Documenta Archive*, 2002
<http://www.documenta11.de/archiv/d11/data/english/index.html> [accessed 28 September 2012].
[4] 'Artnews.org: Documenta 11 at Documenta Kassel', *artnews.org*, 2002
<http://artnews.org/documenta/?exi=17664> [accessed 5 October 2012].
[5] McEvilley.
[6] Michael Gibbs, 'Documenta 11/1', *Art Monthly*, 2002, 1–5 (p. 2).
[7] Exactly what constitutes a 'political' artwork is of course one of the themes of this chapter.
[8] Jorg Imdahl, 'Documenta 11', *Modern Painters*, 2002, pp. 146–147 (p. 147).
[9] James Meyer, 'Tunnel Visions', *Artforum*, 2002, pp. 168–169 (p. 168). For example, Chantal Akerman's film installation *De l'autre côté* ('From the Other Side') concerning the fate of Mexicans who cross the border into the U.S. seemed only fractionally removed from documentary by its inclusion within the exhibition. The opposite approach of *September 11 2001*, Touhami Ennadre's series of photographs of grieving Americans draped in the national flag, was derided by Imdahl as 'emotional kitsch'.

criticality required of a politically aware practice. A genuinely provocative statement might require greater subtlety and invention:

> [The] blurring of lines between art and reality, fiction and journalism, documentation and forgery is a central concern of Documenta 11. It is also one that often seems forced and even banal. [...] Whether art must make a head-on confrontation with contemporary political issues in order to establish its current legitimacy is perhaps the most provocative question posed by Enwezor's Documenta instalment.[10]

In a similar vein, Eleanor Heartney drew from *Documenta 11* the conclusion that 'political art performs best when it asks questions instead of presuming to answer them'.[11] Perhaps the most pressing question at *Documenta 11* therefore concerned the politics of aesthetics; in an age when politics appears increasingly aestheticised, what is the critical value of the aesthetic and how might it be best deployed?

The timing of *Documenta 11*, and its curators' stated ambition to explore themes of imperialism and the relation of the West to its others, ensured that the exhibition was overshadowed by 9/11. The curators' attempt to address new geopolitical realities was perhaps more prescient than they could have anticipated, yet 9/11 seemed to render the exhibition both highly topical and anachronistic. If the question of 'what comes after imperialism' seemed more relevant than ever, the attacks seemed to represent a moment of rupture rather than continuity with existing political struggles. The global media coverage planted both the attacks and their iconography of planes and skyscrapers firmly within the public imaginary. Any serious discussion of the politics of globalisation and their relationship to contemporary art that the show initiated seemed irrelevant unless it refracted the fusion of visuality and violence epitomised by the attacks. In fact the hijackers' sophisticated grasp of global media cultures threatened to expose much of the work in *Documenta 11* as structured by a hermetic or simply naïve understanding of the politics of aesthetics.

'An enormous vacuousness'

One of the few internationally established European painters to exhibit at *Documenta 11* was Luc Tuymans, whose reputation had been growing steadily throughout the 1990s. *Mwana*

[10] David Galloway, 'Documenta 11', *ARTnews*, 2002, 169–170 (p. 170).
[11] Eleanor Heartney, 'A 600-hour Documenta', *Art in America*, 2002, pp. 86–95 (p. 95).

Kitoko, his display in the Belgian pavilion at the 2001 Venice Biennale, dealt with the unacknowledged violence of the Belgian colonial enterprise in the Congo. The exhibition was widely praised and confirmed Tuymans' reputation as one of the most respected and influential painters currently working.

Tuymans is often bracketed with Gerhard Richter as a 'post-photographic' painter exploring painting's alleged redundancy as a critical historical medium in the current age of lens-based media. Both artists investigate photography's claim to witness an external, objective truth, and its impact upon painting's status as the visual repository of European history and thought. Both address the legacy of European Enlightenment thought, especially Romantic aesthetics, and its ultimate catastrophe in the Holocaust. However, whereas Richter's work seduces the viewer with its virtuosic technique, only to withdraw behind his trademark soft-focus blurring, Tuymans' manner is calculatedly undemonstrative yet every bit as distinctive. Composed in short, even brushstrokes and sickly tones, his paintings appear prematurely aged. Tuymans likes to call them 'authentic forgeries'; as he explains, 'I wanted the paintings to look old from the start, because they are about memory'.[12]

Through apparently banal images Tuymans interrogates the repression of violence in personal and cultural memory, from Europe's colonial history to nationalist ideology and child abuse. Tuymans once said that 'Violence is the only structure underlying my work', refuting the destructuring capacity more commonly assigned it.[13] Note also that this assertion is subtly discordant with Tuymans' statement that his paintings 'are about memory'. In fact, the link between memory, violence and representation is Tuymans' true subject. His paintings patiently and forensically explore the history of representation as a history of the deployment, consequences and legitimisation of violence. Tuymans' paintings invite a symptomatic reading whereby what is omitted from the image is often crucial, and where such narratives as the viewer is offered appear fragmentary and uncertain. Meaning in his work often arises in the gaps or omissions, in what the image fails to show, and in the space between images presented as a group. What we are left with are the traces of violence; his work is 'a dismemberment, a probing at fragments and wounds'.[14]

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[12] Juan Vicente Aliaga, 'Interview', in *Luc Tuymans*, rev. edn (London: Phaidon, 2003), pp. 6–31 (p. 8).
[13] Aliaga, p. 20.
[14] Adrian Searle, 'False Memories', *Frieze*, 17 (1994)
<http://www.frieze.com/issue/article/false_memories/> [accessed 9 October 2012].

Echoing Jean-Luc Nancy, Joseph Leo Koerner claims that 'by nature, violence completes itself in imagery'.[15] Nancy argues that in order to be fully satisfied the violator must see his violation as an image: 'The violent person wants to see the mark he makes on the thing or being he assaults, and violence consists precisely in imprinting such a mark'.[16] This seems persuasive, as evidenced perhaps in the Nazis' obsessive cataloguing of their attempted extermination of the Jews — all those piles of hair and shoes. One might think also of the careful photographing by the Khmer Rouge of every one of the detainees at the notorious S-21 prison. Violence is theatrical inasmuch as it stages itself, and this theatricality is part of the humiliation and domination of the victim, his or her reduction to the status of an object of the violator's will, which must be made visible to be completely effective. The connection between violence and picturing, the imagery of violence and the violence of images, is central to Tuymans' oeuvre, as is an examination of the ethics of spectatorship.

To look is to some extent to violate, but the effects of violence and trauma in particular are often excluded from the 'violent' image. In Tuymans' work the representation of violence and the violence of representation are frequently intertwined, as can be seen in one of his most notorious paintings. Dating from 1986, it is a small painting of an empty room in some anonymous institutional building, scrubbily executed in warm, dirty browns. The image itself is fairly unremarkable, yet 'there are no innocent images in Tuymans' paintings'.[17] The painting's title is *Gaskamer* (*Gas Chamber;* Figure 25)*.* Based on a photograph depicting one of the preserved gas chambers at Dachau concentration camp, it represents 'a core image in the consciousness of the past 60 or so years', and yet one which is rarely ever seen, thanks in part

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[15] Joseph Leo Koerner, 'Monstrance', in *Luc Tuymans* (New York: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Wexner Center for the Arts in association with Distributed Art Publishers, 2009), pp. 30–46 (p. 42); Nancy, pp. 15–26. Koerner here appears close to Andrea Dworkin's argument that pornography *is* violence, that the representation of a violent act essentially repeats the violence of the act itself. I am using Dworkin here as the example *in extremis* of a pervasive attitude which sees picturing, and above all the 'transfer of reality' involved in photography, as an intrusive, violent act. The attitude is present in both Barthes' *Camera Lucida* and Susan Sontag's *On Photography*, as well as in André Bazin's influential essay from which the phrase is taken; Bazin, p. 14. However, whereas for Dworkin violent or pornographic images repeat the acts they portray, for Koerner as for Nancy the image, whether material or not, is integral to the violent act, for violence is itself a form of image-making. Whereas for Dworkin the picture violates, for Nancy violence is a form of picturing. On the issues raised by feminism around sexuality and the spectacle of violence, see Tanya Horeck, *Public Rape: Representing Violation in Feminism, Fiction and Film* (London: Routledge, 2003).

[16] Nancy, p. 20.

[17] Adrian Searle, 'Living Dead', *Guardian*, 22 June 2004, section g2 <http://www.guardian.co.uk/culture/2004/jun/22/1> [accessed 9 October 2012].

to a powerful taboo.[18] Thus a whole history of violence, horror and repression opens up within the image. And yet, where is this violence within the image itself?

Figure 25: Luc Tuymans, *Gaskamer*, 1986. Oil on canvas, 60.5 x 82.5 cm. Collection Museum Overholland, Amsterdam.

To what exactly does the phrase 'the image itself' refer? Perhaps to the image shorn of its title: yet the title simply describes what the image depicts, filling in the history of the banal space in the picture. The painting's shocking effect depends upon the apparent absence of violence in an image which, upon reading the title, is revealed to be implicated in the most horrific violence. The painting conceals and then reveals this history, echoing the diffusion of knowledge of the camps themselves, and the shocking impact in 1945 of the first photographs from the camps. Can an image which does not depict a violent act be described as violent? One answer might be that it can if the act of picturing is itself a violation. The gas chamber's history bestows upon it a kind of sanctity, and the sacred has a long association with unrepresentability, going back at least as far as the Second Commandment.[19] The gas

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[18] Searle, 'Living Dead'.

[19] For an incisive reading of the Second Commandment in the context of photography see Snyder.

chambers were the central horror of the Holocaust, and as such photographs of them have a certain taboo quality upon which the painting draws. As with all Tuymans' paintings, *Gas Chamber* is based on a photograph. It is therefore a picture of picturing, an image of a taboo image. 'The image itself' is here much more than the simple presentation of a thing; it is also the invocation and transgression of an entire history of the taboo or sacred image.

Painted with 'meticulous indifference' to its subject matter, the painting at first appears anything but violent: but can 'meticulous indifference' itself be a form of violence?[20] The phrase suggests the kind of bureaucratic callousness that conceived and implemented the 'Final Solution'. The indifference which treats this as merely one image amongst others is ethically monstrous, and one in which the viewer is made complicit. Just as Tuymans paints gas chambers in the same way he paints flowers or fruit, so the spectator encounters the painting as one in a series of artistic images in a gallery or a glossy art book. One persistent theme of commentary on violent imagery has been the fear that repeated exposure to such images may induce indifference or numbness in the beholder.[21] Tuymans' oeuvre displays an enervation suggestive of moral failure, not only in those responsible for the violence to which the paintings bear witness, but in the beholder's capacity to treat this like any other image. As we saw in Chapter 3, part of Adorno's objection to art 'after Auschwitz' concerned the possibility that it would 'make an unthinkable fate appear to have had some meaning'.[22] The recognition of art's implication in the structures of thought that made possible the catastrophe thus becomes a barometer of post-Auschwitz art's ethical integrity. In Chapter 3 I suggested that integrity may reside in the admission of complicity, in the erosion of the distance separating observer and observed, subject and object, which technics sustains. Tuymans' paintings never confront the beholder with the violent act itself, except inasmuch as the act of picturing is already a violent one. Instead we are presented with the traces of past violence or repressed memories. Tuymans rejects the spectacle of violence, instead exploring the manner in which violence, as a mode of picturing, can structure an image. *Gas Chamber*, a painting of a taboo image, addresses the picturing of violence as well as violence itself. Its power lies as much in what is not visible as in what is.

Yet the painting does not present its own failure to represent the event, in the manner of the negative sublime so pervasive in post-Auschwitz art. For Jean-François Lyotard, writing in 1979, 'To make visible that there is something which can be conceived and which can neither be

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[20] Searle, 'Living Dead'.

[21] Carolyn J. Dean cogently analyses the complex of responses for which the phrase 'the pornography of death' has become a placeholder; Dean.

