Aesthetics of Terror: Reflections on Post-9/11 Literature and Visual Culture

by

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Abstract

This dissertation project investigates cultural responses to visual representations of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. I examine the aesthetics, contexts, movements, and politics of post-9/11 visual culture across a range of media with a primary focus on photography and fiction. Recent scholarly articles and book length surveys on post-9/11 culture overwhelmingly charge popular literary and visual texts with participating in the reproduction of hegemonic norms and supporting a regressive climate of anti-feminism, hyper-masculinity, and reactionary politics. I contend that many scholars have actually foreclosed alternative interpretations and the production of new knowledge regarding post-9/11 literature and visual culture in the pursuit to reveal dominant ideologies at work. This project unfolds in three main sections, each of which develops "reparative readings" of visual and literary texts in an attempt to redeem valuable political, ethical, and affective aspects of post-9/11 visual culture that scholars have previously discounted or overlooked. The first section outlines post-9/11 victory culture and American exceptionalism through corporate media suppression of Richard Drew's photograph, "The Falling Man." I examine how dominant national narratives repress Drew's photograph in an analysis of New York nostalgia and the cultural resurgence of tightrope walker Philippe Petit. Following Judith Butler's more recent work, I argue that images of falling bodies might be redeemed, citing Jonathan Safran Foer's employment of images in his fiction as an example, through an ethics of vulnerability. The second section examines William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* as a narrative that runs contrary to academic perceptions that figure post-9/11 fiction as narcissistically preoccupied with national trauma. Drawing from Jodi Dean, I argue that

Gibson's portrayal of "the footage," a series of viral online images, reflects a harsh critique of online technologies and formulates terrorism as symptomatic of American imperialism and processes of globalization. The final section examines the Bush Administration's use of Joel Meyerowitz's Ground Zero photographs as part of an international foreign policy tour to gain support for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Drawing from Jill Bennett's extension of Gilles Deleuze's philosophy of the event, I work beyond critiques that have only posited these photographs as propaganda, exploring the uncanny and ethical dimensions of Meyerowitz's work, which has since been published as *Aftermath*.

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Introduction

> It is the World Trade Center you came to see up close….From here you
>
> can see the Gothic detailing of the towers' closely massed, aluminum-
>
> faced columns, stretching upward to what seem impossible heights. Even
>
> the towers surrounding these twins seem paltry by comparison….There is
>
> no denying the power of their mass and sleekness. But how much more
>
> clearly you could see the city, with its layers of accumulated history, if
>
> only those two vast and imposing structures weren't here. The trick, then,
>
> is to make the World Trade Center disappear. (Darton 4)

During the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, amateur and professional photographers gathered on the streets and rooftops of New York City in order to make images of the visual spectacle as it unfolded before them. "Manhattan seemed alive with cameras," writes David Friend, and "[a]mid the horror, New Yorkers by the tens of thousands had committed millions of moments to film and video" (ix-x). Media images of the World Trade Center's collapse were played and replayed incessantly on television, printed and reprinted in newspapers and magazines, shared and distributed on the Internet. Jonathan Flatley writes that the Twin Towers "offered a perfectly condensed and extremely visible site for a disaster that capitalized on the iconic reproducibility and, often horrible attraction of spectacle" (4). It is now perhaps a relatively obvious point to note that the terrorists more than likely planned the attacks with the significance of this visual spectacle in mind. Scholars partially attribute the massive production and

circulation of the terrorist attacks in visual media to the convergence of digital cameras, 24-hour newsgathering services, and the beginnings of Web 2.0 technology. These recent media developments enabled nearly instantaneous transmission of images and video footage of the terrorist attacks to audiences across the globe.

Despite the iconicity of video footage capturing the collapse of the World Trade Center, photographs continue to play an important role in defining the collective memory and history of the terrorist attacks. "It is striking," writes Marita Sturken, "that still photographs seem to have played a dominant role in the response to 9/11, far more than the television images. Unlike the television images which defined the media spectacle, the photograph seems to aid in mediating and negotiating a sense of loss" (186). Photography initially became a suspect activity at Ground Zero. Official signage instructed people to put their cameras away as part of Mayor Giuliani's ban on unauthorized photography, and a certain moral discourse emerged around making pictures as an inappropriate response to the tragedy. A number of posters appeared near Ground Zero reprimanding amateur photographers for participating in dark tourism: "All Of You Taking Pictures: I wonder if you really see what is here or if you're so concerned with getting that perfect shot that you've forgotten this is a tragedy site, not a tourist attraction" (qtd. in Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 14). Despite official and unofficial attempts to discourage photography, many New Yorkers and people from around the world made trips to Ground Zero, stood to look beyond the crowd barriers and police check points, and made

pictures of the site in the weeks and months after the attacks.[1] "Certainly I had not felt comfortable bringing a camera along," writes Marianne Hirsh, "[b]ut, as soon as I got there, I bought a disposable camera and took pictures of the signs, of people holding them, of streets blocked, of the silent crowds at the vigil. I took pictures of pictures, of people looking at pictures, of people taking pictures" (69). This widespread compulsion to make photographs led to the formation of two ambitious and hugely popular grassroots photography exhibitions and subsequent publications, *The September 11 Photo Project* and *Here is New York*. Project organizers obtained thousands of images from hundreds of photographers as a result of open calls to the general public and displayed this work in temporary gallery spaces throughout the fall of 2001. Certainly, this social and cultural primacy of the terrorist attacks' visual dimensions has made it commonplace for writers to characterize September 11, 2001 as an image event or as the most recorded and photographed day in history.

My dissertation investigates cultural responses to visual representations of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Drawing from W.J.T. Mitchell's approach to iconology, I examine the aesthetics, contexts, movements, and politics of post-9/11 visual culture across a range of media with a primary focus on photography and fiction. It may initially seem odd to include literary narratives as part of a discussion on visual culture, but these representations of the attacks are especially reliant upon and find inspiration in the visual aspects of 9/11. Following Mitchell, I maintain that the notion of a purely

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[1] Kevin Bubriski documents this phenomenon of people across the United States (and around the world) travelling to see and photograph the remains of the World Trade Center behind police barricades in *Pilgrimage: Looking at Ground Zero*. Bubriski's black and white photographs capture people staring with blank facial expressions as they attempt to come to terms with gravity of destruction that is only implied, but not depicted.

visual art or a purely textual writing does not exist. In "There Are No Visual Media," Mitchell writes that "[t]he very notion of a medium and of mediation already entails some mixture of sensory, perceptual, and semiotic elements" (399). In other words, my analysis of post-9/11 literature and visual culture recognizes that all media are mixed media; all arts are composite arts. From this perspective, an analysis of visual culture cannot solely be invested with concerns of ocular experience, but rather must attend to the heterogeneity of signification and representation. In *Picture Theory*, Mitchell argues that any analysis of visual culture must be attentive to the combination of "different codes, discursive conventions, channels, sensory, and cognitive modes" (95). He stresses the importance of considering the interplay between verbal and visual modes of communication as constitutive of representation. Of course, this does not mean that different media forms cannot or should not be distinguished. Mitchell's approach maintains medium specificity while acknowledging that all media are mixed, albeit not all mixed in the same way or with the same correlation of components. Therefore, throughout my dissertation, I try to examine some of the interconnectivity and overlapping influences between text and image, literary and visual culture in artistic works that emerge from the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks.

My dissertation project is also concerned with recuperating particular literary and visual texts that scholars and critics largely dismiss as participating in the reproduction of hegemonic norms and supporting a regressive climate of anti-feminism, hyper-masculinity, and uncritical patriotism. Following the terrorist attacks, the Bush Administration and corporate media manufacturers would continually reproduce American narratives of triumph and exceptionalism in efforts to justify reactionary

politics and garner support for the War on Terror. In order to rally approval and complicity for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the Bush Administration reinvigorated what Tom Engelhardt calls "victory culture," American representations of triumph and nationalism that establish defeat as the opportunity for retaliation and conquest over those coded as evil others. The Bush Administration and corporate media producers partially drew from the rhetoric of atomic warfare and the obsessive practice of locating and eliminating enemies of the state. Under a banner of triumphalism, the Bush Administration would invest an enormous amount of government funds in surveillance and security, erode civil liberties through multiple policy initiatives (most notably the Patriot Act), and generate a political atmosphere of fear and paranoia that consequently incited an anti-Islamic social climate. This kind of hawkish and uncritical patriotism dominated much of the cultural landscape in the wake of the terrorist attacks, encouraging harsh reprisals in response to public statements that would question American nationalism and the motivation for war.

In *The Terror Dream*, Susan Faludi similarly argues that corporate media's proliferation of triumphalist narratives prompted the polarization of gender identity and anti-feminist backlash. "In the aftermath of the attacks," writes Faludi, "the cultural troika of media, entertainment, and advertising declared the post-9/11 age an era of neofifties nuclear family 'togetherness,' redomesticated femininity, and reconstituted Cold Warrior manhood" (3-4). Faludi contends that feminism became a domestic enemy and that the reportage of American news media would posit feminist perspectives as a form of treason. She highlights the case of writer and activist Susan Sontag as a prime

example of this post-9/11 climate. Sontag wrote less than five hundred words in the

September 24, 2001 issue of the *New Yorker* where she provides a critique of the

immediate government response to the terrorist attacks, partially questioning the Bush

Administration's alignment of masculinity with nationhood. Sontag concludes that a "few

shreds of historical awareness might help us understand what has happened, and what

may continue to happen. 'Our country is strong,' we are told time and time again. I for

one don't find this entirely consoling. Who doubts that America is strong? But that's not

all America has to be" ("Talk of the Town"). Adverse media reactions to Sontag's

comments quickly followed. *New York Post* columnist Rob Dreher, for intance, evoked

violence in his response to Sontag's remarks: "I wanted to walk barefoot on broken glass

across the Brooklyn Bridge, up to that woman's apartment, grab her by the neck, drag her

down to Ground Zero and force her to say that to the firefighters" ("Painful to Live").

Other commentators and columnists derided Sontag, calling her "deranged" and an "ally of

evil," claiming that her comments suffered from "moral idiocy" (Faludi 27). Sontag,

however, is not necessarily unique in the criticism she received. Public figures such as

Ward Churchill, Bill Maher, and Barbara Kingsolver each made their own respective

comments criticizing the American government's rhetoric and response to the terrorist

attacks and each were met with significant backlash. Reactionary political stances and a

culture of triumphalism ultimately marginalized and quashed alternative perspectives

regarding the terrorist attacks, narrowing possibilities of signification in terms of what

was able to be seen and said. Faludi and Engelhardt agree that the American government

and mainstream media outlets responded to the terrorist attacks not with an open

interrogation of what had actually taken place in terms of globalization and ideological conflict, but rather with propagandistic war rhetoric and the comforting and familiar fantasies of female vulnerability and heroic masculinity reminiscent of 1950s domesticity and post-war films.

As a result of this highly reactionary political and cultural climate, the majority of academic research on post-9/11 literature and visual culture is often particularly unfavourable. Scholars usually find few redeeming qualities in fiction and photography that directly represents the tragedy. These texts are suspect precisely because they seem to reflect aspects of exceptionalism or express a narcissistic preoccupation with personal and domestic trauma. Recent academic articles and book length surveys on post-9/11 literature and visual culture, including Richard Gray's *After the Fall*, David Holloway's *Cultures of the War on Terror*, Jeffrey Melnick's *9/11 Culture*, Martin Randall's *9/11 and the Literature of Terror*, and Kristiaan Versluys' *Out of the Blue*, frequently accuse authors and filmmakers, photographers and artists, of reproducing many of the conservative reactions to the terrorist attacks that Faludi and Engelhardt describe. Scholars commonly argue in their thematic readings of post-9/11 cultural texts that these works are essentially part of a mainstream effort to maintain white, phallogocentric narratives of victory culture and domesticity in the aftermath of the attacks.