[22] Adorno, 'Commitment', p. 189.

seen nor made visible: this is what is at stake in modern painting'.[23] Lyotard proposes that the event, the fact that 'it happens' prior to any understanding or categorisation of what 'it' might be, is sublime and constitutively unrepresentable: 'When the sublime is "there" (where?), the mind is not there. As long as the mind is there, there is no sublime.'[24] A 'sublime feeling' aroused by the event nevertheless, 'bears witness to the fact that an "excess" has "touched" the mind, more than it is able to handle'.[25] External to consciousness and excluded from representation, Lyotard's sublime is framed as a (non)experience of self-shattering akin to trauma: 'Shock is, *par excellence,* the evidence of (something) happening, rather than nothing at all. It is suspended privation.'[26] Lyotard's sublime event presents a stimulus exceeding the capacity of the subject's perceptual apparatus. It thus recalls Freud's description of trauma as a failure of mediation in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*. Thus, 'We may use the term *traumatic* to describe those excitations from outside that are strong enough to break through the protective barrier' provided by consciousness and to impinge upon the unconscious directly.[27] The event as self-shattering trauma is unrepresentable because it exceeds or precedes the temporal and spatial boundaries that determine subjectivity. Unable to represent 'it happens', art can only bear witness to this failure: 'It does not say the unsayable, but says that it cannot say it'.[28] For Lyotard, Barnett Newman's abstract paintings respond to the abyss of 'it happens' with a mute display of the traces of presence that marks the limits of representation. Along with Adorno's complex meditations on the condition of art 'after Auschwitz' discussed in chapter 3, Lyotard's 'postmodern sublime' has been influential in determining limitations upon representations of the Holocaust and upon representation as such. We have seen how that paradigm has come under pressure in light of questions around mediation. In the context of Tuymans' work it is worth noting that Lyotard's 'postmodern sublime' operates according to a logic of the symptom, where some feature of the image becomes a sign of something that, subject to repression, cannot be depicted. In fact the titles of Tuymans' works often function as symptoms. Discussing his painting *Silent Music* (1993), and immediately after claiming that 'Violence is the only structure underlying my work', Tuymans says that, 'The title itself is the heart of the image and can never be depicted: the missing image. *Gas Chamber* is another

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[23] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), p. 78.

[24] Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger and 'the jews'*, trans. by M.S. Roberts and A. Michel (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990), p. 32.

[25] Ibid.

[26] Jean-François Lyotard, 'The Sublime and the Avant-Garde', *Artforum*, 1984, 36–43 (p. 40).

[27] Freud, 'Beyond the Pleasure Principle', p. 68.

[28] Jean-François Lyotard, *Heidegger and 'the jews'*, p. 47; See also Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman: Reflections on Time* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1993).

work that might look warm, but when you read the title it becomes threatening, the whole image changes.'[29] However, *Gas Chamber* shows that the 'unrepresentable' *pellicule maudit* of the Holocaust can be represented, while still disturbing concepts of representation. As Helen Molesworth writes of the painting, 'What is shocking is not an aesthetic image of the putatively unrepresentable, but rather the *simplicity* with which the idea and the space *can* be imaged'.[30] In this painting memory and violence, image and discourse are brought into an uneasy relationship that troubles any simple description of what an image 'represents'.

Tuymans is preoccupied with themes of violence, trauma, repression and representation. Much as was the case with Don DeLillo in literature, then, there was an expectation in the art world that Tuymans would respond to 9/11: specifically, in his contribution to *Documenta 11*.[31] Instead Tuymans showed a group of paintings which appeared pointedly to avoid any reference to 9/11. The centrepiece was a huge still life seemingly calculated to frustrate the expectations surrounding it (Figure 26). It is important to remember that, given Tuymans' reputation as the possessor of 'a cold eye, which looks not to the central horror of an event, but somewhat to the side, to some apparently insignificant or innocuous detail', nobody was expecting a straightforward or unproblematic depiction of the events of September 11.[32] Nevertheless, Tuymans' contribution to *Documenta*, and in particular this painting, 'completely eluded any expectations of some kind of chronicle of the moment or an overtly moral response'.[33] The general reaction to *Still Life* was one of bafflement and mild indignation. It was widely interpreted as a deliberate parrying of the expectations surrounding Tuymans in the aftermath of 9/11. The artist was felt to have ducked the issue, to have refused to engage with an historical event that seemed to fit with his artistic preoccupations of violence, trauma and history almost too neatly.

The painting has subsequently been described as 'an alarmingly empty and precarious still life, consumed not so much in light as an enormous vacuousness, [which] is a sort of gigantic nadir of the still life genre, a monument to futility'; as 'a vast canvas representing an absolute nothingness […] banality expanded to the extreme'; and as 'a form of stand-in, a picture of

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[29] Aliaga, p. 20.

[30] Helen Molesworth, 'Luc Tuymans: Painting the Banality of Evil', in *Luc Tuymans* (New York: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Wexner Center for the Arts in association with Distributed Art Publishers, 2009), pp. 15–29 (p. 25).

[31] See for example Hans Rudolf Reust, 'The Pursuit: Luc Tuymans 1996-2003', in *Luc Tuymans*, Contemporary Artists, rev. edn (London: Phaidon, 2003), pp. 148–239 (pp. 150–152); Julian Heynen, 'Illusion and Reality: Interview with Luc Tuymans, Dusseldorf, 13 January 2004', in *Luc Tuymans*, ed. by Emma Dexter and Julian Heynen (London: Tate, 2004), pp. 8–15 (pp. 10–13).

[32] Searle, 'Living Dead'.

[33] Heynen, p. 10.

absolute vacancy created in response to the events of 9/11, yet refusing to represent them at all'.[34]

Figure 26: Luc Tuymans, *Still Life,* 2002. Oil on canvas, 347 x 500 cm. Collection James and Jacqui Erskine, Sydney.

Three things seem to be happening here. Firstly, the painting does not conform to prior expectations of how it might look. Those expectations were both widespread and diffuse; as far as I have been able to ascertain, nobody stated exactly what form the expected image 'of' 9/11 should take. Perhaps this was the demand placed upon Tuymans' contribution to *Documenta 11,* and of which it was felt to fall short: to provide a summary image of 9/11. Secondly, and partly as a result of this confounding of unarticulated assumptions, the painting is read as blank or emptied, as if another image has been removed. The image is framed in terms of what it does not show: by denial, vacancy and refusal. Especially in the last comment, representation seems to be conflated with depiction. Surprisingly for writers familiar with the strategies of contemporary art, these critics are unwilling to accept that the painting

[34] Searle, 'Living Dead'; 'Luc Tuymans - Still Life - Contemporary Art', *The Saatchi Gallery* <http://www.saatchi-gallery.co.uk/artists/artpages/tuymans_Still_Life.htm> [accessed 9 October 2012]; Emma Dexter, 'The Interconnectedness of All Things: Between History, Still Life and the Uncanny', in *Luc Tuymans*, ed. by Emma Dexter and Julian Heynen (London: Tate, 2004), pp. 16–29 (pp. 22–23).

'represents' an event it does not depict. At the same time, the still life it does depict is largely taken as a kind of non-image: passed over as one would a television test card. Tuymans himself has described it as an 'anti-picture', stating that 'in *Still Life* the idea of banality becomes larger-than-life; it's taken to an impossible extreme'.[35] Finally, it is nowhere considered possible that a picture of some fruit and a jug of water has 9/11 as its referent. Tellingly, Tuymans' gesture is read as one of refusal rather than of negation. Negation invokes what is negated as a structuring absence; Beckett's plays never mention the Holocaust directly, but are imbued with the burden of its memory. The critics who see *Still Life* as a refusal to address 9/11 themselves refuse exactly that relationship described by the term 'negation'. Yet neither is the painting taken seriously as a still life, its ostensible subject matter ignored in seeing it as a kind of blank, an assertion of artistic autonomy, a refusal of politics. Rather than a negative presentation of the theme of the attacks which locates them as a structuring absence, there seems to have been consensus that the painting refuses any critical engagement with 9/11. If *Still Life* apparently invokes Cézanne, it is as the representative of aesthetic autonomy, of the decoupling of the aesthetic and the political, championed by critics such as Clive Bell and Roger Fry. Coming from an artist preoccupied with themes of violence, memory and the politics of the image, *Still Life* seems to represent a failure to meet the aesthetic challenge of 9/11. If that lethally effective enlistment of aesthetics in the service of politics appeared to confirm Don DeLillo's suggestion that terrorists have usurped art's ambition to change the world, *Still Life* seems to have been taken as Tuymans' admission of defeat in the face of such radically violent image-making.[36]

Still Life is read not as a critical engagement with the visual archive of 9/11, but as the pointed refusal of any such critique, of any attempt to reckon with the power of that archive. The relationship between refusal and negation is central to the question of what precisely can be considered an image 'of' 9/11. I argue here that the framing of *Still Life* as a refusal to address 9/11 itself sustains disavowal of the politics of the image, a central theme in Tuymans' oeuvre. Disavowal is a means by which unpleasant knowledge can be simultaneously registered, ignored and negated. As Žižek puts it, disavowal works on the principle of 'I know very well, but still …'.[37] It often works through the mediation of a fetish object which allows the subject to continue denying the reality they appear to accept. In other words, we can continue living in a world of violence and exploitation thanks to the presence of art which allows us to see that violence sublimated into beauty. *Still Life* exposes the art object's function as a fetish

[35] Heynen, p. 10.
[36] DeLillo's claim, expressed in interviews and in *Mao II*, is cited in Chapter 4.
[37] Žižek, *The Sublime Object of Ideology*, p. 18.

sustaining denial of art's ideological role in sublimating the violence of 'primitive accumulation'.[38] The painting plays the role of fetish object to parodic excess, thus undermining the disavowal it ostensibly supports and allowing a critique thereof. The strength of *Still Life* as a political artwork is therefore that, more subtly and rigorously than much of the work on show at *Documenta 11*, it stages the aesthetic as a politics of disavowal.

Still Life is a strange and unsettling painting, which makes few concessions to the viewer. It is an enormous canvas, extraordinarily large for a still life, and by far the largest painting Tuymans had then shown. Viewed close up, it dominates the viewer uncomfortably, and tends to push one back across the room. The pieces of fruit are huge, almost billboard scale; already there is tension between the domesticity of the subject matter and the distancing effect of its treatment. Unable to settle, the eye wanders uneasily across the painting as if looking for purchase. Neither does the image sit easily on the canvas; the group of objects hangs suspended, waiting weightlessly above the blank ground. The title, often so important in Tuymans' works, offers only a sullen tautology.

The cluster of fruit sits awkwardly in the very centre of the canvas, adrift in a sea of off-white space. The boundary between figure and ground is all too visible, for example in the outline of the pear or the handle of the carafe, the way the space inside the handle is a different colour from the ground. The objects appear flattened and weightless, like a collage (which is precisely what they are; as ever, Tuymans takes an *image* as his starting point). As often in Tuymans' work, the lighting recalls both the soft glow of a television screen and the glare of a camera flash. The result is a strange and unsettling tension between flatness and intangibility; the painting's surface neither effaces itself as window nor asserts itself as material presence, but hovers somewhere in between, like a screen.

Still Life projects a kind of enervated blankness, an affectless indifference to the absorption in surface detail and texture with which the genre is associated. The obvious reference is to Cézanne, the 'father of modernism' and a painter strongly associated with still life; there is indeed something of Cézanne's self-containment here. To my eye, the painting also recalls Caravaggio's *Basket of Fruit* (Figure 27) in the flattened space and the starkness of its composition. However, whereas Cézanne was concerned to record the experience of looking

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[38] The term is originally Marx's, and refers to the long process of dispossession and enclosure which preceded the Industrial Revolution and created a class of people with nothing to sell but their labour. My use of the term here is indebted to the analysis of the Retort collective, who argue that primitive accumulation is once again in force as the motor of the current aggressive phase of globalisation. See Retort, pp. 10–12, 75–77.

at objects in the world and to render their materiality in visual form, these objects have a wraithlike weightlessness, evoking memory and loss rather than presence and plenitude. Where Caravaggio's fruit projects forward into the viewer's space, Tuymans' withdraws, not into pictorial depth but into another kind of remoteness.[39] They are as if fantasised, dreamt or remembered rather than directly seen. Tuymans' narrow tonal range and washed-out colours amplify the oneiric or mnemonic quality. The impression also has something to do with the generic quality of the fruit on display; neither wholly abstract nor convincingly specific, they hover between material object and image, form and diagram. The painting seems suspended between description and metaphor, presentation and concealment; just how seriously are we to take this image of a collection of objects? One might consider this as an example of what Rancière calls a 'pensive image', suspended between action and form.[40] *Still Life* does not offer up the mute presence of the objects it depicts; the careful delineation of texture and form usually associated with still life painting is notable by its absence. Neither, however, does it present a readily legible narrative based around the figural relation of appearances to actions as practiced in traditional history painting, and in more contemporary fashion in the documentary ethos of much of the art on display at *Documenta 11*. Neither object nor text, the painting interweaves mute presentation and discursive narration.

The difficulty of reading *Still Life* seems bound up with a sense that something is missing: but what? What is being withheld in or from this image? On the one hand, the expected visual reference to 9/11 seems to be missing (but what form might such a reference take? What would an image 'of' 9/11 look like?). Similarly, the painting seems little concerned with the traditional themes of still life: consumption, materiality, the description of a convincingly realised world of objects. The painting seems to refuse that consideration of the experience of looking at things, of the encounter of a self with objects in the world, which is the central concern of still life. The painting seems stilled, somehow suspended in time and space like the famous image of the falling man: or more precisely, like a freeze-frame lifted from a sequence of filmed footage.[41] The association draws us toward television and the quintessentially televisual event of 9/11, so often replayed, stilled and analysed in forensic detail. Such close examination yields little here. If there is a clue hidden in the image, it is the image itself and

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[39] Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (London: Reaktion, 1990), pp. 77–81.
[40] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, pp. 107–132.
[41] Since the invention of cinema and especially digital film, any image arguably has this substrate of movement, of the pause in an endless flow. If the photograph momentarily stilled time, film and especially live television make still images a subset of the flow of continuous 'real time' footage.

what it withholds. The traditional generic emphasis on description is here displaced by citation as a mode of disavowal; the image is a screen for things withheld.

Figure 27: Caravaggio, *Basket of Fruit*, c. 1599. Oil on canvas, 31 x 47 cm. Biblioteca Ambrosiana, Milan.

Still Life lacks anything that would mark it as an image 'of' 9/11; Tuymans pointedly refuses the familiar iconography of planes, towers, and horrified spectators.[42] There is no 'stain', no mark of repression that would allow a reading of the image as symptom. The symptom, as 'the exception which disturbs the surface of the false appearance, the point at which the repressed Other Scene erupts', is a repeated feature of Tuymans' work.[43] For example, in *Gas Chamber* the title functions as symptom, giving the lie to the image's apparent banality. The title inscribes in the image the history of violence and horror at first hidden from the beholder. The

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[42] I am aware that the vertical strip of reflected light on the carafe produces a shape reminiscent of the twin towers of the World Trade Centre. However, I contend that this association results from, rather than initiates, the painting's discursive relationship to 9/11. The necessity for such a visual resemblance in order to authorise that reference is precisely what Tuymans brings into question.

[43] Slavoj Žižek, *Enjoy Your Symptom!* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. x.

logic of the symptom is by no means ubiquitous in Tuymans' work, however, and part of his achievement, through careful choice of his source images, is to create a discourse around his work whereby no 'stain' is necessary to authorise a reading of the image in terms of repressed violence. The apparent absence of such a symptom in *Still Life* perhaps explains its widespread reception as a refusal of politics. Lacking a symptom, however, the painting itself becomes a symptom. The absence exposes its function as a fetish object sustaining disavowal of the political stakes of artistic images, reversing the image's function in respect of the repression of politics in the aesthetic from fetish to symptom. The opposition of politics and aesthetics is most obvious in the discursive construction of still life as an 'apolitical' mode purely concerned with the description and depiction of material objects. It is also present, however, in less obvious form in the prevailing tendency of many works at *Documenta 11* to adopt a documentary or textual approach to political subjects, as if the aesthetic were not itself already politicised.

The empty mirror, the blank screen

I want to argue here that, contrary to most published comment on it, *Still Life* can be read as a subtle and critical response to 9/11. Response need not cite directly the event, act or statement with which it is in dialogue. Most commentators have taken Tuymans' avoidance of any direct reference to the attacks in *Still Life* as a refusal to moralise or otherwise comment upon the subject. I argue that this apparent refusal constitutes the mode of the painting's engagement with the aesthetic and political issues surrounding 9/11. In particular the painting stages a more complex and nuanced politics of the image than was articulated in the discourse around *Documenta 11* and in the critical reaction to *Still Life* itself.

Apart from its size, the painting is remarkable for its lack of any striking feature: it is utterly generic. *Still Life* does not represent *a* still life so much as the genre of still life, and beyond that art itself as the sublimation of politics.[44] Long interested in the generic example that sacrifices its own individuality in 'standing for' the form as a whole, Tuymans' paintings can appear stripped of all style and painterly flourish. (It is therefore doubly ironic that Tuymans'

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[44] This argument assumes the Freudian thesis that artistic creation represents a sublimation of the drives in socially acceptable form. Art sublimates the desire for possession, transforming the violence of 'primitive accumulation' into aesthetic pleasure and visual rather than material possession of goods.

calculated avoidance of theatrical technique has itself become an instantly recognisable and widely imitated style.) Certain of Tuymans' works refuse exactly the kind of symptomatic or forensic articulation for which he is best known. These images, including printed patterns, flowers, shadows, 'empty' mirrors and a series of blank slide projections, seem to aim toward a minimally inflected articulation of the representative function. Such paintings parody Modernism's effort of distillation, yet reject the Modernist fetishisation of presence and authenticity. Reduced to its minimal inflection, painting still *pictures*. In exhibitions these paintings function as 'an apparent zero sign, an active empty space' which draws meaning from the paintings around it and from the viewer's knowledge of Tuymans' oeuvre.[45] *Still Life* is a further example of a work apparently lacking Tuymans' signature themes, yet which 'projects something [...] that is actually connected to the history and development of painting'.[46] In a resonant phrase, Gerrit Vermeiren describes these works as 'painting which is painting to the full, just as a test card is television to the full.' For Vermeiren, 'in the works in which [Tuymans] seems far more to be representing nothing than something, it is not so much meaning that the painter eliminates as communication'.[47]

In 2002, the year he painted *Still Life,* Tuymans also worked on paintings of empty slide projections against a blank wall (Figure 28).[48] These works focus on theatricality itself, on the function of display shorn as far as possible of any specific content. Here and elsewhere Tuymans seems fascinated by the problem of representing 'nothing. And not even Nothing. This is no cosmic void, no feeling allied to the Kantian notion of the sublime'.[49] Rather than struggling to picture the putatively unrepresentable, Tuymans explores how an image can be said to represent at all. When does an image come into being, and how does it refer to something it is not? This is an important question in Tuymans' art; how can one 'represent' something, *other* than by simply reproducing its appearance? The complication of referentiality in his work parallels that in trauma, where the traumatic memory resists integration within a frame of reference.

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[45] Reust, p. 152.
[46] Gerrit Vermeiren, 'Noise', in *Luc Tuymans: I Don't Get It* (London: Ludion, 2007), pp. 15–27 (p. 21).
[47] Vermeiren, pp. 22–23.
[48] Tuymans has also produced paintings of shadows and 'empty' mirrors. See Ulrich Loock, *Luc Tuymans*, rev. edn (London: Phaidon, 2003), pp. 79–82, 175.
[49] Vermeiren, p. 21.

Figure 28: *Left;* Luc Tuymans, *Slide #1*, 2002. Oil on canvas, 203.5 x 134 cm. Collection Hamburger Bahnhof, Berlin. *Right;* Luc Tuymans, *Slide #2*, 2002. Oil on canvas, 179 x 134 cm. Courtesy Zeno X Gallery, Antwerp.

The 'empty' *Slide* paintings suggest that for Tuymans, representation is at least partly a matter of projection. Rather than a window, the painting's surface is figured as a screen upon which the functions of window, mirror and screen overlap, and the viewer's fantasy may be both projected and reflected. The *Slide* paintings still produce the illusion of a shallow three-dimensional space, but the scene pictured constructs representation on the model of projection. These paintings stage representation as the construction of a screen upon which an image may be projected. The mechanism of representation provides the screen, they suggest, but the viewer must provide the image. When in *Still Life* Tuymans withholds the anticipated image, the painting is seen in terms of 'absolute vacancy'. In Lacanian terms, *Still Life* refuses to give back to the viewer his own message in inverted form. Tuymans returns to its sender the question, 'What should a picture of 9/11 look like?', and is met with incomprehension. Unable to distinguish what they expect to see there, viewers respond to the painting as emptied, as literally insignificant. *Still Life* thus wavers between mirror and screen, between empty mirror and blank screen (is a blank screen what an 'empty' mirror would look like?). Indeed the screen itself has a doubled function that combines showing and hiding. As sublimation, the painting screens out the imagery of 9/11, replacing it with a less traumatic image, or more accurately,

with a fetish image in which the trauma is repressed. However this withholding itself becomes traumatic. In accordance with the logic of the fetish, the attempt to hide the traumatic image screens it as an absent presence that haunts the painting. The very banality of the image becomes the symptom, the point where the screen image fails to convince and the repressed image returns, projected onto the canvas as screen.

An important clarification is necessary here. When I say that *Still Life* screens 'the imagery of 9/11', I mean that it condenses all the infamous and traumatic images of planes, burning and falling towers and people, clouds of dust and debris, fleeing office workers, and distressed witnesses that constitute the 9/11 archive. This is the strength of Tuymans' approach: refusing to isolate any particular image from the archive, the painting can 'represent' all of them at once. As a blank screen or 'active empty space', the canvas holds multiple images of 9/11 in suspension, in a manoeuvre impossible should the painting cite a particular image directly.

The avoidance of direct reference to the 9/11 archive in *Still Life* contrasts with the approach taken by Tuymans in *Demolition* of 2005, part of his exhibition *Proper* at the David Zwirner Gallery in New York that year. As often the case with Tuymans' solo shows, the exhibition was organised around a coherent theme: in this case, the Bush administration during its 'War on Terror'. Taken as a whole the show offered 'a critique of America that is intended to be subconsciously constructed', giving the viewer a glimpse of 'the bleak reality we know is lurking just below the surface'.[50] Other paintings in the show included *Ballroom Dancing* (2005), showing a couple on a floor emblazoned with the state seal of Texas; *The Perfect Table Setting* (2005), showing an elaborate place setting at a ceremonial dinner; and *The Secretary of State* (2005), a close-cropped image of Condoleeza Rice. *Demolition* shows a dense, billowing dust cloud in elongated portrait format; a streetlamp visible at bottom left gives a sense of the cloud's scale (Figure 29). The painting clearly recalls the enormous, rolling clouds of dust and debris which swept lower Manhattan after the World Trade Center collapsed. As often the case with Tuymans' work, the painting hovers uneasily between directness and obliquity, revelation and concealment. Whereas *Gas Chamber*'s title reveals horror in an otherwise banal image, in *Demolition* the title defuses the image's apparent directness. Is this a routine industrial demolition or Manhattan on September 11 2001? The painting undoubtedly holds

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[50] David Zwirner, 'Luc Tuymans: *Proper* (Press Release)' (David Zwirner Gallery, New York, 2005) <http://www.davidzwirner.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/2005_LTPR.pdf> [accessed 1 November 2012].

both possibilities in suspension.[51] *Demolition* bears witness to the spectral power of the 9/11 archive to infect a whole range of imagery which beforehand had been considered banal. Yet demolition is a violent procedure regardless of its purpose. There are no simply banal images in Tuymans' oeuvre.

Figure 29: Luc Tuymans, *Demolition*, 2005. Oil on canvas, 165 x 113 cm. Museum of Modern Art, New York.

Demolition is also a reflection upon representation: an image of obscured vision that plays on linguistic and visual reference. Describing the painting, Joshua Shirkey writes:

> [As] a Tuymansesque treatment of nothing, it is a tour de force. The titular process of turning form into nonform is pictured as a cloud of dust — a subject antithetical

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[51] The title also hints at the conspiracy theories which suggested, for example, that the World Trade Center was deliberately demolished in order to prevent it toppling onto other buildings in an area of hugely valuable real estate.

to traditional painting, since it comprises only billowing motion, not fixed, tangible figures. […] Nothing within the picture gives it its emotional impact. That affective agent lies outside the painting's bounds: precisely, and without mincing words, in its physical and pictorial adjacency to another picture, the portrait of Condoleeza Rice. […] Once paired, the images are overtaken by their relation and become nearly impossible to understand separately.[52]

Shirkey over-emphasises the painting's dependence upon its proximity to the portrait of Rice; the image and title are surely enough to invoke the disturbing reference to 9/11 without making it irrefutable. For Vermeiren, 'the dust cloud simultaneously becomes a veil and a projection screen, a chaotic but sublime mass of disinformation'.[53] *Demolition* stages visual and rhetorical indeterminacy, echoing Derrida's argument that 9/11 was an event to the extent that it escapes thought. The opposition between showing and hiding, looking-at and looking-away, breaks down in this picture of a screen.

Still Life performs a similar operation without directly referencing the iconography of 9/11. The question of 'what comes after imperialism' which framed *Documenta 11*, the continuing global impact of the attacks, and Tuymans' existing reputation as an artist, were and are sufficient to frame the painting in relation to 9/11 and the politics of aesthetics more generally. Tuymans' very refusal to directly reference the visual archive of 9/11 makes it the painting's structuring absence. In *Still Life* that archive is entirely spectral, more even than the towers Lianne sees in the Morandi still life in *Falling Man*. Where *Demolition* frames 9/11 as sublime, *Still Life* presents art as a sublimation of violence, the site of an averted gaze. Tuymans' paintings often stage an uneasy oscillation between looking-at and looking-away; in the end they suggest that looking-at is a form of looking-away, and vice versa. As symptom, it is precisely this moment of looking-away which points toward repression.