Here, I briefly suggest that much of the academic work on post-9/11 literature and visual culture seems to be caught within an interpretive frame of suspicion. In *Touching Feeling: Affect, Pedagogy, and Performativity*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick argues that contemporary literary and cultural critics have fallen into well worn paths of ideology

critique that rarely produce new knowledge as they approach texts with interpretive strategies that simply reveal the obvious and the predictable. Drawing from Paul Ricoeur, Sedgwick characterizes this trend as a "hermeneutics of suspicion," a form of analysis that she argues has become "a mandatory injunction rather than a possibility among other possibilities" (125). She contends that this strategy of reading grounds itself in what is usually already known in advance. The hermeneutics of suspicion often manifests as a practice of unmasking and uncovering hegemonic norms that are already anticipated prior to analysis. Of course, Sedgwick does not claim that scholars should not expose or discuss repressive textual or visual representations, but rather she questions what is lost in analysis when the dominant interpretive strategy of a discipline becomes dependant on paranoid or suspicious reading practices. Her claim is that new contributions to knowledge cannot easily emerge from rigid and prescriptive methods that already predetermine or assume the limits of what can be known about a given text. In *The Uses of Literature*, Rita Felski draws from Sedgwick's claims in order to question, "what virtue remains in unmasking when we know full well what lies beneath the mask?" (1). Felski similarly characterizes the hermeneutics of suspicion as a "quintessentially paranoid style of reading," one that calls for "constant vigilance, reading against the grain, assuming the worst case scenario and then rediscovering its own gloomy prognosis in every text" (3). Ultimately, both Felski and Sedgwick argue that the hermeneutics of suspicion becomes a form of repression in and of itself as it frequently forecloses opportunities to produce alternative reading practices and new avenues for creative interpretation.

To be clear, I have found much academic research on post-9/11 culture to be

rigorous and thought provoking in many ways. I draw from and expand upon much of

this work throughout this dissertation. I do not intend to disparage or discount the

excellent work that has been developed on post-9/11 literature and visual culture, but I

maintain that this field of research remains heavily reliant upon the hermeneutics of

suspicion, often revealing ideological frames that are already relatively self-evident. In

9/11 Culture, for instance, Melnick echoes Faludi and Engelhardt in foregrounding

regressive cultural representations of gender identity in fiction, film, and visual art:

> [W]here the feminists of the late 1960s and the 1970s held as a key
>
> principle that the 'personal is political' (i.e. that everything that happens
>
> to us individually shapes and has meaning in the larger field of social
>
> relations), the art of 9/11 has been much more intent on reflecting on how
>
> the political becomes personal. To put it plainly, one of the defining
>
> features of the post-9/11 cultural landscape has been to translate the
>
> violence of the day as a simple assault on the proper functioning of
>
> American masculinity and femininity. (123)

It is not that Melnick is inaccurate or incorrect. Certainly, the majority of scholars

invested in surveying post-9/11 cultural texts frequently make analogous assertions,

affirming that these texts almost always translate the trauma of the terrorist attacks

through an interiorized lens of traumatized domesticity and American exceptionalism. The

general consensus among scholars is that post-9/11 culture fails to explore or engage the

imperial, transnational, ethical, and technological implications that might be drawn from

the terrorist attacks. The problem with this consensus, however, is that scholars rarely

seem to move beyond it.

My dissertation intervenes in this discussion of post-9/11 literature and visual culture in an attempt to recuperate particular texts that many scholars have dismissed or ignored. In each of my three chapters, I briefly engage with suspicious critiques that read particular texts as part of the mainstream effort to reproduce narratives of victory culture and exceptionalism in the aftermath of the attacks. Of course, I do not explicitly disagree that many post-9/11 texts may construct traditional ideas regarding family, gender, and national identity. I suggest, however, that many of the critiques of post-9/11 culture often misread, discount, or ignore particular texts and certain significations in the attempt to demonstrate that authors and artists are reproducing certain hegemonic norms. Drawing from Sedgwick, I frequently attempt to employ affective and reparative reading practices as necessary methods to explore the progressive or unanticipated potentialities of post-9/11 culture. For Sedgwick, the reparative reader's goal is to surrender anticipation in the effort to experience surprise:

> [T]o read from a reparative position is to surrender the knowing, anxious paranoid determination that no horror, however apparently unthinkable, shall ever come to the reader *as new*; to a reparatively positioned reader, it can seem realistic and necessary to experience surprise. Because there can be terrible surprises, however, there can also be good ones. Hope, often a fracturing, even traumatic thing to experience, is among the energies by which the reparatively positioned reader tries to organize the fragments and part-objects she encounters or creates. Because the reader has room to

realize that the future may be different from the present, it is also possible

for her to entertain such profoundly painful, profoundly revealing,

ethically crucial possibilities as that the past, in turn, could have happened

differently from the way it actually did. (146)

Sedgwick's approach to reparative reading is especially pertinent to my dissertation

project as I am less concerned with unmasking the hegemony of post-9/11 culture and

more with reevaluating particular texts that have already been discounted as regressive.

Reparative reading signals the importance of not mapping a particular methodology onto

texts, but rather trying to allow the path of interpretation to emerge from the texts

themselves. This approach involves an attention to affective response, imaginative close

reading, and moments of the unexpected. Of course, I remain mindful of hegemonic norms

within literary and visual texts, but my goal in each of the following chapters has been to

develop readings that may redeem valuable political, ethical, and affective aspects of

post-9/11 culture, which scholars have previously discounted or overlooked as a result of

the hermeneutics of suspicion.

It is difficult to approach the topic of post-9/11 literature and visual culture

without referring in some respect to discourses on trauma. Much post-9/11 cultural

criticism has drawn on the work of trauma theorists such as Cathy Caruth, Dominick

LaCapra, Michael Rothberg, and Barbie Zelizer. Many scholars also express their own

traumatic stories in their research, recounting flashbulb memories of exactly where they

were and what they were doing at the time of the attacks. I will not expand upon my own

memory of the day except to say that I was not in New York or Virginia or Pennsylvania.

Like the majority of people around the world, I watched the events of September 11,

2001 unfold on television. Although the plane crash at the Pentagon and the United 93

crash in Shanksville are important parts of the terrorist attacks and have generated their

own respective cultural texts, the traumatic spectacle in Lower Manhattan absorbs and

overshadows the significance of these respective sites of trauma. Therefore, my approach

to trauma throughout this dissertation is less concerned with direct experience and more

with what Marc Redfield calls the "virtual trauma" generated by the central visuality of

the World Trade Center's collapse. Redfield argues that

> 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
>
> abiding psychic damage – and if we then 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': something
>
> mediated, technically produced, not properly real. (2-3)

For Redfield, virtual trauma is both ambiguous and spectral. It is a trauma that is not

clearly actual, but communicates the threat of violence through distance and mediation. It

is a kind of collective, cultural, and symbolic trauma that partially emerges in the social

imaginary through shifts in signification.

"The event called September 11 or 9/11 was as real as death," writes Redfield,

"but its traumatic force seems nonetheless inseparable from a certain ghostliness, not just

because the attacks did more than merely literal damage (that would be true of any event

causing cultural trauma) but because the symbolic damage done itself seems spectral –

not unreal by any means, but not simply 'real' either" (15). In many ways, trauma

discourse in this virtual sense might actually serve a reactionary political perspective invested in locating and defining victims in order to justify retaliation and reparation in the form of violence. In *The Empire of Trauma*, Didier Fassin and Richard Rechtman argue that understandings of trauma throughout the twentieth-century have shifted to account for this virtual quality in contemporary culture. As a result, trauma is no longer necessarily understood as a psychological injury resulting from direct experience. For Fassin and Rechtman, "trauma today is more a feature of the moral landscape serving to identify legitimate victims than it is a diagnostic category which at most reinforces that legitimacy" (284). Throughout my dissertation, however, I view trauma not as an attempt to define categorical distinctions between victims and victimizers, but rather as an ethical endeavour that might amount to greater historical consciousness and cross-cultural dialogue. As Cathy Caruth writes in her introduction to *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, "[i]n a catastrophic age…trauma itself may provide the very link between cultures: not as a simple understanding of the pasts of others but rather, within the traumas of contemporary history, as our ability to listen through the departures we have all taken from ourselves" (11). I approach post-9/11 literature and visual culture in terms of its immanent potential to express traumas of the past and communicate elements of social and political life that may not be fully actualized in current popular discourses on the terrorist attacks.

My dissertation consequently unfolds in three main chapters. My first chapter primarily explores visual representations of "the jumpers," images of those people who leapt from the upper floors of the World Trade Center to escape the unbearable heat and smoke caused by the fire below. These images of falling people first appeared on

television during the first few hours of the terrorist attacks. Broadcast and cable news networks, such as CNN, Fox News, and CBS, each showed video recordings of people jumping to their deaths. These moving images were pulled almost immediately after they were shown as corporate executives deemed them disturbing and unnecessarily gruesome. Similar images in the form of still photographs, however, were printed on the day after the attacks in countless newspapers across the United States. Richard Drew's "The Falling Man" is probably the most notorious of the falling person photographs as it was printed in the *New York Times* on September 12, 2001 and circulated by the Associated Press. The reproduction of falling body images in newspapers were also met with public outcry and driven out of sight through corporate self-censorship. Although there are dozens, if not hundreds of these images in digital circulation, falling body photographs remain incredibly controversial. Most frequently, these images are understood as exploitative, voyeuristic, and pornographic. At the same time, however, photographs of falling bodies have gained a kind of iconic significance. In literary and visual depictions of the terrorist attacks, countless authors and artists represent and give meaning to the falling bodies in relation to the terrorist attacks.

I examine some of the theoretical, ethical, and political dimensions that arise from representations of falling bodies in a variety of post-9/11 cultural texts. I begin with an examination of Drew's photograph and the context of its censorship. I argue that the repression of "The Falling Man" and representations of falling bodies initially became taboo through the popular American media's maintenance of victory culture and exceptionalism. I argue that the falling bodies disrupt the immediate post-9/11 American social imaginary of victory culture through what Julia Kristeva calls abjection, not only as

a visceral reaction to encounters with death, but also as what must be expelled to maintain and reproduce national identity.

In this first chapter, I turn to the cultural resurgence of high wire walker Philippe Petit as an example of victory culture that seeks to repress images of falling with familiar nationalist narratives of American exceptionalism. I primarily explore James Marsh's documentary drama, *Man on Wire*, as a film that attempts to reproduce the familiarity of American Dream ideals and invert the terror of falling bodies through Petit's masculine heroism and his triumphant tightrope walk. Although *Man on Wire* never directly mentions the terrorist attacks, the film is haunted by spectral traces of the event. I argue that *Man on Wire* simultaneously operates as a nostalgic fantasy that fulfils the desire for the two towers not to have collapsed, but also complicates its own portrayal of American triumphalism, as the film cannot help but conjure the falling bodies that it represses.

I move from the discussion of Petit to explore a much-debated question regarding images of atrocity: why should anyone look at images of impending death? I primarily direct this question through an analysis of Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, a novel that explores some of the ethical dimensions that photographs of falling bodies may produce in fictional representations of the terrorist attacks. Despite the harsh reception of *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, I suggest that Foer renders one of the most significant engagements with a falling body image to date as his novel appears as a counter-narrative to victory culture rhetoric and as an opportunity for readers to actually participate in recognition rather than abjection, an opportunity to consider the image of a falling body in a context of the ethics of human vulnerability.