In an interview published in the catalogue to his major retrospective at Tate Modern in 2004, Tuymans describes *Still Life* in terms of parodic sublimation. Referring to 9/11 he says:

> Those attacks were also an assault on aesthetics. That gave me the idea of reacting with a sort of anti-picture, with an idyll, albeit an inherently twisted one. [...] This kind of sublimation seemed to me to be the only way, even if that sublimation is so exaggerated as to be simultaneously critical of itself. [...] And we shouldn't forget the context either, the aspirations of the 2002 Documenta. I wanted to respond on a political level to the so-called discourse with an intentionally apolitical formula, so I chose sublimation as my method.[54]

[52] Madeleine Grynsztejn and Helen Molesworth, *Luc Tuymans* (New York: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Wexner Center for the Arts in association with Distributed Art Publishers, 2009), p. 187.
[53] Gerrit Vermeiren, *Luc Tuymans: Proper* (New York: David Zwirner, 2005), p. 10.
[54] Heynen, p. 13.

What is sublimation if not a form of substitution, whereby one thing replaces another? According to Freud, sublimation employs the libido's capacity 'to replace its immediate aim by other aims which may be valued more highly and which are not sexual'.[55] In sublimation 'a component instinct of sexual desire' escapes the repression which terminates the infant's pre-Oedipal sexual researches with the intervention of the paternal law, and is transformed into intellectual curiosity or artistic creativity.[56] In a deconstructive reading of Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Leo Bersani argues for 'a view of sublimation as coextensive with sexuality, as an appropriation and elaboration of sexual impulses rather than as a special form of renunciation of such impulses'.[57] Bersani traces the textual movement which escapes Freud's attempt to fix sexuality in teleological stages and defined areas of the body. Bersani instead locates its genesis in the masochism that allows the infant to survive the gap between 'the quantities of stimuli to which we are exposed and the development of ego structures capable of resisting or, in Freudian terms, binding those stimuli.'[58] Sexuality begins in a masochistic response to trauma, to the infant's overwhelming and self-shattering experience of the mother's love. Masochism, as the process whereby excessive stimuli are converted into sexual pleasure, is 'the psychical strategy which partially defeats a biologically dysfunctional process of maturation'.[59] Adult sexuality consists of an attempt to repeat that shattering pleasure. Through sublimation, art restages that search and is therefore an extension rather than a repression or symptom of those desires.

> If the sexual is, at the most primitive level, the attempted replication of a shattering (or psychically traumatising) pleasure, art […] is the attempted replication *of* that replication. That is, it repeats the replicative movement of sexuality as a domesticating and civilising project of self-recognition.[60]

Bersani suggests that sublimation, rather than the transcendence of desire, continues its attempted replication of the self-shattering fulfilment experienced by the infant in its pre-Oedipal relation to the mother. In this scenario, 'cultural forms would be the productively mistaken replications of sexual fantasy, the proliferations of fantasmatic shocks'.[61]

Might it be possible to reframe Bersani's reading of Freud in terms of politics rather than sexuality — that is, to reframe the 'domesticating and civilising project of self-recognition'

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[55] Sigmund Freud, *Leonardo Da Vinci: A Memoir of His Childhood*, Routledge Classics (London: Routledge, 2001), p. 25.
[56] Freud, *Leonardo Da Vinci*, p. 28.
[57] Bersani, p. 45.
[58] Bersani, p. 38.
[59] Bersani, p. 39.
[60] Bersani, p. 111.
[61] Bersani, p. 46.

undertaken in art as the striving for recognition realised through domination of the other? To the self-shattering drive toward union with the mother out of which sexuality arises, one could oppose the self-affirming effort to dominate the other proposed by Hegel as the motor of history. *Still Life* would then bear witness to the historical sublimation of the aggressive drive manifested in 'primitive accumulation' in the aesthetic forms of still life painting, and indeed of aesthetic forms in general. If art can be framed as an extension of self-shattering sexual desires, which 'exists not in order to hide them, but *in order to make them visible*', can it also be framed as an extension of the self-securing desire played out in 'primitive accumulation'?[62] By invoking sublimation Tuymans frames the painting as a critique of art's sublimation of the messy violence of the world. In this view, still life as a genre participates in the colonial history of 'primitive accumulation' now reasserting itself in military and economic neoliberalism.[63] Art is already a continuation of politics by other means, and any attempt to be politically representative which is not sufficiently self-critical distracts attention from the politics of representation.

Tuymans claims he conceived the painting as a sublimation of political concerns within a form supposedly devoid of politics, invoking the autonomy of art in place of the trauma of violence. However, this sublimation would be so parodically exaggerated as to collapse upon itself. The painting would thereby engage *Documenta 11*'s political discourse in a more nuanced way than would have been possible with a more direct approach. As through close reading Bersani locates a counter-movement within the Freudian text, so through parodic excess Tuymans highlights art's role in sublimating aggression and the desire for self-affirmation. As for Bersani Leonardo's artistic achievement 'depends on (rather than is inhibited by) a certain *failure to represent*', so this same failure is the crux of Tuymans' achievement with *Still Life*.[64] In Bersani's reading of Freud's reading of Leonardo it is the very failure of sublimation which makes the work so resonant. Similarly, the failure of sublimation within *Still Life* allows it to operate as a critique of visuality. If sublimation is the motor of aesthetic production, then to critique sublimation is to critique visuality, understood as the political use of representation. Whereas, as Tuymans recognises, the 9/11 attacks were significant in their heavily politicised use of the image, *Still Life* serves to remind us that the aesthetic is, and has always been, thoroughly politicised.

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[62] Bersani, pp. 110–111.
[63] Retort, pp. 78–107.
[64] Bersani, p. 110.

However, in the context of *Documenta 11* the desublimation of *Still Life* fails to take place, or does so incompletely. Its audience sees only vacancy, or a still life which invokes the autonomy of art from politics. The implicit critique of the forms of autonomous art as always a sublimation of some form of violence fails to take hold. In the quotation above, Tuymans' blithe invocation of the political/apolitical binary is striking. Coming from a painter usually so sensitive to the relationship of the aesthetic and the political, one is tempted to ask if he is being disingenuous, whether the word 'apolitical' is used ironically. Surely one thing Tuymans is *not* doing with *Still Life* is invoking the autonomy of art, at least in straightforward fashion; to do so would run counter to the force of his oeuvre up to this point. Yet it seems that this is largely how *Still Life* is interpreted. Is it possible that awareness of complicity between art and 'primitive accumulation' is being repressed in the reaction to this picture? That the critics' refusal to recognise the painting's critique of the aesthetics of violence preserves their disavowal of the violence of the aesthetic?

The politics of still life

Tuymans' choice of a still life as the centrepiece of his display at *Documenta 11* is significant. The genre is 'at the core of Tuymans' practice', according to Emma Dexter, for 'not only is it the most frequently appearing genre in his work, but it also characterises or infects all the other genres that still tendentiously exist in his oeuvre'.[65] Dexter discusses Tuymans' engagement with the discursive concerns of history painting in the 'lesser' genres of still life, portraiture and landscape. That *Still Life* doubles as a history painting is confirmed by the fact that at *Documenta 11* it dominated a room shared with *Portrait* (2000), and *Backyard* (2002; Figure 30), a landscape; of the traditional genres, only history painting was missing.

Still life has often been regarded as a humbly domestic, bourgeois genre primarily concerned with property, accumulation, taxonomy: 'an art of describing', in Svetlana Alpers' words.[66] It traditionally occupies the lowest rung of the hierarchy formulated in sixteenth-century Italy and operative until the nineteenth century, at the apex of which sits politically engaged history painting. Despite this lack of prestige, still life has often served as the medium of a meditation

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[65] Dexter, p. 18.
[66] Svetlana Alpers, *The Art of Describing: Dutch Art in the Seventeenth Century* (London: John Murray, 1983).

upon materiality. The work of Giorgio Morandi, which in *Falling Man* stages Lianne's encounter with her own finitude, is one example of a tendency stretching back to the austere work of Francisco de Zurbarán and Juan Sánchez Cotán in seventeenth-century Spain.[67] Their work deploys the rhetorical convention of *vanitas* particularly associated with Flemish and Dutch still life of the period. Dating from medieval funerary art and taking its name from the opening of Ecclesiastes ('Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity'), *vanitas* presents a visual reminder of the transience of life, the futility of material pleasures, and the certainty of death.[68] The depiction of material luxury and sensual pleasures in seventeenth-century Dutch still life therefore supports a commentary on the transience of such pleasures, thereby resolving the tension between their owners' material wealth and Calvinist religious beliefs. Visual pleasure is subordinated to the discursive meaning it bears. In providing moral justification for the seduction of all those tables heaving with fruit, meats, cheese and fine silver- and glassware, the discourse is at heart contradictory. It uses the visual appeal of material luxury to propagate a moral warning on the evils of material luxury: seduction becomes the lure of a warning against seduction.[69]

Svetlana Alpers disputes the prevalence of the *vanitas* motif in seventeenth-century Dutch still life. For Alpers this is to misread the paintings in terms of a Southern European 'textual' culture that seeks allegorical or philosophical meanings in serious painting. Instead she argues that they are products of a predominantly visual Northern European culture, where meaning is seen rather than read. The paintings comprise an investigation of the subject's relation to the world of objects and the process of seeing, articulated in distinctively visual terms through detailed description of surfaces and forms. Muteness replaces discursivity, presentation replaces allegory as the dominant mode of the painting. However, this descriptiveness does not arise out of an interest in 'art for art's sake'. Instead, still life is here (and frequently elsewhere, as in Cézanne) the object of a rejection of narrative in favour of an investigation of the gaze. Still life has been practiced throughout its history as a form of curiosity about the processes of seeing and representation. From Caravaggio to Velázquez to Cézanne, Picasso and Braque, still life has often been used by artists to investigate the conditions of representation and work out new forms of picturing the relationship of self to world. Thus for Hanneke

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[67] Bryson, pp. 60–75.

[68] Ecclesiastes 1:2 (King James Version). The Vulgate renders the verse as *Vanitas vanitatum omnia vanitas*.

[69] Norbert Schneider argues that the Catholic Church's promotion of *vanitas* imagery formed part of its counterattack on the ascendant capitalist values of materialism and individualism in the seventeenth-century Netherlands. According to Schneider, 'This notion of *vanitas* was shared in particular by the humanist intelligentsia, a culturally conservative social class who had no share in this wealth'. Norbert Schneider, *Still Life: Still Life Painting in the Early Modern Period* (London: Taschen, 1994), p. 79.
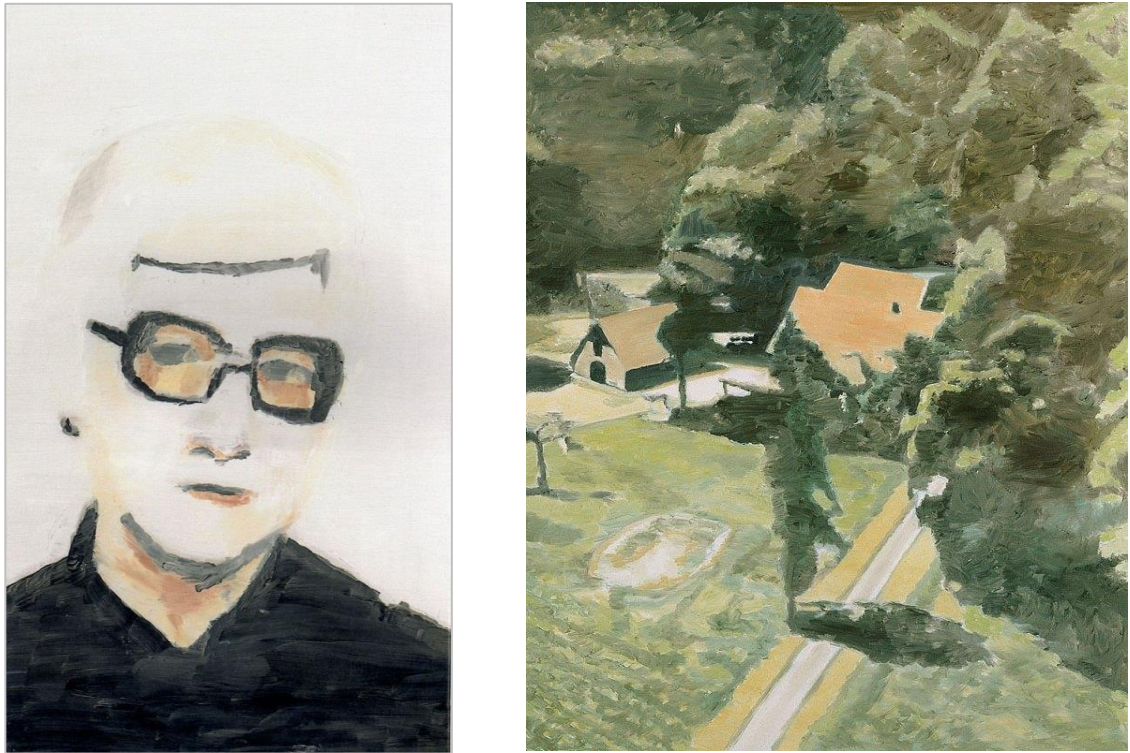
Figure 30: *Left;* Luc Tuymans, *Portrait*, 2000. Oil on canvas, 67 x 39 cm. Collection Susan and Lewis Manilow. *Right;* Luc Tuymans, *Backyard*, 2002. Oil on canvas, 139 x 114 cm. Museum of Contemporary Art, Los Angeles.