In the second chapter, I turn to William's Gibson's *Pattern Recognition* as it is not only one of the earliest examples of post-9/11 fiction, but also one of few novels that explicitly engages with questions of globalization, Internet technology, and visual culture. Curiously, many scholars who have so harshly criticized post-9/11 fiction for not exploring transnationalist or cross-cultural ethics seem to neglect *Pattern Recognition* or mention the novel only in passing. I focus on this novel as Gibson's portrayal of life after the terrorist attacks is an early attempt to grapple with a globalized post-9/11 technoculture and realities of surveillance, paranoia, and conspiracy. Although *Pattern Recognition* is part of a trilogy, I place emphasis on this novel over Gibson's subsequent post-9/11 works as this work of fiction is more specifically concerned with the digital image in its various forms. *Pattern Recognition* explores the global dissemination, circulation, and exploitation of online content in the form of digital images and text-based exchanges about them. In this chapter, I discuss *Pattern Recognition*'s depiction of certain anxieties pertaining to technology, visual culture, and globalization in a post-9/11 world. This discussion touches on the interconnections between technology, globalization, surveillance, affect, and conspiracy theory through Gibson's portrayal of online message board users. Known as the Footage:Fetish:Forum (F:F:F), this message board allows users to participate in the process of electronic exchange that Jodi Dean describes as "communicative capitalism." I contend that Gibson's attention to the circulation of online "footage" offers a critical commentary of digital visual culture through the representation of communicative capitalism at work in the novel. Although Internet technology may sometimes aid in the organization of offline political activism, I contend that Gibson's

characterization of this technology reflects not only the underlying paranoia generated through online communication networks, but also provides a harsh critique of online communication, specifically the electronic exchange of digital images and the quasi-political debates about them. Ultimately, I explore *Pattern Recognition*'s expression of futility at the possibility of these networks producing progressive political action in the aftermath of 9/11.

In the final chapter, I explore the political and ethical dimensions of Joel Meyerowitz's *Aftermath*, a publication that draws from the photographer's large archive of Ground Zero photography. Many scholars examine Meyerowitz's photography and conclude that his images function as propaganda that serves the dominant discourse of reactionary politics for war. My contention, however, is that Meyerowitz's photographs of Ground Zero aesthetically engage with a broader imaginary of ruins, which not only contributes to their affective capacity as propaganda, but may also allude to unrealized interpretive possibilities beyond dominant reactionary narratives of the terrorist attacks. I focus on Meyerowitz's body of work as no other photographer had similar access to the site of destruction. This publication not only extends the prominent role that images of Ground Zero may continue to play in public discourse, but will most likely remain the official record that defines the collective memory of the destruction and unbuilding of the World Trade Center. Further, there is currently little academic research that explores the aesthetics of Meyerowitz's photographs and their complex connotations.

I approach Meyerowitz's *Aftermath* through Jill Bennett's theorization of aesthetics and the event. In this approach, events are not fixed or final in their emergence, but resonate along a relational series with other temporalities and occurrences. The event

is not really a rupture or break with the past, but is always continuously becoming. In other words, as meaning is continuously produced around the event in its actualization, there is always the potential for new knowledge and interpretative meaning to unfold. There is always the possibility for the event to emerge differently. Bennett draws from Gilles Deleuze's *The Logic of Sense* in order to conceptualize works of visual culture as affective encounters with the event in its becoming. For Deleuze, the event holds the possibility for reordering, extending, or shifting an actualized or presupposed state of affairs. Revisiting the event through its representation in photographs, then, allows for the reorganization of what is sensible or knowable about the event.

In my examination of Meyerowitz's photographs through the event, I draw from contemporary scholarship on ruins and their aesthetics. Many scholars argue that ruins of modernity may transgress borders of space and time, generating new experiential possibilities for subjects caught within increasingly regulated social spaces. Meyerowitz's photographs, however, raise questions about the limits of those possibilities through aesthetic encounters with the ruins of destruction. I contend that Meyerowitz's *Aftermath* primarily stages affective encounters through sublime and uncanny aesthetics. Drawing from Bennett's approach to aesthetics as an affective encounter, I argue that an examination of the affective dimensions of ruins might outline the possibility for viewers of Meyerowitz's photographs to be caught between multiple histories and geographies, memories and temporalities, affects and imaginings. Through this approach, I attempt to recover some of the ethical possibilities in the aesthetics of Meyerowitz's *Aftermath*, which are overwritten through the dominant discourses of Ground Zero. Ultimately, I argue that Meyerowitz's *Aftermath* confronts viewers with the repressed imagery that

uncannily communicates political anxieties, which both serve and run counter to the intense memorialization and victory culture narrativization of Ground Zero.

In my conclusion, I briefly explore AMC's reconfiguration of Drew's falling body photograph for the opening credit sequence and advertising campaigns of the popular television show, *Mad Men*. The show's representation of the falling body communicates a shift in signification from the original image's depiction of a stark and disturbing reality to a more metaphorical commentary on the post-9/11 cultural climate. AMC's appropriation of the falling body imagery demonstrates the possibility for visual representations of the terrorist attacks to continually emerge and reverberate through contemporary visual culture in alternative and unpredictable contexts.

Victory Culture and Photographs of Falling Bodies after September 11, 2001

> To catch death actually happening and embalm it for all time is something
>
> only cameras can do, and pictures taken by photographers out in the field
>
> of the moment of (or just before) death are among the most celebrated and
>
> often reproduced of war photographs. (Sontag, *Regarding* 59)

Introduction

The photograph features a man falling headfirst, hands at his side, one leg bent, dressed in a white shirt, black pants, and high-top shoes. Dark shadows obscure the man's face. His body is slightly blurry from the movement of the fall. The man's posture almost appears casual. Frozen slightly higher than the middle of the rectangular frame, the upside-down man points vertically in such a way that journalist Tom Junod describes him as "an arrow…a missile, a spear, bent on attaining his own end" (211-12). He perfectly aligns with the perpendicular mullions of the World Trade Center towers, which comprises the backdrop of the photograph. The man's body divides the North tower on his left from the South tower on his right, giving the impression that the photograph's composition is very deliberate. In *New York Sights*, Douglas Tallack likens the background of the image to the stripes of the American flag. "The stripes are vertical and not horizontal stripes," writes Tallack, "and are accidentally there and not patriotically invoked" (176). Although the man is about to die, the photograph does not explicitly portray death. Like most images of falling bodies taken during the terrorist attacks of

September 11, 2001, viewers must extrapolate from Richard Drew's photograph, now widely known as "The Falling Man," in order to presume the reality of a gruesome fate beyond what is actually depicted in the frame.[2]

A photographer for the Associated Press, Drew was covering a maternity fashion show at Bryant Park during the time of the attacks. He received a call from his editor to abandon the show in order to photograph the events unfolding at the World Trade Center. Drew took the subway down to Chambers Street and began to photograph the burning towers as well as people that were injured by falling debris. In a 2011 interview with *The Daily Beast*, Drew recounts standing with a police officer and an EMT, each of them watching the spectacle of burning buildings. Drew continued to photograph the smoke and fire until the EMT witnessed a number of people falling:

> 'Oh my god, look!' And that's when we noticed people coming down from the building. We don't know whether they were overcome by smoke. I was photographing several people coming down from the building and I have a sequence of photographs of this guy coming down. The camera captured the photograph in a sequence, since it had a motor drive on it, so the camera captured a moment. If the camera functioned a fraction of a second earlier, I wouldn't have had that picture. It was the camera that captured the photograph, not my eye and quick finger. Can you imagine

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[2] Richard Drew's photograph of the falling man does not have an official title, but simply appears with a caption in the Associated Press online archive: "A person falls headfirst from the north tower of New York's World Trade Center Tuesday, Sept. 11, 2001." In the September 12, 2001 issue of the *New York Times*, Drew's photograph is given a similar caption: "A person falls headfirst after jumping from the north tower of the World Trade Center. It was a horrific sight that was repeated in the moments after the planes struck the towers."

how fast people fall? They're falling really fast, and while you're

photographing this you have to pan with them so I picked this guy up in

my viewfinder, put my finger on the button, and kept taking pictures

while he was falling. I had to time my vertical motion of the camera to his

descent. (qtd. in Stern)

Drew photographed a dozen frames of the falling man through a 200mm telephoto lens.

He also produced multiple series of images that sequentially capture the similar fates of

others who jumped or fell from the World Trade Center. Despite producing more than a

hundred images of different people falling from which to choose, Drew ultimately decided

upon a single, slightly cropped frame for submission to the Associated Press server.

"That picture," says Drew, "just jumped off the screen because of its verticality and

symmetry. It just had that look" (qtd. in Junod 213). On September 12, 2001, Drew's

photograph of the falling man appeared on page seven of the *New York Times* and in

hundreds of other newspapers across the United States and the world.

Although mainstream media outlets would continuously broadcast video footage

of the collapsing towers in the days and months after the terrorist attacks, images of those

who jumped to escape the heat and smoke on the upper floors of the World Trade Center

only appeared in news publications on the day after the attacks and were never reprinted

due to public outcry and corporate self-censorship. Two years after the terrorist attacks

in a short piece for the *Los Angeles Times*, Drew briefly discusses his experience

following the short-lived publication of his now notorious photograph:

My family calls it 'the picture that won't go away.' Most newspaper

editors refused to print it. Those who did, on the day after the World

Trade Center attacks, received hundreds of letters of complaint. The

photograph was denounced as coldblooded, ghoulish and sadistic. Then it

vanished. Yet, two years later, I still get asked about it. I've been invited

on national talk shows, interviewed by foreign TV crews and asked to

speak about it at universities across the country. *Esquire* magazine just

published a 7,000 word essay that hails it as an icon, a masterpiece and a

touching work of art. All this for a single frame out of hundreds shot in

haste before I was pulled to safety as the second tower of the World Trade

Center tumbled toward me. My fellow photographers call it 'the most

famous picture nobody's ever seen.' ("The Horror")

Drew's comments begin to suggest some of the paradoxes that the photographs of falling

bodies seem to embody. These images are both attractive and repulsive, perceived as

exploitative and voyeuristic, but they are also celebrated as masterful works of art and

photojournalism. Despite corporate self-censorship and a climate of uncritical patriotism

in the wake of the terrorist attacks, the images of falling bodies remain "the most haunting

and memorable part of the tragedy" (Brottman 172). These images, especially Richard

Drew's "The Falling Man," have now become iconic symbols of the terrorist attacks for

authors and artists that explore the events of 9/11 in their works (Gauthier 101).[3]

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[3] Novelists have especially taken on the task of representing the falling bodies in their work. Don DeLillo's novel, *Falling Man*, features reoccurring scenes where a performance artist dangles from a bungee cord above the streets of New York as a stark reminder of the lives lost on 9/11. In *Windows on the World*, Frédéric Beigbeder tells the story of a Texas realtor and his two sons trapped on the upper floors of the World Trade Center. Beigbeder's novel concludes with the father and sons jumping to their deaths to

In this chapter, I am most concerned with exploring the ethical, political, and affectual questions that arise from representations of falling bodies in a variety of post-9/11 literary and visual texts. First, I begin with an analysis of Drew's photograph and its censorship, as it is the most well known falling body image and the one that I believe most authors and artists draw from as a referent. Of course, there are many other falling body images, but I will refer to these more specifically as they become relevant in later discussions. I argue that the need to repress Drew's photograph and other images of falling bodies developed through popular American media's desire to support and maintain, what Tom Engelhardt calls, "victory culture," a collective of American narratives of triumph and nationalism that only portray defeat as "a springboard for victory" over those coded as darker, evil others (3). Engelhardt argues that victory culture steeply declined and more or less disappeared from the cultural landscape as a result of the Vietnam War. In the aftermath of September 11, 2001, however, the Bush Administration and corporate media manufacturers temporarily reinvigorated victory culture and exceptionalism as part of what Charles Taylor refers to as the "social imaginary." I contend that the various images of falling bodies initially disrupted the American social imaginary through, what Julia Kristeva calls, abjection, as they unsettle the post-9/11 victory narrative. After the terrorist attacks, corporate media producers would not only self-censor images of falling bodies, but also sought to replace them with familiar and reparative nationalist narratives of triumph and American exceptionalism.

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escape the burning fires inside the tower. Memories of the falling bodies also haunt the protagonist of Ken Kalfus's *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* and the characters of Jay McInerney's *The Good Life*. One of the most disturbing depictions of the falling bodies, however, appears in Jess Walter's *The Zero* where police officers discuss the sounds of falling people hitting the pavement.

Later, I turn to the cultural resurgence of Philippe Petit as an indirect example of post-9/11 victory culture, which is haunted by traces of the terrorist attacks and images of falling bodies. Known for his 1974 high wire walk between the nearly completed World Trade Center towers, Petit appears in dozens of literary and visual texts in years since the terrorist attacks. Although I consult a variety of these texts, I primarily examine James Marsh's popular documentary drama, *Man on Wire*, which dramatizes Petit's planning and preparation for the dangerous and unauthorized tightrope walk. Curiously, Marsh's film never explicitly acknowledges the terrorist attacks. Nevertheless, the film reproduces familiar ideals of the American Dream and inverts the terror of falling bodies through Petit's masculine heroism and his triumphant tightrope walk. In one sense, *Man on Wire* operates as a nostalgic fantasy that fulfils the desire for the two towers not to have collapsed, the desire for people not to have tumbled to the streets below. I maintain, however, that *Man on Wire* complicates its own portrayal of American triumph and nostalgic escapism, as the film cannot help but denote the falling bodies that it is so intent on repressing. Ultimately, Marsh's documentary demonstrates a disrupted temporality, engaging with two events simultaneously as the events of September 11, 2001 encode any number of past and present representations of New York City.

Finally, I conclude this chapter with a pressing question: why should anyone look at images of falling bodies? In my examination of Jonathan Safran Foer's novel, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, I attempt to unravel some of the ethical complexities that photographs of falling bodies have enabled authors to explore in their work. Despite harsh critical reactions against this novel, I argue that Foer renders one of the most significant

engagements with images of falling bodies to date as *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* serves both as a counter-point to post-9/11 victory culture and as an opportunity for readers to actually participate in an act of recognition rather than abjection or repression. Drawing from Judith Butler's recent work, I contend that Foer's novel provides an opportunity for readers to consider images of atrocity through a broader historical context and the ethics of human vulnerability.

Censorship, Victory Culture, and Exceptionalism in the Immediate Aftermath

Shortly after the collapse of the Twin Towers on September 11, 2001, Don DeLillo commented that it would be a daunting task for contemporary authors to "give memory, tenderness, and meaning to all that howling space" (39). DeLillo refers to the absence of the World Trade Center towers, the empty space in the Lower Manhattan skyline, but also to the presence of an overwhelming reminder that this space signifies the site (and sight) of death and destruction. In *The Second Plane*, Martin Amis similarly expresses the difficulty for authors to fill such a traumatic literary void. He writes, "[a]fter a couple of hours at their desks, on September 12, 2001, all the writers on earth were considering…a change of occupation" (Amis 11). In *The Spirit of Terrorism*, Jean Baudrillard refers to the inadequacy of language to analyze or interpret the attacks when he writes that the attack on the World Trade Center "defies…any form of interpretation" (4; 13). Jacques Derrida adopts a similar perspective in *Philosophy in a Time of Terror*, stating that the significance of 9/11 is irreducible and remains elusive. He writes that what collapsed was not so much two architectural symbols of political, military, and capitalist

power as "the conceptual, semantic, and one could even say hermeneutic apparatus that might have allowed one to see coming, to comprehend, interpret, describe, speak of, and name 'September 11'….[W]hat is terrible about 'September 11,' what remains 'infinite' in this wound, is that we do not *know* what it is and so do not know how to describe, identify, and even name it" (Derrida qtd. in Borradori 93-94). The philosophical consensus, here, is that the collapse of the Twin Towers temporarily initiated a semiotic collapse, the inadequacy of language to interpret, analyze, or comprehend the attacks.

This rhetoric of the unspeakable, the unrepresentable, and the incomprehensible, has a long history in studies of violence and trauma. It is a common trope for describing and representing any given atrocity as that which is impossible to describe and represent. Jacques Lacan, for instance, characterizes the traumatic event as an encounter with the real insofar as it is a "missed encounter," an encounter that is "unassimilable" and unknowable except through imaginary and symbolic signification (55). In other words, there is no combination of words or images that can reproduce the pure reality of a traumatic event. In *Out of the Blue*, Kristiaan Versluys attempts to shift this conversation from philosophical notions regarding the inadequacy of language and representation pertaining to the trauma of 9/11 in order to discuss the inevitability of signification:

> To the observation that 9/11 is unpossessible must be added the
> countering truism that somehow in some way it must be possessed. Even
> to say that the event is unnameable is a form of naming it. There is no way
> even something as indescribable as what transpired on that sunny Tuesday
> morning can stay out of the reach of symbol and metaphor. Willy-nilly,

the event gets absorbed into a mesh of meaning-making. This most real of

all real events – 220 stories crashing down, thousands of tons of steel

collapsing – demonstrates, if not the primacy, then at least the inevitability

of discourse. The event would not exist and could not exist outside the

interpretive schemes that are imposed upon it. (3)

In this light, the rhetoric of the unspeakable and incomprehensible embodies a kind of

paradox. "Declare that God is unrepresentable," writes W.J.T. Mitchell in *Cloning*

Terror, "and you also declare yourself a representative of the truth about him; you make

a representation, an authoritative declaration of his unrepresentability" (63). In *The*

Future of the Image, Jacques Rancière similarly argues that "[t]he logic of the

unrepresentable can only be sustained by a hyperbole that ends up destroying it" (138).

The rhetorical expression of the unspeakable is always paradoxically communicated

through speech and language. The claim that atrocity exists beyond representation

inherently produces its own negation.

Despite the semiotic collapse that Baudrillard and Derrida describe, for instance,

there was an endless flow of newspaper and magazine articles, television news coverage,

and various edited book collections and commentaries following the destruction of the

Twin Towers. Likewise, there was no shortage of fictional, poetic, or photographic

representations of 9/11 and its aftermath. In 2002, Dennis Loy Johnson and Valerie

Merians published *Poetry After 9/11*, an edited collection featuring nearly a hundred

poems by more than forty New York poets, not to mention Toni Morrison's "The Dead

of September 11" or the multitude of poems posted around New York City after the

attacks as part of the memorials to loved ones lost. Multiple photography and art exhibits also found their way into book form, including Michael Feldschuh's *The September 11 Photo Project*, Nathan Lyons' *After 9/11*, Joel Meyerowtiz's *Aftermath*, and the massive edited collection, *Here is New York: A Democracy of Photographs*. And even before William Gibson published *Pattern Recognition* in 2003, Iain Banks, a Scottish writer, had released *Dead Air* one year earlier, a novel that begins on September 11, 2001 and follows the musings of a radio DJ in London who frequently contemplates the consequences of the terrorist attacks. By 2005, many popular literary novelists including, Paul Auster, Frédéric Beigbeder, Jonathan Safran Foer, and Ian McEwan had released fictional responses to 9/11.

If so many images and words can emerge through violence that is supposedly beyond representation and speech, perhaps it is worth briefly questioning the rhetorical work being done through these notions of semiotic collapse in the wake of trauma. In *Against the Unspeakable*, Naomi Mandel argues that the characterization of violence as beyond the limits of linguistic representation "evokes the privileges and problems inherent in speech while actively distancing itself from them, performing a rhetorical sleight of hand that simultaneously gestures toward and away from the complex ethical negotiations that representing atrocity entails" (5). The rhetoric of the unspeakable and unrepresentable justifies speechlessness as the only valid ethical response to atrocity and censorship as the only appropriate form of that atrocity's representation. If the characterization of violence as unspeakable and unrepresentable unavoidably performs an act of speech and representation, this act simultaneously designates certain limits of what

can be shown, seen, and said. "The negation performed by the 'un' in 'unspeakable,'"

writes Mandel, "can be more accurately described as a prohibition, a kind of taboo, itself

untouchable, around which discourse and culture are structured" (7). In the aftermath of

the terrorist attacks, for instance, much could be said without question so long as it

conformed to a particular understanding of the violent spectacle as an unforgivable,

unrepresentable tragedy.

In *The Terror Dream*, an analysis of post-9/11 feminist backlash and victory

culture (although she does not use this term), Susan Faludi writes that despite the endless

multiplicity of fictional and non-fictional narratives, photographs, art projects, and media

representations of the terrorist attacks, none of these accounts "had begun to plumb what

the trauma meant for [America's] national psyche" (2). Here, Faludi's statement is rather

ambiguous, but I think she refers not only to the kind of semiotic collapse that Derrida

and Baudrillard describe, but also to the corporate media failure to produce news and

entertainment narratives outside the frame of American victory culture. What is clear,

however, is that any difficulty or inadequacy to "plumb," examine, or critique the trauma

of 9/11 was also a product of social expectations surrounding notions of the unspeakable

and the unrepresentable, which often emerged in the form of corporate self-censorship.

Shortly after 9/11, for example, talk show host Bill Maher would lose his ABC show,

Politically Incorrect, as he took issue with President Bush's claim that the terrorists were

"cowards," arguing that "we have been the cowards, lobbing cruise missiles from 2000

miles away" (qtd. in Carter). In response to Maher's comments, ABC executives

expressed their disapproval, sponsors pulled their support, and White House

spokesperson Ari Fleischer declared to a national audience that "Americans need to watch what they say, watch what they do, and…this is not a time for remarks like that" (qtd. in Brottman 205). This statement further contributed to both corporate self-censorship within music, television, and film industries and structured a widespread taboo of critically speaking or writing about the attacks in any way that might communicate dissent. Film companies, for example, delayed and edited releases that contained potential reminders of the Twin Towers while radio stations developed lists of "lyrically questionable" songs (Hilburn; Scherzinger). Anne K. Swartz recounts that a number of galleries across the United States put artistic representations of the terrorist attacks and the Twin Towers in storage, deeming them "distasteful."[4]

As I mentioned previously, media producers would play and replay video footage of the Twin Towers' collapse in the days and weeks after the attacks, but images of falling bodies quickly became taboo to view or display. Newspapers across the United States pulled Richard Drew's infamous photograph, "The Falling Man," from subsequent coverage due to a barrage of public outcry. In his article entitled, "The Falling Man," originally published in *Esquire*, Tom Junod writes that after publishing Drew's photo "[p]apers all over the country, from the Forth Worth *Star-Telegram* to the Memphis *Commercial Appeal* to the *Denver Post*, were forced to defend themselves against charges that they exploited a man's death, stripped him of his dignity, invaded his privacy, turned

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[4] Eric Fischl's bronze sculpture, *The Tumbling Woman*, was meant to commemorate the lives lost in the terrorist attacks, but was abruptly removed from view only a week after its unveiling in September 2002 as a result of controversy surrounding depictions of the falling bodies (Holguin). Sharon Paz was met with similar controversy when she printed silhouettes of people falling and adhered them to the windows of the Jamaican Center for the Arts and Learning in Queen's. Paz's project, *Falling*, was deemed an insensitive reminder of 9/11 and subsequently removed from view.

tragedy into leering pornography" (215). Melnick also notes these gestures of self-

censorship within mainstream media outlets after the attacks. He writes that there was

"almost [a] complete media blackout when it came to presenting images of the dozens,

and perhaps hundreds, of people who leapt (or fell) to their deaths from the World Trade

Center….[M]ost mainstream media – after publishing or broadcasting an image or two –

refused to offer up any other footage of bodies falling from the Twin Towers" (Melnick

80). These controversial images quickly found a home on numerous Internet sites devoted

to the display of gruesome images. "More and more, the jumpers – and their images –

were relegated to the Internet underbelly," writes Junod, "where they became the

provenance of the shock sites….where it is impossible to look at them without attendant

feelings of shame or guilt….[It was] as though the jumpers' experience, instead of being

central to the horror, was tangential to it, a sideshow best forgotten" (217). In *About to

Die: How News Images Move the Public*, Barbie Zelizer describes the context surrounding

the images of falling bodies that corporate media manufacturers in the United States

broadcasted during their immediate coverage of the terrorist attacks:

> During the first few hours of the attacks, certain U.S. broadcast and cable
>
> news organizations – CNN, Fox News, and CBS – initially showed moving
>
> images of people jumping from the towers' upper floors to their presumed
>
> deaths on the pavement below. These pictures, which portray bodies like
>
> unreal stick figures tumbling jerkily into the gray sky from the side of the
>
> buildings, represented but did not depict actual death. No bodies were
>
> shown striking the pavement below, and little visual detail of those about

to die was offered. The images were peculiar for the long view of action

that they offered and for their failure to depict faces, identifiable human

features, or detailing of clothing. At the same time, the distance between

the photographers and camera-people, on the one hand, and the individuals

on the towers' upper floors, on the other, made certain that the people

remained anonymous and would not be recognized by relatives.