Grootenboer, 'Not intending to tell a story or communicate a message, still life calls attention to the mere recording of objects, or rather to the artist's scrutinising gaze upon these objects'.[70] By limiting his visual field, the painter concentrates his attention upon the process of picturing. However, the concentration on the process of representation itself highlights the politics of representation. By averting his gaze from the exalted to the humble the painter implicitly subverts, or at least inverts, the hierarchy which supports those positions.

It is certainly possible to read still life paintings by Pieter Claesz, Chardin or Cézanne as investigations of material form and the process of seeing. However, this does not mean that there is no such thing as a politics of still life. Picturing is always politicised inasmuch as it materialises what John Berger called a 'way of seeing'; it encodes cultural norms in the choice and hierarchisation of subject matter, and in its construction of a particular seeing subject.[71]

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[70] Hanneke Grootenboer, *The Rhetoric of Perspective: Realism and Illusionism in Seventeenth-Century Dutch Still-Life Painting* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), p. 6.

[71] John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin, 2008); Even Cézanne, who has been read by influential critics like Roger Fry and Clement Greenberg as an exemplar of formalism and of art's autonomy, carries some of the outside world into his paintings. Richard Shiff argues that at the end of the nineteenth century, the supposed 'abstraction' of Cézanne became identified in some quarters with a refusal of the

The 'mapping impulse' which Alpers finds in seventeenth-century Dutch still life paintings may be primarily interested in description, but it reveals a lot about the values of the society in which they were produced. For where is the effort to master the world in and through representation which Heidegger names '*Technik*' more evident than in still life?

Still life is the genre of description *as* possession. It inscribes the beholder within a world of objects, a world objectified for his gaze, and therefore reinforces his own self-possession. The genre thus operates according to a logic entirely consistent with that which legitimised the project of European colonial conquest and appropriation and which supports contemporary visuality, as can be seen in the Situation Room photograph. Both depend upon the domination of objectified nature by a subject whose sovereignty is ideologically produced and reinforced in representation. Throughout its history, still life has been significant within cultures whose relation to the world is one of acquisition, expansion, and domination. The first known still lives adorn the walls of Pompeii and Herculaneum. The genre developed in its modern form amidst the mercantile power and wealth of seventeenth-century Holland and Spain; it became prominent again in Europe around the dawn of the twentieth century, when it was an important vehicle for the development of Modernism in the work of Cézanne, Picasso and Braque.[72] These are all moments when the power of the culture in question was at its peak and would soon decline, even if that eclipse was not yet apparent.

Still life is much more than a form of ideological support for the project of European domination, however. The subversive potential of a focus on the banal at the expense of the exalted is elegantly described by Norman Bryson in *Looking at the Overlooked*. Bryson discusses a series of paintings by Velázquez that extend and deepen the tactic of inversion employed by the Flemish artists Pieter Aertsen and Joachim Beuckelaer. Aertsen and Beuckelaer reverse the polarity of 'high' and 'low' subject matter by relegating Biblical scenes to the background of genre pictures, the focus of which are lovingly rendered still lives of various kinds of food. For Bryson these paintings set up 'a dialogue between high and low in which each both supports and interrogates the other, in a semantic field of considerable

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materialism and alienation of modernity, even as his concentration on form seemed for many to exemplify artistic modernity. For contemporary critic Charles Morice, in Cézanne's painting '[it] was left to the technique of painting, not the worldly subject matter it represented, to become the means, as the critic said, of a "tacit protest".' Richard Shiff, 'Apples and Abstraction', in *Impressionist Still Life* (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2001), pp. 42–47 (p. 47).

[72] Although Spanish still life of the seventeenth century is more concerned with the object as an aid to contemplation than as a demonstration of wealth, the society in which these paintings were produced was nevertheless a hugely wealthy colonial power. Likewise Chardin worked amidst the opulence of the France of Louis XV and XVI, although his own work is characterised by its fascination with absorption in the everyday activities of preparing and eating food, reading and writing, and so on.

richness and complexity.'[73] The inversion of traditional genre hierarchy brings into focus issues such as class and gender politics, and the relationship of transcendental meaning to everyday experience; still life thus becomes the carrier of meanings more commonly associated with the 'higher' genres of religious or history painting.[74]

For Bryson, Velázquez employs the same structure of inversion to reflect upon the implication of art itself in the dialogue of high and low, sacred and profane. In a series of genre scenes by Velázquez, the sacred scene can be understood either as a real space in the background or as a mirror or painting hanging on the wall. The paintings thus participate in the same dialogue as the more famous *Las Meninas* and *Las Hilanderas,* wherein 'painting contemplates its own fate, divided between the heroic world of court or history painting, and the no less insistent claims of still life'.[75] The choice, as framed by Velázquez, is between 'the drama of great individuals' and an art which is devoted to 'things entirely unexceptional, born of need on a poor planet'.[76] As indicated by Bryson's prose, however, the aestheticisation of the humbler artefacts dignifies them with the glow of transcendence.

Bryson locates the same dialectic of high and low, sacred and profane, presence and absence, all couched within the terms of an investigation of the gaze, within a pair of paintings by Velázquez both known by the title *The Black Servant.* As in Aertsen and Beuckelaer, the version in Dublin pushes the 'proper' subject of the painting into the background where its status is uncertain, elevating in its place a banal scene of a kitchen servant scrubbing a worktop (Figure 31). The still life on the bench dominates the theological scene behind; it both takes on its themes of the relationship of human experience to transcendental truths and forms a counterpoint to them. Once again painting apparently confronts a crisis of allegiance between the significant and the banal: 'Do still life and *its* values take precedence in this image over history painting, and the values of history painting?'[77] The crisis is resolved by the implied transference between sacred and profane, whereby the banal still life is invested with a dignity more commonly located in the historical subject. Furthermore, the banal objects are invested not only with the glow of transcendence but with a more pointed capacity to critique the values of the elevated scene behind it: more precisely, to critique the gaze that sees political or moral significance only in that scene.

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[73] Bryson, p. 146.

[74] The same might be said, of course, for Breughel's famous *Landscape with the Fall of Icarus*, where the 'serious' mythological subject is relegated to the background of a genre painting showing peasants going about their daily business.

[75] Bryson, p. 154.

[76] Ibid.

[77] Bryson, p. 155.

Figure 31: Diego Velázquez, *The Kitchen Maid with Christ at Emmaus (The Black Servant)*, 1618-1619. Oil on canvas, 55 x 118 cm. National Gallery of Ireland, Dublin.

This can be seen more fully in the other version of the painting in Chicago. Here the image of the supper at Emmaus disappears entirely, leaving a blank wall behind the servant. For Bryson, the exclusion prompts the emergence within the image of a different politics, one focused on the overlooked servant and objects which remain in view:

> And the painting thinks the link between [objects and servant] through to its inevitable and bitter conclusion: that just as these objects are treated as articles of use, just as they are part of an endless round of need and drudgery, just as they are never truly seen, so is she.[78]

The exclusion of the transcendental or historical thus does not exclude the political *per se*. Instead it allows a different politics to emerge, one based on the recognition of class difference and reified power relations. An abstracted, 'timeless' history is rejected in favour of a rigorously particular and historicised politics. A similar manoeuvre can be seen in Tuymans' *Still Life*. There, the very exclusion of one form of political engagement — perhaps that of the aestheticisation of politics — becomes the means by which another, more situated mode — the politics of aesthetics — is made visible. As in the Chicago version of *The Black Servant*, Tuymans entirely removes or displaces the 'significant' image in order to politicise the means of representation itself. Like Velázquez in *The Black Servant*, like DeLillo in *Falling Man*, with *Still Life* Tuymans focuses upon the humbly domestic in order to explore the relationship of self

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[78] Bryson, p. 155.

and other that underpins politics. The image becomes a scene in which that relationship can be staged and questioned.

The mark of violence

Essentially *Still Life* substitutes one visual archive, that of still life, for another: that of 9/11. The painting establishes a relationship between the two archives; more accurately, it highlights a relationship that already exists but has been widely overlooked. The painting thus comes to 'stand in' not only for the visual archive of 9/11 but for the institution of art as *both* the support for a cultural fantasy of possession as self-affirmation that I have been calling 'technics', *and* the vehicle of a critique of such fantasies. In other words, the picture sets up a structure of monstration whereby it displays something invisible, something that can appear only through the interaction of a discursive context and the supplementary logic of fantasy. In Catholic practice, the consecrated Eucharistic host is traditionally displayed prior to communion in a structure known as a monstrance, from the Latin *monstrare* meaning 'to show or demonstrate', and also 'to warn'. The monstrance thus displays something that cannot be seen: the host's real but invisible transubstantiation into the body of Christ.[79] Monstration paradoxically conflates revelation and concealment; it theatricalises concealment *as* revelation, the display of something invisible. Monstration draws on the Church's power to represent and to control the meaning of its representations in order to institute a schism between the image and what it shows, between the represented and the visible. To look at the monstrated disk and see the body of Christ is to look beyond what is visibly present, to project a form of looking as looking-away. It is important to note here that monstration does not operate according to the Barthesian logic of the *punctum*, the subjective symptom which reveals the repressed presence of death in the image. Instead we are here in the socialised frame of reference Barthes calls the *studium*.[80] The monstrated disk is a fetish object that employs the Catholic doctrine of incarnation to sustain contradictory beliefs: as a Catholic I 'know' very well that this is a wafer of bread, but still I 'believe' it to be the body of Christ.

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[79] Koerner, p. 33. The monstrance is more than just a symbol inasmuch as it actually incarnates the thing it symbolises, collapsing the distinction between image and referent. Its particular power and fascination lie in this slide from representation to embodiment.

[80] Barthes, pp. 25–28.

Where the symptom reveals a repressed truth, the monstrance sustains its disavowal, supporting rather than undermining the fantasy.

I owe my use of the trope of monstration here to Joseph Leo Koerner, who analyses Tuymans' production of 'monstrous' images. For Koerner, Tuymans' paintings display what they conceal, namely the violence of representation: 'This, then, is the primal iconoclasm, this, the violence that the image always already self-inflicts: its monstrance of everything concealed.'[81] Tuymans separates representation from mimesis, picturing from depiction. Their rigorous failure to depict violence sustains the paintings' capacity to stage the violence of representation itself. For Koerner, 'Nowhere is Tuymans truer to his aims as a painter than when he makes these paintings almost disappear […] image making occurs in image breaking'.[82]

In showing *Still Life* at *Documenta 11*, Tuymans must have been aware that the aftermath of 9/11 would overdetermine the painting's reception. Hence his decision to address the 'so-called discourse' of artistic commitment surrounding *Documenta 11,* and beyond it, the institution and history of art. The presentation of a generic still life transferred the structure of monstration from its origins in baroque religious politics to the secular temple of the exhibition hall, via a parodic sublimation 'so exaggerated as to be simultaneously critical of itself'. As Koerner points out, the invisibility of what the monstrance displays tends to produce a compensatory hypertrophy of display:

> [It] was precisely because monstrances displayed an invisible deity, because they exhibited what could not be shown, that they were embedded in yet more elaborate frameworks jammed with things to see. Baroque altarpieces formed a meta-monstrance superimposing on the displayed Eucharistic host (that wheaten disk in its tabernacle) an entire gallery of sacred images.[83]

As one of the principal rituals through which the art world recognises itself, *Documenta,* itself an elaborate framework 'jammed with things to see', is perhaps a modern equivalent of those Baroque churches. Its 'so-called discourse' of politicised aesthetics is recoded by *Still Life* through a monstration of the absence at its heart: that of a truly rigorous critique of that discourse itself. The majority of exhibits at *Documenta 11* were organised around a rubric of the politicised gaze which dares to confront violence directly. In contrast, with *Still Life* Tuymans subverts the distinction between looking-at and looking-away and demonstrates that the withheld gaze, or the withheld image, can be equally politically invested. However, the gambit fails and the painting is read as a refusal of politics or an admission of defeat in the face

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[81] Koerner, p. 45.
[82] Koerner, p. 36.
[83] Koerner, p. 33.

of the radically violent form of picturing practiced by mass terrorism. However, the failure of Tuymans' parodic sublimation at *Documenta* need not be final. What I want to rescue here is the possibility of a critical aesthetics that does not limit representation to depiction or conflate presence with visibility, something I believe is maintained in *Still Life* against the odds and against the prevailing critical consensus. My argument here concerns the textuality of Tuymans' painting, its insertion within a discursive network determined by 9/11. Yet it also calls upon an expanded sense of visual discursivity, a reassessment of the image's relation to discourse. Perhaps ironically I find myself drawn back to T.J. Clark's advocacy, discussed near the beginning of this thesis, of 'a kind of visuality that truly establishes itself *at the edge of the verbal*', that draws upon language's particular referentiality without being strictly reducible to it.[84] Such is the visuality of *Still Life*; it draws the discourses of technics, aesthetic autonomy and globalisation into conjunction with the visual archive of 9/11 without resorting to illustration or translation of one mode or discourse into the terms of another. My reading of the painting necessarily reduces the complex elasticity of that movement, framed as it is in strictly linguistic terms. However, the painting itself resists the effort to determine too closely its 'meaning', as do all pictures. The slippage it induces between presentation and concealment, saying and seeing, ultimately comes down to the beholder's 'belief' in what the image 'shows', as does the monstrance whose structure it repeats.