Spectators, instead, were expected to expand on the brutal fact of

anonymous falling bodies with the presumption of their impending death

on the pavement below. In a sense, then, these images, that aptly captured

the horror of the attack as it unfolded, depended already at their original

depiction on the public to fill in the narrative of a gruesome death beyond

that actually depicted. (Zelizer 43)

Although these moving images "did not depict actual death" and did not reveal the

identities of those captured on film, news networks still refused to air any images of

falling bodies after initial coverage of the terrorist attacks, claiming that they were

maintaining the standards of "good taste." In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag

notes that the corporate "insistence on good taste in a culture saturated with commercial

incentives to lower standards of taste may be puzzling. But it makes sense if understood

as obscuring a host of concerns and anxieties about public order and public morale that

cannot be named" (69). While I agree with Sontag's comments, here, I want to more

closely explore some of these concerns and anxieties in terms of the dominant nationalist

narrative in the immediate aftermath of 9/11.

Here, I suggest that the repression of falling body images is more broadly connected to the maintenance of an American social imaginary based upon the temporary resurgence of victory culture and exceptionalism. I take the term "social imaginary" from Charles Taylor who sees it as a broad and multifaceted concept that incorporates "the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations" (23). Taylor also writes that the social imaginary cannot really be thought of as a theory as it "has no clear limits" and "can never be adequately expressed in the form of explicit doctrines because of its unlimited and indefinite nature" (25). Taylor's understanding of the social imaginary also encompasses what many theorists call the "cultural imaginary," "the available cultural repertoire of images and representations [that]…shapes our emotions, our desires, and our beliefs" (Mackenzie 143). He writes that the social imaginary is "carried in images, stories, and legends," is "shared by large groups of people, if not the whole society," and is "that common understanding that makes possible common practices and a widely shared sense of legitimacy" (Taylor 23). In *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Cornelius Castoriadis argues that the social imaginary underlies the symbolic order of any society, grounding its system of social significations, providing social patterns and order:

> These patterns do not themselves exist in the form of a representation one
>
> could, as a result of analysis, put one's finger on….They can be grasped
>
> only indirectly and obliquely…as a 'coherent deformation' of the system
>
> of subjects, objects and their relations; as the curvature specific to every

social space; as the invisible cement holding together this endless collection

of real, rational and symbolic odds and ends that constitute every society,

and as the principle that selects and shapes the bits and pieces that will be

accepted there. (143)

When I refer to the social imaginary, I refer to this complex and mutable system of

common understanding that allows individuals and communities to carry out collective

practices, define and maintain their identities in relation to the symbolic order, and

understand certain narratives, images, social codes, and ideas as normative or factual.

In *The End of Victory Culture*, Engelhardt argues that a culture of triumphalism

historically defines American national identity from the nineteenth century until the

Vietnam War. Victory culture is an extension of American exceptionalism, a system of

discourses and conceptual metaphors that do not usually provide clear definitions of

America, but that signal an orientation toward meanings that are meant to endorse the

belief that America stands in superiority in comparison to other nations. Donald E. Pease

summarizes some of the multiple meanings that American exceptionalism as a term has

come to represent:

American exceptionalism has been said to refer to clusters of absent (feudal

hierarchies, class conflicts, socialist labor party, trade unionism, and

divisive ideological passions) and present (a predominant middle class,

tolerance for diversity, upward mobility, hospitality toward immigrants, a

shared constitutional faith, and liberal individualism) elements that

putatively set America apart from other national cultures. While

descriptions of these particulars may have differed, the more or less agreed

upon archive concerned with what made America exceptional would

include the following phrases: America is a moral exception (the 'City on

the Hill'); America is a nation with a 'Manifest Destiny'; American is the

'Nation of Nations'; America is an 'Invincible Nation.' (8)

American exceptionalism is the belief and discursive framework that posits the United

States not only as distinctive from other nations, but also as an ideal cultural and political

model that other nations throughout the world should aspire to achieve. The frames of

exceptionalism also support the notion that the United States "is exempt from the laws of

historical progress (meaning that it is an 'exception' to the laws and rules governing the

development of other nations)" (Pease 9). Notions of American exceptionalism often shift

to incorporate various narratives and representations in order to bolster national identity,

especially in times of crisis or war. National identity, being "a collective sentiment based

upon the belief of belonging to the same nation and of sharing most of the attributes that

make it distinct from other nations" and a "[b]elief in a common culture, history, kinship,

religion, territory, founding moment and destiny" (Guibernau 11), is a significant part of

the social imaginary. By extension, the American social imaginary historically embodies

the narratives of exceptionalism and victory culture.

Engelhardt traces the roots of the victory narrative to nineteenth century captivity

and rescue stories. These stories typically portray victory as an act of justified revenge

carried out by white European settlers against "savage" and "evil" non-European others.

In the victory narrative, non-European others usually initiate a violent assault upon the

white European heroes, kidnapping or killing helpless women and children in the process. With the initial attack functioning as justification for retributive acts of violence, the white heroes can organize a counter-attack against their non-European enemies, rescue women and children from captivity, and celebrate the act of triumph. Engelhardt argues that these captivity narratives are essentially the origin myths of the traditional war story, "putting the Indians in the position of invaders, violently intruding on a settled world, they made the need for certain types of explanations unnecessary. In a sense, then, history in North America begins with the capture of white women and the idea of white victimization" (23). The victory narrative legitimizes retaliatory violence as necessary in order to rescue victims and restore civility. Engelhardt argues, however, that after World War II, the cultural reverence for narratives of victory gradually declined and eventually collapsed in the wake of the Vietnam War:

> Vietnam marked a definitive exit point in American history and the 1960s, a sharp break with the past. There, the war story finally lost its ability to mobilize young people under 'freedom's banner' except in opposition to itself, a loss experienced by a generation as both a confusing 'liberation' and a wrenching betrayal. There, the war story's codes were jumbled, its roles redistributed, its certitudes dismantled. (14-15).

Engelhardt maintains that the public's disillusionment with victory culture peaks with widespread reportage and cultural representations of American military atrocities in Vietnam. He suggests that the victory narrative was no longer able to easily fuel the public's consent for war and that the culture of triumphalism basically crumbles and

disappears after the Vietnam War.

Although I do not dispute that victory culture subsides after Vietnam, I think that Engelhardt fails to acknowledge not only the resilience of American exceptionalism, of which the victory narrative is an extension, but also the significance that gender plays within the traditional war story. In other words, I briefly contend, here, that Engelhardt somewhat overstates the collapse of victory culture, overlooking how elements of the triumphalist narrative continue to survive within the social imaginary. The persistence of both American exceptionalism and hegemonic gender normativity partially accounts for the Bush Administration's ability to temporarily reinvigorate the tropes and discursive frames of victory culture in the aftermath of September 11, 2001. In *American Exceptionalism and the Legacy of Vietnam*, Trevor B. McCrisken concludes that the "belief in American exceptionalism is highly resilient, largely because it can be expressed and applied in so many different ways" and that this belief "survived Vietnam as it had in other times of trial in American history" (184). Of course, the national trauma and humiliation of the Vietnam War shook the foundation of American exceptionalism, but McCrisken maintains that, "in the post-Vietnam period, Americans have continued to conceive their foreign policy, debate its course, and criticize its faults in terms that consistently reflect some notion of the exceptional nature of the United States" (190). Pease indicates that part of American exceptionalism's resilience might be attributed to its elusive and shifting significations. He argues that "American exceptionalism operates less like a collection of discrete, potentially falsifiable descriptions of American society than as a fantasy through which U.S. citizens bring these contradictory political and cultural

descriptions into correlation with one another through the desires that make them meaningful" (8). Pease suggests that whenever one version of American exceptionalism no longer serves certain geopolitical circumstances, government administrations simply reconfigure its narrative elements in order to maintain its relevance for the contemporary social and political climate. He contends that the belief in American exceptionalism "lack[s] any fixed relationship to a binding state of affairs" and that it often operates "by way of the double function of selecting a specific set of themes and elevating one or another of them into the position of the metaconcept empowered to represent the entire cluster" (9). In this light, victory culture simply becomes one version of American exceptionalism that may gain traction when certain threats to national security emerge or are evoked. Conversely, the victory narrative may also be suspended so that another version of exceptionalism might be given emphasis in the social imaginary to perform the work of nationalism.

Elements of victory culture also endure the Vietnam War as part of the social imaginary through hegemonic constructions of gender normativity. Part of American exceptionalism operates through links between masculinity and nationalism. Exceptionalist rhetoric, for instance, commonly refers to the United States as an invincible, tough, and supremely powerful nation. Engelhardt thoroughly outlines the racial component of the victory narrative, but does not acknowledge the importance of gender to its constitution. In many ways, the victory culture that Engelhardt describes is an instrument of patriarchal order. This order, however, does not necessarily manifest as an explicit politics of hegemonic masculinity, which may account for Engelhardt's

oversight regarding gender. R.W. Connell argues, for instance, that the politics of gender

ideology are not especially visible since they are usually already taken for granted as a

"normal" and "natural" part of institutional structures that permeate everyday life:

> Most of the time masculinity need not be thematized at all. What is
>
> brought to attention is national security, or corporate profit, or family
>
> values, or true religion, or individual freedom, or international
>
> competitiveness, or economic efficiency, or the advance of science.
>
> Through the everyday working of institutions defended in such terms, the
>
> dominance of a particular kind of masculinity is achieved. (213)

The victory narrative similarly conveys a traditional story of war through assumptions

regarding gender. This narrative relies upon "natural" distinctions between men and

women, which it maintains through representations of masculine heroism and female

vulnerability. In many ways the heart of the traditional war story is not simply the result

of American triumph and victory, but also the thrill of unbridled hyper-masculinity as the

ultimate assertion of male dominance. In the victory narrative, the initial American defeat

functions as humiliation through emasculation. This emasculation, however, creates the

opportunity for the reassertion of American masculinity through reactionary violence.

      The end of the Vietnam War, then, not only marks the suspension of the victory

narrative, but also "a parallel alienation from much of the received notion of American

masculinity" (Braudy 530). Without a justification for war to reaffirm traditional notions

of masculinity, Susan Jeffords argues that the vast majority of the post-Vietnam cultural

landscape may not convey triumphalism, but still proceeds to polarize and reinforce

gender binaries, privilege men, and function as a "mechanism for [the] renegotiation of patriarchal relations…through 'remasculinization,' a revival of the images, abilities, and evaluations of men and masculinity in dominant U.S. culture" (xii). In other words, gendered components of the traditional war story linger in the social imaginary, always ready and able to be reinvigorated under traumatic circumstances of emasculation as part of a broader symbolic project to restore patriarchal order. Perhaps it is not simply that defeat produces the impetus for victory in the traditional war story, but also that emasculation in the form of defeat always creates an opportunity to reassert (or restructure) hegemonic forms of gender performativity and American exceptionalism.

Certainly, the 9/11 terrorist attacks symbolically called American masculinity into question. "The towers," writes Hélène Cixous, "*embodied* phallic power in all its ever disquieting complexity" and their collapse became a kind of "castration" (431). Cara Cilano also argues that "the 9/11 attacks emasculated the US, thereby provoking and justifying the superpower's hypermasculinist and militaristic response" (210). If partially understood as a form of gender humiliation, the terrorist attacks symbolically denote the need for the revitalization of American masculinity. Unsurprisingly, then, Engelhardt also recognizes the temporary resurgence of victory culture in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks, in the speeches of American government officials, and in the rhetoric of mainstream media. He argues that members of the Bush Administration invoked "an old tradition of American triumphalism....They brought back much of [victory culture's] language and many of its images, while promising 'victory' in a new, generations-long, Manichean struggle against 'evil' enemies" (xi). In *The Terror Dream: Fear and Fantasy*

in Post-9/11 America, Susan Faludi makes a similar argument about mainstream cultural texts after the terrorist attacks, but is much more attuned to the gender dynamics of post-9/11 culture. Like Engelhardt, she argues that the Bush Administration and corporate media outlets reproduced "elements of a national fantasy in which we are deeply invested, our elaborately constructed myth of invincibility" (Faludi 14). Faludi also traces the origins of this myth to nineteenth century captivity narratives where white men rescue women and children in danger from non-white evil others.

Unlike Engelhardt, however, Faludi outlines the significance of gender as part of this renewed victory narrative. She writes that corporate news outlets began to construct endless stories of male heroes rescuing those in danger as news articles after the attacks "always seemed to gravitate toward the same argument: 'maleness' was making a comeback because New York City's fire*men* were heroes on 9/11, and they were heroes because they had saved untold numbers of civilians" (Faludi 79). Joan Didion also observes that after the attacks it seemed that "[a]s if overnight the irreconcilable event had been made manageable, reduced to the sentimental, to protective talismans, totems, garlands of garlic, repeated pieties that would come to seem in some ways as destructive as the even itself. We now had 'the loved ones,' we had 'the families,' we had 'the heroes'" (9). In *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, Slavoj Žižek describes this as a "derealization" of the horror that took place on 9/11. Žižek writes that despite the media's report of the death toll and description of the gravity of the event,

> it is surprising how little of the actual carnage we see – no dismembered
>
> bodies, no blood, no desperate faces of dying people…in clear contrast to

reporting on Third World catastrophes, where the whole point is to

produce a scoop of some gruesome detail: Somalis dying of hunger, raped

Bosnian women, men with their throats cut. These shots are always

accompanied by an advance warning that 'some of the images you see are

extremely graphic and may upset children' – a warning which we never

heard in the reports on the WTC collapse. Is this not yet further proof of

how, even in this tragic moment, the distance which separates Us from

Them, from their reality, is maintained: the real horror happens *there*, not

here?" (13)

Here, Žižek highlights the American media's attempt to maintain notions of American

exceptionalism through the management of violent images. After the terrorist attacks,

corporate media outlets attempted to restore America's social imaginary of

exceptionalism with familiar narratives of victory culture and traditional representations

of gender, obviously repressing images of falling bodies that might communicate notions

of American vulnerability, weakness, or emasculation. The temporary resurgence of

victory culture as part of the social imaginary had to be maintained through the repression

of that which did not conform to it.

Photographs of Falling Bodies and the Experience of Abjection

Narratives of American heroism dominated media portrayals of the terrorist

attacks and distracted from the actuality at the devastated World Trade Center site where

there were almost no survivors to rescue. Faludi writes, for example, that there were

countless volunteer rescue workers willing to help at the World Trade Center site, but any large scale rescue operation was futile: "[a] paramedic at a volunteer staging area surveyed the mob of idle Good Samaritans with dismay. 'There's no rescue,' he tried to explain. 'It's just body parts. You're just going there to recover body parts'" (53). Amongst the dust and debris, volunteer excavators and medical examiners only found occasional office supplies and fragments of human bodies. Further, the people who fell from the two towers became more than victims of the terrorist attack. As they fell, these people also became, as Susan Lurie writes, "deadly objects for dedicated rescue workers" (49). In fact, The National Commission on Terrorist Attacks upon the United States only recognizes those who fell from the towers three times in *The 9/11 Commission Report*, each time equating them with hazardous "debris," which posed a threat to the rescue workers on the ground (300; 309; 316). Tom Junod and Douglas Tallack both note that at least one falling body is known to have hit and killed a fireman on the ground (Junod 214; Tallack 176). While victory culture relies on clear distinctions between victims and victimizers, the falling bodies complicate these categories, becoming both helpless and dangerous. Tim S. Gauthier writes that "[t]he representations of the falling persons – real as well as fictionalized – continue to disturb because they offer little redemption – they refuse to be incorporated into a soothing narrative. They remain that part of the day not counteracted by stories of heroism or good luck or divine intervention" (101).

Let us consider for a moment something as seemingly simple as this rhetorical act of naming or describing those who fell from the towers. In "The Falling Man," an article for *Esquire* on Richard Drew's now iconic photograph of the same name, Tom Junod

writes that upon calling the New York medical examiner's office to request an estimate of

how many people might have jumped, he did not get an answer, but rather an admonition:

"We don't like to say they jumped. They didn't jump. Nobody jumped. They were

forced out, or blown out" (217-218). In a *USA Today* article on the falling bodies, New

York Medical Examiner's Office spokesperson, Ellen Borakove, similarly takes issue with

describing those who fell as "jumpers," stating that "'[a] jumper' is somebody who goes

to the office in the morning knowing that they will commit suicide" (Cauchon and

Moore). This tension of naming those who fell from the Twin Towers suggests the

contradictions at play in representations of falling bodies in one form or another. Joanne

Faulkner argues that this attempt to displace the term "jumpers" in favor of alternatives is

> a certain refusal to think through the possibility that the innocent, in their
>
> final moments, can take responsibility for their own manner of dying. It
>
> ignores the complex process that constitutes human agency: that decision
>
> is bounded by a material situation that one may interpret, appraise, or
>
> ignore, but cannot ultimately escape. In the case of the 9/11 jumpers, such
>
> a refusal is implicitly political: it suspends the innocent within a state of
>
> purity and quietism; and it robs these people of their decision, and of the
>
> final gesture of agency that they could enact, under the very restrictive
>
> circumstances in which they found themselves. (71)

In the end, the New York medical examiner's office officially documented these deaths as

homicides. This official documentation effectively strips any individual agency from

those who jumped from the towers. Naming the dead as "jumpers" or "suicides" not only

suggests that these people played a role in their own deaths, exercising some form of agency before dying, but it also places these people in association with the hijackers, who, of course, also committed suicide on September 11, 2001. Although the falling bodies are still widely known as "the jumpers," this attempt to displace certain terms over others demonstrates a deliberate effort to maintain and contain the narrative of American triumphalism. The falling bodies cannot assimilate with the post-9/11 narrative of victory culture, which explains the purging of these images from corporate media coverage of the terrorist attacks.

Despite censorships efforts, however, anyone with a laptop computer and an Internet connection could, and still can, easily access dozens if not hundreds of images and videos of the falling bodies on any number of websites. Further, millions of people would have seen images of the falling bodies in their initial print run on the day after the attacks. In "The Movement of Vulnerability: Images of Falling and September 11," Andrew D. Fitzpatrick writes that, regardless of censorship, the "images of those who fell from the towers became traumatically imprinted in people's minds" and Drew's photograph became "an image that, perhaps more than any other, epitomizes the tragedy and horror of the September 11 catastrophe in Western cultural memory" (85). Images of falling bodies, Drew's being the most recognizable, clearly communicate the failure of American "heroes" to rescue hundreds of people from the Twin Towers. The falling bodies function as a direct contradiction to the post-9/11 American social imaginary of heroism and victory culture. Although footage of the collapsing towers might similarly communicate American vulnerability or weakness, they do not concretely depict a loss of

life. In *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country*, for example, Ken Kalfus writes that when the two towers collapsed, "[y]ou had to make an effort to keep before you the thought that thousands of people were losing their lives at precisely this moment" (3). Kalfus implies that the images of the collapsing towers were an inescapable media spectacle, but the lack of human presence in those images does not easily communicate the deaths of those trapped inside or of those who fell to the pavement below. By contrast, the falling bodies "are the most salient and human representation of the suffering undergone that day" (Guathier 101). They explicitly communicate the failure of American security and heroism on September 11, 2001.

As I mentioned previously, shortly after the terrorist attacks, philosophers generally adopted the view that the events of the terrorist attacks, including and especially the images of falling bodies, were shocking beyond words, beyond representation. Baudrillard and Derrida argue that a collapse of language simultaneously occurred with the collapse of two architectural symbols of political, military, and capitalist power. Each of these philosophers invokes the language of the unrepresentable to describe the inadequacy of language to interpret, analyze or comprehend the attacks. In *Out of the Blue*, Versluys provides a brief summary of these philosophical claims: "September 11 – for all of the physicality of planes impacting on giant skyscrapers and for all the suffering caused to victims and their near and dear – is ultimately a semiotic event, involving the total breakdown of all meaning-making systems" (2). Similarly, writers often describe images of those who fell from the upper floors of the two towers as "incomprehensible," "too real" (Kahane 111), or as one witness wrote when referring to

the falling bodies, "[b]eyond description," and "[b]eyond words" (Howie 205).

Since Kristeva's understanding of abjection explicitly deals with the collapse of

boundaries, meanings, and distinctions, I suggest the images of falling bodies might best be

understood in relation to her theoretical interpretation of that which disrupts the

symbolic order. In *Powers of Horror*, Kristeva writes that the abject does not have a

definable object. She writes that the abject is not an object that can be named or imagined:

> What is abject is not my correlative, which, providing me with someone or
>
> something else as support, would allow me to be more or less detached and
>
> autonomous. The abject has only one quality of the object – that of being
>
> opposed to *I*. If the object, however, through its opposition, settles me
>
> within the fragile texture of a desire for meaning, which, as a matter of face,
>
> makes me ceaselessly and infinitely homologous to it, what is *abject*, on
>
> the contrary, the jettisoned object, is radically excluded and draws me
>
> toward the place where meaning collapses. (1-2)

Abjection is the state where the subject is drawn toward its boundaries, a condition where

meaning collapses and there is neither a distinct subject nor object, only the abject. What

is abject must be expelled and repressed in order to maintain boundaries and allow for the

"self" to be both recognized in the "other," but also constituted in opposition to that

same "other." Kristeva demonstrates this point with the example of the dead body:

> The corpse (or cadaver: *cadere*, to fall), that which has irremediably come
>
> a cropper, is cesspool, and death; it upsets even more violently the one
>
> who confronts it as fragile and fallacious chance….[R]efuse and corpses

show me what I permanently thrust aside in order to live. These bodily

fluids, this defilement, this shit are what life withstands, hardly and with

difficulty on the part of death. There, I am at the border of my condition

as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that

border….The corpse…is the utmost of abjection. It is death infecting

life….It is thus not lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but

what disturbs identity, system, order. What does not respect border

positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite. (3-4)

The abject is something rejected from which one cannot separate. Although death, decay,

and the unclean are Kristeva's prime examples of abjection, that which is abject is not

necessarily a corpse or the smell of rotten milk, but rather the thing that "disturbs

identity, system, order." Kristeva clarifies, however, that transgressive acts, for example,

do not necessarily qualify as abject. "He who denies morality is not abject," she writes,

"there can be grandeur in amorality and even in crime that flaunts its disrespect for the

law – rebellious, liberating, and suicidal crime" (Kristeva 4). Abjection, however, is

"immoral, sinister, scheming, and shady: a terror that disassembles, a hatred that smiles, a

passion that uses the body for barter instead of inflaming it, a debtor who sells you up, a

friend who stabs you" (4). Abjection generates an experience of cognitive dissonance

through conflicting impulses of attraction and repulsion. It is also that which must be

repelled in order to maintain the symbolic order.