Tuymans' paintings enact the undoing of representation. More precisely, they figure representation as the means of its own undoing, as the introduction of the invisible within the visible image. The structure of monstration does something similar, in invoking a discursive supplement to an image, whether that be Catholic doctrine or the discourse of art, in order to allow an image to represent more than it shows. After all, isn't this what representation, as reference, does? For Jacques Rancière, 'The image is not the duplicate of a thing. It is a complex set of relations between the visible and the invisible, the visible and speech, the said and the unsaid'.[85] The question of the relationship between speech, vision and visibility, of the place of invisibility in the field of vision, has become important in contemporary aesthetics, for example in the work of Rancière and T.J. Clark.[86] As I have shown here, it is also a longstanding preoccupation of Tuymans'. If violence is 'the only structure underlying [his] work', it is because for Tuymans violence both structures and destructures vision, complicating ideas of presence and visibility in the figure of trauma. Tuymans' paintings characteristically present us with the wound of trauma as inscribed in the visual. Glossing Jean-Luc Nancy, Koerner writes,

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[84] Clark, p. 176.
[85] Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, p. 93.
[86] Rancière, *The Future of the Image*; Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*; Clark.

> By nature, violence completes itself in imagery. The violator exhibits, and takes pleasure in the visible marks he or she makes. Painting such marks together with their monstrance, Tuymans returns us not to the moment of their infliction but to their afterward as image. Imagery's "only" underlying structure, violence is itself already image. And conversely, the image violates, not just by showing or inspiring the blow but also by acting it out.[87]

The particularity of *Still Life* is to erase such marks of violence precisely in a context where they were expected to be visible. This erasure becomes the mark of violence itself; it stages a violence of representation ultimately inseparable from the violence of 9/11 conceived as 'blowback', as a return of the violence of primitive accumulation that the discourse of aesthetic autonomy wards off.

The relationship of culture and cruelty is a constant theme in Tuymans' work. In a 2004 interview he repeats an earlier statement to the effect that 'Western society, in order to create culture, has also created a lot of violence. These things go hand in hand.'[88] He thus all but explicitly links painting and 'primitive accumulation'. By connecting the visual archive of 9/11 with an archive variously associated with claims of aesthetic autonomy, capitalist accumulation, neo-imperialist globalisation and the transcendental subject, *Still Life* lays claim to the possibility of a critical function for the very form of representation — painting — which Tuymans inhabits with such scepticism. As such, Tuymans returns us once again to Walter Benjamin's famous thesis that 'there is no document of culture that is not at the same time a document of barbarism'.[89]

The witness of ineffability has become a postmodern cliché. However, *Still Life* does more than merely avow the limits of representation. In all of his work and particularly with *Still Life*, Tuymans deploys the capacity of the image to represent more than it makes visible in order to present the unrepresentable not as beyond representation, but as always lurking within it, haunting it. The painting thus bears out T.J. Clark's maxim that 'It takes more than seeing to make things visible'.[90] In the case of *Still Life*, as so often in Tuymans' work, it takes an acceptance of the image as a discursive as well as a visible object, one that speaks and is silent, reveals and conceals. Lurking within the apparently straightforward image is another withheld

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[87] Koerner, p. 42. Nancy's formulation of the same theme can be found in Jean-Luc Nancy, 'Image and Violence', in *The Ground of the Image*, trans. by Jeff Fort (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), pp. 15–26.

[88] Garrett, 'Interview with Luc Tuymans', *Flash Art*, 2004.

[89] Walter Benjamin, 'Theses on the Philosophy of History', in *Illuminations*, ed. by Hannah Arendt, trans. by Harry Zorn (London: Pimlico, 1999), pp. 245–255 (p. 248).

[90] T.J. Clark, *The Absolute Bourgeois: Artists and Politics in France 1848-1851* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1982), p. 30.

image (or, better, a whole series of them) which could perhaps be described as subsisting or ex-sisting, remaining outside the opposition of presence and absence.

As do Morandi's paintings in *Falling Man*, Tuymans' *Still Life* problematises the relationship between looking-at and looking-away. Where Lianne's vision of the towers of the World Trade Center in the Morandis leads to a renewed appreciation of her vulnerability and connectedness to the world she inhabits, the audience for *Still Life* in 2002 seems to have been unable to make the connection between looking-at and looking-away. This despite the fact that whilst the painting was on show in Kassel, people were queuing up in Manhattan to stand and look at the absence where the World Trade Center had once stood. Opened by New York Mayor Rudolf Giuliani on December 30 2001, the Ground Zero viewing platform allowed mourners and tourists 'to connect to their history, without mediation and with maximum transparency', in Warholian fifteen-minute windows.[91] The viewing platform has since been replaced by a permanent memorial, named 'Reflecting Absence'. Opened on September 12 2011, it consists of two large pools on the footprint of the towers sunk to the level of bedrock and featuring man-made waterfalls. The large voids are intended as 'open and visible reminders of the absence' of towers and victims.[92]

This haunting is a repeated focus of Tuymans' work, which often depends upon the *studium*, the viewer's knowledge of the context and history of the image presented, in order to have its full destabilising effect. The relationship 'between the visible and the invisible, the visible and speech, the said and the unsaid' is one of his great themes, and his work implies that our conception of what a picture is and does must be rethought. Ralph Rugoff argues that:

> In the end, the problems posed by Tuymans' art are not those famously depicted in his paintings, with their allusions to fascism, colonialism, and nationalism. Instead his work insists that the central problem is how we look at the problem. [...] the underlying narratives of his paintings finally emerge not from what they directly portray, but from the specific ways in which they address us and from how we, in turn, navigate our way into the ambiguous territories they summon.[93]

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[91] Lentricchia and McAuliffe, p. 358; For an illuminating critique of the memorialisation of Ground Zero, see David Simpson, pp. 55–86 Recognising the overlap between the roles of mourner and tourist is crucial in understanding the trauma culture of 9/11.

[92] Michael Arad and Peter Walker, 'World Trade Center Site Memorial Competition: Reflecting Absence: Statement', *wtcsitememorial.org*, 2004 <http://www.wtcsitememorial.org/fin7.html> [accessed 20 December 2012] The site also included a tree-filled Memorial Plaza and the September 11 Memorial Museum.

[93] Ralph Rugoff, 'Luc Tuymans: Inside the Box', in *Luc Tuymans* (New York: San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, Wexner Center for the Arts in association with Distributed Art Publishers, 2009), pp. 49–71 (p. 57).

I have argued here that the inability of commentators in 2002 to see *Still Life* in terms other than of vacancy and refusal is symptomatic of their disavowal of the political stakes of representation. Just as in *Falling Man* art stages the self-shattering effect of trauma and so offers a means to reconceive our relationship to the other, so with *Still Life* Tuymans stages to parodic excess art's role in sublimating the aggressive drive toward self-affirmation through subjugation of the other. This aggression sustains the processes of dispossession and displacement visible in the current phase of neo-colonial globalisation.

We thus return to the problematic figured in the analysis of the Situation Room photograph which opened this thesis; namely, that the visual enframes a certain relationship of a subject to its objects which according to Heidegger has dominated Western thinking for centuries, and has intensified with the development of technologically-driven modernity. In chapter 2 I outlined the close relationship between this technocratic modernity and the techno-archaism of violent Islamism. Rather than picturing 9/11 by simply reproducing its appearance, and thus remaining within the spectacular terms of both capitalist techno-modernity and its militant Islamist other, with *Still Life* Tuymans highlights the function of the art object as a fetish sustaining disavowal of the political stakes of visuality. Resisting appropriation within the circuits of contemporary media spectacle, the painting offers one place from where a critique of such relations might begin.

Conclusion: **Situating visuality**

In the Waaggebouw

On January 31 1632 the eminent Dr. Nicolaas Tulp, praelector in anatomy to the Surgeons' Guild of Amsterdam, performed his second annual anatomy lecture in the Waaggebouw ('weighing house') before an audience of invited notables and paying members of the public.[1] On the dissecting table lay the corpse of petty criminal Aris Kindt, hanged only a couple of hours earlier for the attempted theft of a cape. The body would have had to be speedily removed from the gibbet overlooking the harbour to prevent its teeth, blood or bones being claimed by the crowd for their curative properties. Instead, Kindt's fate was to be the object of a formal public dissection, an eagerly anticipated event in the city's social calendar. To commemorate the occasion Tulp commissioned a group portrait of himself and several eminent members of the guild from the young Rembrandt. The painting, *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaas Tulp*, is one of Rembrandt's early masterpieces and a significant moment in the history of the group portrait (Figure 32). It displays, in Alois Riegl's words, both an 'inner, closed unity' of the group itself and an 'outer unity' of subjects and beholder.[2] The stiff, frontal format demanded by the need to include recognisable portraits of perhaps two dozen figures, all carefully differentiated by rank and function, has been opened out to give a tangible depth. The surgeons' relations to each other and to the beholder are complex and beautifully orchestrated. The play of gazes directs the viewer's eye across the surface and through the narrative of the dissection, not forgetting to include as it goes a moral lesson on the way of all

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[1] I take most of the historical information here from Simon Schama, *Rembrandt's Eyes* (London: Allen Lane, 1999), pp. 342–353.

[2] Riegl, *The Group Portraiture of Holland*, quoted in Schama, p. 347.

flesh. This is in the *memento mori* gesture of Frans van Loenen at the back of the group, who fixes us with his eyes whilst pointing toward the corpse as a reminder of our own inevitable fate. The other members of the guild look toward the corpse's opened left arm or beyond it to the splayed anatomy textbook propped at its feet. Tulp himself gazes offstage to the viewer's left. Rembrandt has chosen to depict the doctor in the act of demonstrating the flexion of the tendons in the cadaver's left arm. The choice is significant, for according to Simon Schama 'Tulp did in fact use the dissection of the forearm and the demonstration of the flexor muscles as an exemplum of the God-created ingenuity of the body'.[3] Tulp's left hand prefigures the gesture his right will provoke in Kindt's left hand, perhaps suggesting the surgeon's sympathy with, as well as his control of, his subject.

Figure 32: Rembrandt, *The Anatomy Lesson of Dr. Nicolaas Tulp,* 1632. Oil on canvas, 169.5 x 216.5 cm. The Hague, Mauritshuis.

This is a picture of a demonstration which itself demonstrates. It models a particular kind of picturing, one which was coming into being at the time and has since served as the foundation

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[3] Schama, p. 342.

of the modern conception of the subject. For Russell Kilbourn, 'the beginning of modern medical practice is conflated in Rembrandt's painting with the emergence of a new way of seeing', one which structures modernity itself.[4] The public dissection served several purposes repeated by the painting: to display the skill, expertise and status of Dr. Tulp; to demonstrate the newly emergent art of medical anatomy and instruct the public in its discoveries; to confirm the Guild of Surgeons as a prestigious yet benevolent institution. It also served a purpose the painting does not appear to repeat: that of 'harrowing the flesh of the delinquent even beyond death, a procedure then still part of the ordained punishment'.[5] In depicting Tulp's manipulation of Kindt's hand, Rembrandt subtly acknowledges the fact. The public anatomy lecture constituted a moment of self-fashioning for a society which, in the words of one of the painting's key modern readers, W.G. Sebald, 'saw itself as emerging from the darkness into the light'.[6] The anatomy displays the triumph of scientific rationalism. Knowledge is figured here as revelation, bringing into the light, penetrating the surface to uncover the truth lying hidden beneath. And the object of this penetrating gaze is the body, the brightest point in the image. The painting's focal point is the triangle formed by Tulp's hands and the cadaver's left hand, emphasising the body's penetration by an instrumentalising knowledge. Kindt's body is very much an object of discourse, rather than a source of subjective experience. In Foucauldian terms his body is the surface upon which the nexus of power/knowledge operates to produce him as a subject: here a mortified non-subject produced by a particular concatenation of legal, medical, religious and aesthetic discourses.[7]

One of the principal effects of this discourse is the interpolation of the image between subject and object, a process which the painting stages as the transformation of Kindt's body into an objectified representation of 'the body'. As noted above, the doctors look either at the

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[4] Russell J.A. Kilbourn, '"Catastrophe with Spectator": Subjectivity, Intertextuality and the Representation of History in *Die Ringe Des Saturn*', in *W.G. Sebald and the Writing of History* (Wurzburg: Konigshausen & Neumann, 2007), pp. 139–162 (p. 143).