Curiously, Kristeva's example of the cadaver finds its root word in Italian,

"*cadere*" or "to fall." Falling is a complex concept, one that communicates any number of

overlapping and contradictory fears, anxieties, and metaphors. I argue, however, that the

concept of free falling, much like Kristeva's example of confronting a corpse,

demonstrates abjection. In "Uncanny Sights: The Anticipation of the Abomination,"

Claire Kahane summarizes some of the metaphorical and psychological aspects of falling

in relation to trauma:

> [F]alling…is a marker of the abysslike structure of trauma. Falling: *losing*
> *ground, having the rug pulled out from under you, being pushed over the*
> *edge, catch me I'm falling*. My own free-fall thoughts suggest that archaic
> memory traces of infantile experiences must inhabit the metaphor, signifier
> of the ultimate loss of control, of loss of agency, of loss of boundaries.
> Compounded by a host of cultural associations, the fear of falling in all
> likelihood must be part of our neurobiological makeup, contributing to our
> survival. But there is more to the fear of falling than the fear of falling;
> falling evokes not just memory but fantasy, contaminating both memory
> and desire with perverse wishes that push us past our limits, urge us
> toward risk, even toward death itself. (110-11)

Kahane's understanding of free falling directly reflects the experience of abjection, for

falling embodies similar fears and desires that "push past our limits" toward the edge of

death. There is an attraction or an identification associated with the concept of falling, but

also a fear and a rejection of it. This "loss of control, of loss of agency, of loss of

boundaries" is partly why the images of falling bodies are so troubling for a social

imaginary that relies heavily on narratives of American exceptionalism and victory

culture, narratives that needs clear boundaries of "self" and "other," "us" and "them," in order to function.

Drew's "The Falling Man" is a specific example that clearly embodies the abject dimensions of free falling. The image captures the last seconds of a man's life, but only implies his death. According to Roland Barthes, however, every photograph denotes dying and death through the image's ability to objectify. Barthes writes, for example, when his photograph is taken, he is

> neither subject nor object but a subject who feels he is becoming an object: I then experience a micro-version of death (of parenthesis): I am truly becoming a specter. The Photographer knows this very well, and himself fears…this death in which his gesture will embalm me….[W]hen I discover myself in the product of this operation, what I see is that I have become Total Image, which is to say, Death in person….Ultimately, what I am seeking in the photograph taken of me…is death: Death is the *eidos* of that Photograph. (14-15)

For Barthes, the image in the photograph "produces Death while trying to preserve life" (92). Susan Sontag similarly claims that "[a]ll photographs are *memento mori*. To take a photograph is to participate in another person's (or thing's) mortality, vulnerability, mutability. Precisely by slicing out this moment and freezing it, all photographs testify to time's relentless melt" (*On Photography* 15). Of course, some photographs communicate this sense of death more concretely than others, but it is always present. Drew's "The Falling Man," for instance, captures a moment where the man in the frame is on the

border of life and death. Here, I might draw a comparison between Drew's image and

Barthes' analysis of Alexander Gardner's 1865 portrait of Lewis Payne, who attempted

the assassination of United States Secretary of State, William H. Seward. Gardner

photographed Payne in his jail cell, where Payne was waiting to be hanged for his crimes.

For Barthes, the aesthetic "prick" or piercing (*punctum*) produced by such a photograph,

which cognitively and affectively disrupts the more mundane experience of viewing for

interest's sake, is not only the realization that "*he is going to die*," but also the

acknowledgement that "[*t*]*his will be* and *this has been*":

> I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By
>
> giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me
>
> death in the future. What *pricks* me is the discovery of this
>
> equivalence….Whether or not the subject is already dead, every
>
> photograph is this catastrophe. This *punctum*, more or less blurred beneath
>
> the abundance and the disparity of contemporary photographs, is vividly
>
> legible in historical photographs: there is always a defeat of Time in them:
>
> *that* is dead and *that* is going to die. (96)

It is possible that any photograph may produce this more general sense of mortality

through its depiction of the past in the present. Even more than Gardner's portrait of

Payne in his cell, however, Drew's photograph presents an image of impending death as

the clearest example of the abject: "It is death infecting life" (Kristeva 4). "The Falling

Man" explicitly produces this realization of mortality without the need for context or

contemplation of the photographic medium.

In *Watching the World Change*, David Friend argues that "most of all" the identification viewers of such photographs as "The Falling Man" might experience is what led to widespread corporate censorship of the falling body images: "the viewer saw himself too clearly in the frame: a man who had been propelled to his death for having chosen to go to work that morning in an American office building" (140). Friend also offers a quotation from Drew, the photographer himself, alluding to the cognitive dissonance between viewers' identification and repulsion towards images of falling bodies:

> we just identify too much with this….Think about how many times you've seen a picture of someone who might have been attempting suicide, jumping from the Brooklyn Bridge or some building. We have more curiosity than aversion….We might have to face that similar situation some time….It could be us…It's hard for people to look at because they're thinking about what comes at the end of that…and that could be them. He is you and me. (Drew qtd. in Friend 140-41)

The image terrifies viewers through their identification with the falling man in the frame, seeing themselves as him, him as themselves. In order to protect their sense of identity and uphold the social imaginary, viewers must reject the image, which is simultaneously an act of rejecting themselves in order to ground their sense of self. Referring to what is abject, Kristeva writes "'I' want none of that element….'I' do not assimilate it, 'I' expel it. But since [the abject] is not an 'other' for 'me'…I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which 'I' claim to establish *myself*" (3). When Dori Laub writes that the terrorist attacks, including the falling bodies, are "an

encounter with something that makes no sense," they "fit nowhere," and are part of an "experience of collective massive psychic trauma" (204), he's indirectly describing the abject, that which does not make sense within the social imaginary, that which disrupts it. In order to maintain and stabilize the American social imaginary, corporate media outlets had to repress the images of falling bodies through censorship. These images were jettisoned out of the post-9/11 victory narrative, as they threaten to disrupt its continuity and dissolve its boundaries.

A Tightrope at the Twin Towers: James Marsh's *Man on Wire*

In many ways, James Marsh's *Man on Wire* exemplifies the popular media's attempt to repress images of falling bodies and repair the social imaginary through narratives of victory culture and American exceptionalism. Marsh's documentary drama tells the story of tightrope walker Philippe Petit and his unauthorized performance on a high wire between the Twin Towers in 1974. Premiering at the Sundance Film Festival in 2008, *Man on Wire* does not explicitly reflect victory culture in terms of justifiable American retaliation against evil others. The version of victory culture that Engelhardt describes was already in a state of ruins at the time of the film's release. Marsh's film, however, reconfigures elements of the victory narrative and American exceptionalism through the story of Philippe Petit's triumphant tightrope walk. *Man on Wire* never actually refers to the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, but inevitably suggests their presence through omission. According to Pierre Macherey, these absences and contradictions, gaps and silences, within a given text can reveal "a sort of splitting within

the work: this division is its unconscious, in so far as it possesses one – the unconscious which is history, the play of history beyond its edges, encroaching on those edges: this is why it is possible to trace the path which leads from the haunted work to that which haunts it" (94). In other words, *Man on Wire*'s omission of the terrorist attacks not only simultaneously alludes to the historical event that haunts it, but also to its ideological construction, its repression of the falling bodies. Drawing from Macherey, Alan Sinfield argues that "[a]ll stories harbour within themselves the ghosts of alternative stories they are trying to exclude" (157). Marsh's film does not explicitly depict victory culture, but reproduces some of its key aspects, especially in terms of gender. The film's narrative might not feature a clearly defined enemy, but it does feature a clearly defined hero who exemplifies certain masculine ideals.

Man on Wire emphasizes the thrill of Petit's masculinity in numerous scenes as the film constantly displays his physical prowess. Although a francophone acrobat in tights might not typically connote ideals of hyper-masculinity, *Man on Wire* continuously and playfully contextualizes Petit's career as that of the daredevil who is bent on pursing danger at extreme levels. Petit's accomplice, David Foreman, idealizes the wire walker's fearlessness and his masculine stoicism, recounting the first time he saw Petit on a wire cable: "I had never seen concentration like that. And I think I never have to this day. And his face became this ageless mask of concentration, I mean, he became like a sphinx. It was amazing" (qtd. in Marsh). The film's trajectory also follows masculine expectations commonly associated with crime thrillers. In many ways, *Man on Wire* is reminiscent of a heist film. Petit's performance art ultimately emerges from a rigorous

plan that a group of men develop over the course of years. Whether Petit is shirtless, showing off his muscular figure while practicing on a wire cable, or completely naked when searching for a fishing line at the top of the World Trade Center, *Man on Wire* constantly characterizes its protagonist as a highly sexual, masculine hero. This point is also made clear at the end of the film, when Petit is released from police custody only to whimsically leave his friends and girlfriend for a "magnificent explosion of pleasure" (Petit qtd. in Marsh) with a female admirer of his tightrope walk. In this sense, the film's portrayal of Petit's behavior communicates the hyper-masculine ideals of, what Marc Feigen Fasteau calls, "The Male Machine":

> The male machine is a special kind of being, different from women, children, and men who don't measure up. He is functional, designed mainly for work. He is programmed to tackle jobs, override obstacles, attack problems, overcome difficulties, and always seize the offensive. He will take on any task that can be presented to him in a competitive framework, and his most important positive reinforcement is victory. (1)

Unsurprisingly, *Man on Wire*'s presentation of its masculine hero also includes a supportive, submissive female partner: Annie Allix. At one point during the film, Annie describes her relationship with Petit: "He introduced me to the wire he had set up at the end of his garden and I spent hours watching him walk. He never thought to ask me whether I had my own destiny to follow. It was quite clear I had to follow his" (qtd. in Marsh). *Man on Wire* aligns with the mainstream television and popular culture representations of men and women that Faludi argues were meant to comfort audiences

after September 11, 2001, as the film generates "the consolations of a domestic idyll

where men w[ear] all the badges and women wield…all the roasting pans" (139). Petit

says at the end of the film that "it's so simple that life should be lived on the edge of life.

You have to exercise rebellion. To refuse to taper yourself to rules, to refuse your own

success, to refuse to repeat yourself, to see every day, every year, every idea as a true

challenge and then you are going to live your life on a tightrope" (qtd. in Marsh). Like

many post-9/11 media portrayals of men, *Man on Wire* presents Petit as an inspirational

and ideal model for "proper" male comportment. *Man on Wire* indirectly reproduces

some of the expectations of men and masculinity that victory culture and American

exceptionalism demand.