[5] W.G. Sebald, *Rings Of Saturn*, trans. by Michael Hulse (London: Vintage, 2002), p. 12.

[6] Ibid.

[7] This particularly modern form of subjection affects not just the depicted body of Kindt but that of the viewer as well. The cultural capital encoded in the painting itself and in the Mauritshuis in which it is housed produce and discipline the viewer as a national and cultural subject, even as the objects themselves are offered up for his or her visual mastery. As J.J. Long puts it, in the museum context 'the visual mastery that the viewer exercises over the objects on display is paralleled by further workings of power/knowledge that operate through spectacle on the observer himself', producing that observer as a subject as the items on display are produced as objects. In Long's somewhat functionalist view, 'the spectacle disciplines by delimiting what is given to be seen and determining how it is to be seen' (J.J. Long, *W.G. Sebald: Image, Archive, Modernity* (Edinburgh University Press, 2007), pp. 39, 38.). It seems possible to adopt a more Foucauldian position which emphasises the mobility and fluidity of relations of power and subjection, yet still accepts that institutions play an important role in creating subject positions through the construction and coding of spaces of display, whether or not such positions are then inhabited in the terms in which they are presented.

anatomy textbook or at the conjunction of Tulp's hands with Kindt's — the point at which the schematisation of the body encoded in the book is applied to the body itself. As Sebald's narrator recognises, this relation of diagram to material body is the cynosure not only for the painting but also for the society it represents:

> Dr. Tulp's colleagues are not looking at Kindt's body [… but at] the open anatomical atlas in which the appalling physical facts are reduced to a diagram, a schematic plan of the human being, such as envisaged by the enthusiastic amateur anatomist René Descartes, who was also, so it is said, present that January morning in the Waaggebouw. In his philosophical investigations, which form one of the principal chapters in the history of subjection, Descartes teaches that one should disregard the flesh, which is beyond our comprehension, and attend to the machine within, to what can fully be understood, be made wholly useful for work, and, in the event of any fault, either repaired or discarded.[8]

Images are a powerful tool for understanding the world, but they tend to structure our relationship to the world as a relationship to its image: 'The flesh or nature is made comprehensible and incomprehensible at the same time, subsumed and othered by its very modern representation.'[9] This can be seen in Dürer's famous print of a man using a perspective frame, which turns the woman's body into an image (Figure 33).[10] Sebald's placing of Descartes in the audience at Tulp's anatomy lesson is pleasingly opportune, for as we saw in Chapter 1, Heidegger locates Descartes' thought as the decisive 'turn' (*Kehre)* in the installation of representational thinking as the default mode of Western metaphysics. The question of thought's correspondence with its object is at the heart of the Cartesian method, itself the foundation of the modern form of subjectivity seen coming into being in *The Anatomy Lesson*. The painting stages in extreme form man's rational capacity to take himself as an object of knowledge. In order to confirm the correspondence of Kindt's body to its abstracted image, Kindt himself is reduced to the status of object, or put crudely, killed. In staging this process *The Anatomy Lesson* thus 'represents the violence of early modern discourse'.[11] The objectifying violence of thought connects European rationalism with the horror of Auschwitz as its ultimate expression. As we saw in chapter 3, the dialectic of culture and barbarism is a central theme of Adorno, for whom Auschwitz represents not an aberration

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[8] Sebald, p. 13.

[9] Richard Crownshaw, *The Afterlife of Holocaust Memory in Contemporary Literature and Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 46.

[10] It is worth noting here that the piece of paper inscribed with the surgeons' names held by Hartman Hartmanszoon (to Tulp's right) originally bore an anatomical diagram of a flayed body (Schama, p. 352). The overwriting of this image by the text (and by the Name) corresponds to the censored image in the Situation Room photograph. Here, however, the illegibility of the image is guaranteed by the overlay of legible text, rather than the scrambling (and consequent revelation) of the digital weave of the image itself.

[11] Crownshaw, p. 45.

but the fulfilment of an instrumentalising tendency in the structure of thought which has dominated Europe since the eighteenth century. Thus 'Auschwitz confirmed the philosopheme of pure identity as death'.[12] Although the Holocaust is mentioned only in passing in Sebald's book and nowhere in connection with Rembrandt's painting, for Anne Fuchs 'it is clear that Sebald, like Adorno and Horkheimer before him, makes a connection between European rationalism and the emergence of a biopolitics that made Auschwitz possible'.[13] That connection lies in the replacement of the object by its image and the individual by the universalised abstraction known as 'man'. Thereafter, even 'in his formal freedom, the individual is as fungible and replaceable as he will be under the liquidators' boots'.[14] The objectification of the body depicted in *The Anatomy Lesson* would eventually result in the industrial production of corpses.

Figure 33: Albrecht Dürer, *Man Drawing a Woman Using a Perspective Frame*, c.1525. Woodcut, 7.5 x 21.5 cm.

The Anatomy Lesson has been used to secure a modern critical understanding of the relation between subjectivity and disciplinary power. If it does so, however, it is not without residue; the painting takes a certain distance from the form of visuality it stages. Sebald's narrator locates a point of disjunction in the painting's very centre; he claims that Kindt's opened left arm is actually his right arm transposed. For Sebald's narrator the deliberate flaw 'signifies the violence that has been done to Aris Kindt. It is with him, the victim, and not the Guild that gave

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[12] Adorno, 'Meditations on Metaphysics', p. 86.

[13] Anne Fuchs, '"Ein Hauptkapitel Der Geschichte Der Unterwerfung": Representations of Nature in W.G. Sebald's *Die Ringe Des Saturn*', in *W.G. Sebald and the Writing of History* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007), pp. 121–138 (p. 125).

[14] Adorno, 'Meditations on Metaphysics', p. 86.

Rembrandt his commission, that the painter identifies'.[15] Rembrandt's transposition of the hand subverts the regime of representation that the painting stages. It must be recognised that the issue of Kindt's left hand is controversial; Schama accepts the view of a 1978 report by anatomists at Groningen University that the hand is anatomically correct, and I am inclined to follow him.[16] Furthermore, the fact that the positions of Tulp's hands recall those of Rembrandt himself as he holds paintbrush and palette suggests that the painter's sympathies cannot be straightforwardly aligned with Kindt alone. Nevertheless it is still possible to see evidence of Rembrandt's sympathy with the unfortunate Kindt in the painting. Schama explains that the process of dissection would customarily begin with the opening and emptying of the stomach cavity, before proceeding to the limbs. Rembrandt omits this stage, cleaning up the cadaver as a reminder that this was once a human being and refusing to harrow Kindt's flesh 'even beyond death'. As well as figuring displacement in the turning of the surgeons' gazes from the cadaver to its image in the atlas, the painting thus also stages its own secondary revision of the dissection process. Moreover, it was customary for anatomy portraits to mask the cadaver's face, lower trunk or legs: 'The body was thus properly reduced to its role as the *subiectum anatomicum*, no longer a human but rather an arrangement of organs conveniently awaiting the anatomist's instructive hand'.[17] Rembrandt instead bares the face before us, evoking comparisons with the dead Christ as sacrificial victim. Kindt's face is depicted in detail; the line of shadow passing across his eyes emphasises his inability to return the objectifying gaze brought to bear upon him. Rembrandt thus succeeds in re-humanising Kindt, reversing the tendency of the visual regime depicted and 'forcing the beholder into an uncomfortable kinship with the dead as well as with the living'.[18] Rembrandt's treatment of Kindt's body resists the form of visuality that would subsume it under its own representation. The painting 'articulates the modern paradigm shift towards an objectified and systematised understanding of nature', while at the same time recognising what might be lost thereby.[19] In a painting that ostensibly shows 'the modern science of the individual [emerging] from the visual penetration of the dead body', Rembrandt also stages the limits of that vision and the invisibility it produces and upon which it depends.[20] *The Anatomy Lesson* anatomises modern visuality, describing both its seductive power and the residual materiality it threatens to overlook.

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[15] Sebald, p. 17.
[16] Schama, p. 352, n. 33.
[17] Schama, p. 351.
[18] Ibid.
[19] Fuchs, p. 124.
[20] Jay, p. 395.

If we now return to the Situation Room photograph (Figure 3) the parallels with Rembrandt's painting become apparent. Both are significant examples of the group portrait, one canonical, the other highly topical. If *The Anatomy Lesson* models the visuality of the seventeenth century, the Situation Room photograph stages its contemporary formation. The rhetorical parallels are echoed in their formal resemblance. The composition is mirrored, with a cluster of figures looking across the space, past an object or objects on a table in the foreground. Here, of course, the corpse has moved offstage, its place taken by the bank of 'dead' laptops. Instead of a book, the figures' attention is presumably held by a screen. The confluence is almost too perfect; the place of the body in Rembrandt's painting has been taken here by that representative of technocratic managerialism, the laptop computer. On one level the two pictures show us the same thing: a public display of power figured as the capacity to mortify and inspect the body, to expose it to a disciplinary gaze that produces a particular form of subjectivity through the interaction of various discourses. Both offer the spectacle of an exemplary punishment conducted in a semi-public space: those at the anatomy lesson have paid or been invited; the Situation Room is a restricted government space momentarily opened to a limited degree. Each picture dramatises the everyday processes of subjection and discipline in the culture it reflects. Whilst only one public dissection a year was permitted in seventeenth-century Amsterdam, dissection of the corpses of criminals was a standard part of the medical curriculum. Similarly the assassination of bin Laden manifests in extreme form the processes of surveillance, targeting and punishment through which disciplinary discourses operate in contemporary Western societies. Rembrandt's painting shows power/knowledge operating through a primarily medico-legal discursive complex that produces a visuality based around knowledge of the body's structure and functioning. In the contemporary era, the dominant discourse is a politico-juridical-military hybrid that legitimates itself through an appeal to 'security' and focuses on the body's location.

However, if the images share formal and rhetorical characteristics they also differ in important respects. Most obviously, the corpse is absent in the Situation Room photograph. In Chapter 1 I argued that bin Laden's corpse is the structuring absence of the photograph; it secures the image's meaning yet cannot appear within the frame (it is notable that no pictures of bin Laden, alive or dead, are visible within the photograph). Rembrandt's painting does not stand in for something in the same way; Kindt's corpse was visible in the lecture theatre as it is in the painting. In fact Rembrandt insists on the humanity overlooked by the surgeons in their desire to see the body on the table as a diagram, a specimen. The structuring absence of Tulp's lecture, the medico-legal disciplinary apparatus that brought Kindt's body to the dissecting

table, is quietly yet forcefully invoked by Rembrandt's recognition of the felon's humanity. The structuring absence of the painting is the theatricality of the whole spectacle, its appeal *as* spectacle. Thus the paying audience at the back of the room is omitted, leaving only the professionally interested surgeons. What cannot appear in Rembrandt's painting is the crowd as hungry for the 'lovely sight' as was Leontion, and as ready to submit to its appeal. The public eager for gore are of course ourselves, the painting's beholders. Rembrandt's affirmation of Kindt's humanity attempts to resist or transmute the base desire for spectacle into an ethical spectatorship. Yet that desire surely persists in the very production of the image. Rembrandt's humanising effort cannot fully succeed: it requires inclusion of the image of Kindt's body, which thus remains open to a dehumanising fascination. The Situation Room photograph resolves the problem by excluding the abjected other from the image entirely, thus also excluding the rehumanising gaze that would subvert visuality and the objectification it entails. There is no longer any need for the body to be present in the room. The intensification of technics as targeting in the twenty-first century is here visible in the increased abstraction of the targeted body as image. Nevertheless this image is much harder to control than the body it replaced, and returns all the more insistently as a spectral presence neither locatable within the photograph nor finally absent from it. The more technics places, the more it displaces, necessitating an intensified yet counterproductive effort of emplacement.

From neovisuality to counter-visuality

In the course of this thesis I have traced that tension between emplacement and displacement, presence and absence, absorption and theatricality, looking and looking away, from the visual archive of 9/11 back to seventeenth-century Holland. Beginning with the Situation Room photograph (taken as an ostensible 'outcome' of the 'War on Terror' begun in response to 9/11) and with the diffuse archive of 9/11 itself, we have seen how these images stage fantasies of embodiment and witnessing which respond to the inherently mediated nature of the image-event. At the same time they enfold a spectrality intrinsic to visual media such as photography and television, and also to the discourse of trauma. This spectrality inflects the history of technics in terms of which my project is framed. It is therefore no surprise to encounter it in the visual archive of 9/11, which I have argued paradigmatically represents the conjunction of visuality and trauma that has been a significant aspect of Western public

culture over the last two decades. It is also present, as I hope to have shown, in the disjunctive relationship of word and image that runs through the archive and the discourse which has grown up around it, this thesis included. This spectral visuality was traced in different forms through various representations of 9/11 in visual and textual media. These examples were chosen for their symptomatic quality, for the interesting ways in which they staged particular tensions, rather than for any totalising resolutions they offered. Another factor was the wide range of discourses with which they interact, including debates around governmentality and the role of commercial entertainment media in public mourning; the modernity of politicised Islam, and the effect on non-western cultural identities of neoliberalism and deterritorialised capitalism; the efficacy and ethics of realist or mediated witnessing of catastrophe; the relationship of art and terror; the virtualising effect of telemedia; and the historical relation of aesthetic artefacts to 'primitive accumulation'.

The particular co-ordinates of that tension have altered according to the specific formal and cultural factors weighing upon the artworks discussed. *United 93* dramatises director Paul Greengrass' desire to allow the audience 'to walk through 9/11 at eye level'. The phrase suggests a desire for a level of visual immediacy that will encourage the audience to identify with the narrative 'as if it were real'. In fact the twin requirements of authenticity and immediacy incite a tension between documentary verisimilitude and the absorptive pleasure of entertainment which runs through the film. The incitement of affect in the spectator is key to the film's self-presentation as an authentic record of traumatic events *and* as thrilling entertainment. In turn that tension is transferred to reviews which employ a rhetoric of trauma to describe the film's emotional intensity. The description of *United 93* as 'a stark, wrenching and overwhelming viewing experience' is indicative of the overlap in the languages of trauma and aesthetic response common in discussions of the film.[21] Greengrass' use of non-actors 'playing themselves' instigates a further tension between performance of past events and possession by them, which stages the interlacing of acting out and working through in psychoanalytic trauma theory as described by Dominick LaCapra. In enacting tensions between mourning and commerce, embodiment and dislocation, performance and possession, absorption and theatricality, *United 93* stages conflicts within visuality itself as currently organised and deployed.

Frédéric Beigbeder's *Windows on the World* engages with several of the issues raised in *United 93*, including the ethics of imagination in situations where witnessing is impossible and the role

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[21]Smith.

of mediation in representations of suffering. Where *United 93* aims for the maximum of spectatorial absorption as a means to empathic affect, Beigbeder's novel is openly theatrical, repeatedly drawing attention to its mediation of the narrative. *Windows on the World* thus echoes the recent move away from the insistence on the ineffability of extreme events, and by implication of otherness as such. For example, since the late 1990s there has been a shift in the discourse of Holocaust memorialisation from questions of whether the catastrophe can or should be visualised, toward asking how that might be done effectively. The question of mediation is especially pertinent in respect of 9/11, 'an event that *had* to be mediated'.[22] We saw how Beigbeder's insistence upon the role of theatricality in promoting an ethical witnessing of suffering responds to Adorno's meditations upon the ethics of art 'after Auschwitz'. *Windows on the World* repeatedly implicates the reader in the text as a strategy of questioning the moral status of the aesthesis it provides him. Yet Beigbeder ultimately retreats from the most extreme implications of his own position by sanitising certain passages and censoring others for the English translation of the book. More than the 'awful descriptions' Beigbeder admits to cutting out, these unacknowledged exclusions haunt the text, calling attention to its failure to finally 'go where television does not'.

Where Greengrass attempts to imagine what might have happened inside the hijacked planes, and Beigbeder speculates on the hidden suffering of those trapped in the World Trade Center, Don DeLillo strives in *Falling Man* to respond to the challenge he himself outlined in his post-9/11 essay 'In the Ruins of the Future': to articulate the 'counter-narrative'. To critics' audible disappointment, DeLillo focuses neither on the carnage inside the towers nor on the world-historical matrices of plot and counter-plot that led to the attacks, but on their aftereffects, viewed at an intimate, domestic scale. Trauma has a convoluted relationship with visuality, often manifesting visual symptoms yet resistant to picturing. Perhaps the visuality of trauma as pathology incites distrust in the image's capacity to work through rather than merely act out trauma, a capacity more often assigned to literature with its narrative emphasis. In *Falling Man* DeLillo interweaves the two modalities in his descriptions of Lianne's encounters with paintings by Morandi and with the performances of 'Falling Man'. The image is shown to be amply capable of staging the self-shattering effects of trauma, knitting and fragmenting past and present, psychic and external space, artwork and beholder. Yet this repetition of traumatic structures in art is not itself traumatising, or at least not necessarily so. Echoing Leo Bersani's thesis that art stages 'a domesticating and civilising project of self-recognition', DeLillo suggests that in certain circumstances art can dramatise the self-shattering effects of trauma

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[22] Redfield, p. 3.

as a fundamental condition of subjectivity.[23] Through her unsecuring interaction with artworks Lianne recognises herself as constituted in a primary openness to the other and thus irreducibly vulnerable to that other's potential violence. The process is neither guaranteed nor entirely separable from the compulsive repetition evident in traumatised response. Dominick LaCapra suggests that acting out and working through, whilst distinguishable, may never be entirely separable, and by the novel's end Lianne has by no means completed her mourning, yet she seems at least to have begun it. The theatricality of art thus offers hope of a reconstitution of subjectivity around mutual vulnerability that has potentially profound political implications.

The politics of aesthetics are presented in a very different register in Luc Tuymans' large painting *Still Life*. Like DeLillo's, Tuymans' name was frequently associated with themes crystallised in 9/11: in this case, historical legacies of violence and their relationship to images. Like DeLillo with *Falling Man*, Tuymans seemed with *Still Life* to sidestep critical expectations of a particular response to 9/11. Nonetheless we saw how, in apparently rejecting politics, Tuymans presented a rigorous and sly critique of the politics of the image, discursively and historically implicating the art world in a way almost unique amongst the work on show at *Documenta 11*. From Tuymans' painting we briefly traced the intertwined histories of still life painting and economic colonialism back to their roots in seventeenth-century Holland. In encouraging the beholder to see something 'not there' in the painting via the religious structure of monstration, Tuymans not only highlighted the historical complicity of art and the 'primitive accumulation' to which 9/11 was only the most spectacular act of resistance; he also questioned the forms of looking being deployed at Ground Zero in Manhattan concurrently with the blockbuster art exhibition in which *Still Life* was first shown. Tuymans thus gives concise form to an argument made by all the works discussed in this thesis: images embody enduringly complex relations between presence and absence, display and concealment, saying and seeing. To see *Still Life* as 'a picture of 9/11' stretches our ideas of reference and visualisation, of what a picture can be and do, almost beyond the limits of coherence; the same, however, might well be said of the harrowing, dreamlike, ecstatic images of 9/11.

And so we are brought back, by a double retracing, to seventeenth-century Holland and the first modern imperial venture built on commerce rather than conquest. My expertise is inadequate to the task of fully unpacking the particular relations of economic and aesthetic life in the seventeenth-century Netherlands, and of formulating a more nuanced picture of how

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[23] Bersani, p. 111.

that formation has influenced the conjunction of visuality with martial domination and economic exploitation currently known variously as 'development', 'globalisation' or 'neoliberalism'. Undertaken in greater detail according to a rigorous and possibly interminable effort, such a project might provide an alternative model for understanding the current organisation of world power, which as Derrida points out, 'depends largely on the solidity and reliability, on the *credit*, of American power'.[24] American economic, military and cultural power underwrites globalisation in its current form, playing:

> the role of guarantor or guardian of the entire world order, the one that in principle and in the last resort, is supposed to assure credit in general, credit in the sense of financial transactions but also the credit granted to languages, laws, political or diplomatic transactions. […] The United States still retains before the world the power of accrediting a certain self-preservation: it represents the ultimate presumed unity of force and law, of the greatest force and the discourse of law.[25]

This credit is more than simply financial, and is certainly buttressed by military domination, but Derrida's point is that the geopolitical pre-eminence of the United States is figured in terms of a certain debt or credit articulated in economic, military, judicial and linguistic terms. In the Situation Room photograph we saw that that credit is also deployed in visual terms, and that the complex of visuality so deployed represents the current culmination of a longer history stretching back at least to the seventeenth century. Yet if visuality has deep historical roots, it is also changing.

Although named by Carlyle in the mid-nineteenth century, Nicholas Mirzoeff locates the origins of visuality in the seventeenth-century colonial plantation and its employment of an 'overseer' whose control was exercised through surveillance.[26] Mirzoeff traces the subsequent history of visuality through a series of 'complexes', through the 'imperial complex' of the nineteenth century to the present complex of surveillance and counter-insurgency. Mirzoeff identifies the post-1945 'Revolution in Military Affairs' as marking a crucial transformation in the structure of visuality from panopticism to surveillance and counter-insurgency:

> Unlike the Panopticon or plantation, the place of surveillance is not just invisible but unknown, what one might call its undisclosed location. This is post-panoptic visuality for a new era, a neovisuality enabled by global digital technology that nonetheless understands itself to be part of a centuries-old tradition.[27]

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[24] Borradori, p. 93.
[25] Borradori, pp. 94–95.
[26] The use of the term to describe *The Anatomy Lesson*, although anachronistic in itself, thus refers to a complex which was becoming firmly established at about that time, and upon which the wealth and advancement the portrait celebrates was founded.
[27] Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, p. 294.

This new formation nonetheless retains the tensions present in the technics that structures it. Despite its increasingly abstract pervasiveness, counterinsurgency produces real and violent effects upon bodies and populations: 'Its favoured tactics include "disappearances", renditions, the "invisible" prison camp, no-fly lists, no-fly zones, electronic surveillance, and non-accountable interrogators, known as Other Government Agency personnel'.[28] The increasing deterritorialisation of power notwithstanding, the image is more than ever a crucial battleground upon which the war for 'hearts and minds' is waged. Recent sites of tactical struggle include the Abu Ghraib archive, the contrasting visibility of the corpses of Muammar Gadafi and Osama bin Laden, the introduction of body scanners at major airports and the ever-increasing spread of CCTV in Britain. To this neovisuality Mirzoeff opposes a counter-visuality traced in the resistant visual practices of slaves, Caribbean and Mesoamerican indigenous cultures, and more recently in the anti-war and anti-globalisation movements which have themselves begun to coalesce and globalise under the banner of the Occupy movement.[29] This history and its continuing practices have yet to be fully mapped, but appear to offer the most productive current strategy for resisting and undoing the anti-democratic impetus of visuality as counter-insurgency. One interesting avenue for future research may lie in the conjunction of Mirzoeff's counter-visuality and the 'counter-narrative' for which DeLillo called in the aftermath of 9/11.

At the outset I posed several questions as framing devices for this thesis. They addressed the relationship between trauma, visuality and mediation, which I proposed as crucial to any detailed understanding of the affective charge encoded in, and subsequent cultural significance of, the visual archive of 9/11. Perhaps the most succinct was: how does one represent something which is already to a great extent its own representation? In the chapters which followed it became apparent that the most convincing answers to that question rigorously and subtly probed the role of mediation in staging, disrupting, and critically reflecting upon trauma. Another question fundamental to my project was: what can a picture *do* that is not susceptible of being parsed in language, *and yet can be seen*? Can we nonetheless stage that interweaving of language and imagery in a way which does justice to its complexity and its power? I believe that the readings of specific responses to 9/11 offered here demonstrate that we can, and we can do so in surprising and thoughtful ways that engage powerfully with both modalities yet respect the specificity of each. Words and pictures

[28] Mirzoeff, *The Right to Look*, p. 295.
[29] Nicholas Mirzoeff, 'Something to See Here: For a Militant Visual Culture Practice' (unpublished public lecture presented at the Radical Media Forum: New Media Experiments, Goldsmiths University of London, 2012) <http://www.gold.ac.uk/calendar/?id=5848> [accessed 20 December 2012].

have been in productive dialogue for thousands of years, and there is no reason to expect that dialogue to end any time soon. However, any sensitive listener to that conversation must also be aware of the silences, the thought that resists translation between modes. I hope to have respected those silences as much as the gestures and the speech that frame them. The interpolation of images stripped of captions within this thesis has been one attempt to do justice to that resistance, and to continue that conversation. The text, as a whole and at specific points, is intended to be in dialogue with these images without reducing them to the role of mere illustration. As academics working within language I believe it is necessary to respect as well as to interrogate the specific modality of the visual. In the course of this thesis I hope to have productively located the visual archive of 9/11 within that complex, and suggested how responses by image-makers to that archive have exposed some of the antagonisms that fracture it. As such, in probing the relationship of images and words, technics and mediation, picturing and seeing, I hope to have rendered the complexity of pictures useful, to have suggested a means of understanding contemporary visuality as a first step in transforming it.

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