Further, despite his French origins, Petit fulfills the role of an American hero as

Man on Wire consistently frames his story in terms of American Dream ideals. The film

tells the story of Petit's beginnings in France as an unknown street performer and his

perseverance to achieve a "dream" that could only be realized in America:

> Here I am young, seventeen years old with a bad tooth in…the waiting
>
> room of a French dentist….I freeze because I have opened a newspaper at
>
> a page and I see something magnificent, something that inspires me. I see
>
> two towers. And the article says, 'One day those towers will be built.'
>
> They're not even there, yet. And when they are, they will become the
>
> highest in the world. Now, I need to have that, this little tangible start of
>
> my dream….I tear the page, put it under my jacket, and go out. Now, of
>
> course, I would have a toothache for a week, but what's the pain in

comparison that now I have acquired my dream. (qtd. in Marsh)

Later in the film, Petit recounts his thoughts during his first visit to New York. He says

that the first time he looked up at the Twin Towers he felt defeated: "I knew that my

dream was destroyed instantly. Impossible. Impossible. Impossible. It's clearly

impossible, not only to walk across, this, I'd probably hardly thought of it, but to bring

almost a ton of equipment secretly, to rig a wire for hours, to guideline it. It's clearly out

of human scale" (Petit qtd. in Marsh). Petit's story, however, is about the ability to

triumph over what appears impossible. His feelings of defeat become the catalyst for his

victory at the Twin Towers. Petit says, "I thought, 'Okay, now, it's impossible, that's

sure. So, let's start working'" (qtd. in Marsh). After the completion of the tightrope walk,

Petit became a folk hero in New York City. Annie says that after the walk, she "saw

Philippe discover what it meant to be famous, to be recognized, with expressions of

friendliness and enthusiasm. People would cross the street to tell him, 'You gave us such

a gift! It was beautiful. It was a breath of fresh air! Thank you!'" (qtd. in Marsh).

Further, in his memoir of which *Man on Wire* is partially based, Petit writes, "America

has saluted me. New York City adopts me. I stay" (228). *Man on Wire* flaunts Petit's

story of individual determination and ultimately his triumph as an immigrant who

achieves his dream in America and who is accepted by Americans. In this way, the film

reinforces the idyllic notion that immigrant success is "a function of brains and hard work

rather than influence or inheritance, and that American society as a whole provides the

milieu in which this can happen" (Clark 27). Of course, Petit's whiteness is also essential

to the success of this narrative. With intense paranoia surrounding immigrants and

immigration after September 11, 2001, Petit's whiteness renders his foreign status more palatable for a wider American audience.

Since his tightrope walk, Petit has also become an enthusiastic spokesperson for the American Dream. In an interview for the PBS documentary, "New York: The Center of the World," for example, Petit emphasizes the determination that was needed to make his "dream" a reality:

> You need dreams to live. It's as essential as a road to walk and as bread to eat. I would have felt myself dying if this dream had been taken away from me by reason. The dream was as big as the towers. There was no way it could be taken away from me by authority, by reason, by destiny. It was really anchored to me in such a way that life was not conceivable without doing this. (qtd. in "Episode Eight: Center of the World")

In this context, Petit frames "dreams" in terms of higher aspirations, ambitions, or goals, denoting the larger concept of the American Dream. Petit also universalizes this "dream" as if it were necessary to human survival and a sense of self-purpose. Of course, there is also a romantic, but ultimately ignorant, socio-economic implication in his statement: as long as any individual struggles through the obstacles of "authority," "reason," and "destiny," any "dream" can be accomplished, anything is possible. "I know it's impossible," Petit writes in his memoir, recounting his first thought after looking down from the 110th floor of the Word Trade Center, "[b]ut I know I'll do it" (17). Petit's accomplice, Jean-Louis Blondeau, echoes these sentiments in *Man on Wire* when he says, "If you want something, nothing is impossible" (qtd. in Marsh). *Man on Wire*'s

presentation of Petit, a person who so completely embodies and supports American

Dream ideals, inevitably reproduces the nostalgic certainties of heroism and the American

Dream through the triumphant tightrope walk. The film acts as reparative to a social

imaginary shaken by the events of September 11, 2001. The film's emphasis on male

heroics and American Dream ideals also obscures and distracts from the Twin Towers as

political symbols of American corporate power and capitalism, the very reason they

became the targets of terrorism. *Man on Wire* reframes this symbolism as the towers

simply become the objects that enable Petit's "dream" and story of individual success.

   Man on Wire also fulfils a common desire expressed in many post-9/11 cultural

texts for the two towers not to have collapsed, the desire for people not to have fallen to

the streets below. In *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, Jonathan Safran Foer's

protagonist, Oskar Schell, clearly communicates this desire for inversion, as the character

creates a reverse flipbook using Lyle Owerko's series of falling body photographs. I will

return to Foer's novel in more detail shortly, but *Man on Wire* also fulfils this desire for

inversion, as Petit conquers what those who fell from the two towers on 9/11 could not.

In his 1982 article on Petit, "On the High Wire," Paul Auster writes that

> [e]ach time we see a man walk on the wire, a part of us is up there with
>
> him. Unlike performances in the other arts, the experience of high wire
>
> walking is direct, unmediated, simple, and it requires no explanation
>
> whatsoever. The art is the thing itself, a life in its most naked delineation.
>
> And if there is beauty in this, it is because of the beauty we feel inside
>
> ourselves. (253)

If viewers identify with Petit during *Man on Wire*, this identification remains distinct

from the experience of cognitive dissonance that viewers might suffer while viewing

photographs of falling bodies. Unlike images of the falling bodies, Petit's walk ultimately

does not deliver abjection. "He did it beautifully and calmly" Alan Welner says during the

film, "in fact, he did it literally with his eyes closed. It was just what he does. Everything

he told me was true" (qtd. in Marsh). *Man on Wire*'s post-9/11 portrayal of Petit's wire

walk emphasizes the wirewalker's preparedness, his extreme sense of concentration and

control, his fearlessness, his mastery of heights, of the air, and of the Twin Towers.

Contrary to the falling bodies, the film allows individuals to applaud a man who defies

gravity, defies what is abject.

In *Let the Great World Spin*, a novel that explicitly attempts to examine the

historical connection between Petit's walk and the events of September 11, 2001,

McCann's narrator discusses the peculiarity of Vic Deluca's 1974 photograph of Petit's

wire walk, which McCann reprints in his book (237) and which Marsh also displays in

Man on Wire. The photograph captures Petit on the high wire between the two towers

with an airplane flying directly above him at the top of the frame, looking as if it will

plunge into one of the building's upper floors. McCann's narrator contemplates this

image at length:

> A man high in the air while a plane disappears, it seems into the edge of
>
> the building. One small scrap of history meeting a larger one. As if the
>
> walking man were somehow anticipating what would come later. The
>
> intrusion of time and history. The collision point of stories. We wait for

the explosion but it never occurs. The plane passes, the tightrope walker

gets to the end of the wire. Things don't fall apart. (McCann 325)

Here, McCann's narrator describes the appeal of Petit's walk in a post-9/11 context as it

brings audiences to a place where "things don't fall apart." Not only does *Man on Wire*

provide audiences with a story of the Twin Towers that avoids any explicit mention of

their destruction, but the film also does not question or explore the consequences had

Petit actually fallen. Mackay is also aware of this point: "The film's structure allows

very little space to consider the potential ramifications of the act, confirming that the

film's creators work to distance Petit's narrative from these concerns" (9). In this sense,

Man on Wire operates as a repressive fantasy or, in Petit's own words, "a fairytale,"

(qtd. in Marsh) where nobody falls from the World Trade Center.

Deluca's photograph, however, exemplifies how *Man on Wire*'s attempt to

repress and overlap images of falling bodies with an emphasis on heroism, nostalgic

fantasies, and the exceptionalism of American Dream ideals, is ultimately futile. It

expresses a dual temporality, referring not only to Petit's walk, but also to the terrorist

attacks. In "On the High Wire," Paul Auster writes that "[u]nlike the stuntman, whose

performance is calculated to emphasize every hair-raising risk, to keep his audience

panting with dread and almost sadistic anticipation of disaster, the good high wire walker

strives to make his audience forget the dangers, to lure it away from thoughts of death by

the beauty of what he does on the wire itself" (253). After the traumatic event of people

falling from the two towers, however, this statement no longer seems to make sense in the

case of Petit's walk between the two towers, if it ever did in the first place. In a post-9/11

context, the photographs and portrayals of Petit's wire walk always allude to danger, free

falling, and death. Petit recounts in his memoir, for example, that his black turtleneck

sweater had fallen from his bag, out into the air, and for a moment, the crowd thought

he'd jumped or fallen from the building: "With horror, they see a black silhouette surging

from my corner of the south tower and falling into the void. At first it's a human shape,

whirling and twirling, then it turns into what my friends conclude looks like a piece of

cloth; their moment of terror passes" (175). Marsh's *Man on Wire* recounts this same

moment, as one of Petit's accomplices, Barry Greenhouse, says during an interview in the

film, "I saw a thing falling down and I couldn't believe it. And I said to myself, 'That's it.

You've been fooling yourself this whole time. He went straight down with the first step

off the roof. He might be dead'" (qtd. in Marsh). In *Let the Great World Spin*, McCann

recreates this scene of momentary shock, emphasizing the potential danger involved with

Petit's walk and clearly alluding to images of the many who fell from the upper floors of

the two towers:

> A body was sailing out into the middle of the air. He was gone. He'd done
>
> it. Some blessed themselves. Closed their eyes. Waited for the thump. The
>
> body twirled and caught and flipped, thrown around by the wind. Then a
>
> shout across the watchers, a woman's voice: God, oh God, it's a shirt, it's
>
> just a shirt. It was falling, falling, falling, yes, a sweatshirt. (7)

McCann's repetition of "falling" not only emphasizes the extreme verticality involved

with the wire walk, but also the potential for Petit to slip from the wire, the possibility of

a "thump." Prior to this description of the falling shirt, McCann sets the scene with

sirens, helicopters, and the few "watchers" who "stand around and point upward, until people gathered, tilted their heads, nodded, affirmed, until they were all staring upward" (3). The narrator even refers to Petit as a potential "jumper," a term which obviously denotes suicide and the falling bodies of 9/11.

At one point in McCann's novel, a group of computer hackers take control of a payphone in Lower Manhattan in order to communicate with spectators to receive news about Petit's performance. One witness picks up the payphone and decides to mislead the hackers into thinking that Petit has fallen from the high wire: "Something terrible happened….He fell….Smashed to the ground. Terrible commotion here. D'you hear that siren? You can't hear that? Listen….There's cops running through. They're crawling all over the place….He smashed here. Right here at my feet. It's all blood 'n' shit….He splattered all over the place" (185). Even Mordicai Gerstein's children's book, *The Man Who Walked Between The Towers*, and the animated short film adaptation of the same name, directed by Michael Sporn, allude to the possibility of falling when Petit slips from his high wire while performing for children in Central park. In both texts, the narrator recounts Petit's Central Park performance, his punishment for walking between the Twin Towers: "They brought him to court. The judge sentenced him to perform in the park for the children of the city. This he did happily…though during his performance some boys playing on his wire jerked it and Philippe fell…but caught himself" (Gerstein). Both the book and short film present an image of Petit barely hanging from the wire by his left toe. While Gerstein's book and the short film present this near fall as a comical incident, these texts also provoke a less humorous question: what if Petit had fallen during his walk

between the two towers?

Even the photographs of Petit's walk that are shown in *Man on Wire* share uncanny similarities with photographs of the falling bodies. In many of the photographs of Petit on his tightrope, the high wire is difficult to see and it appears as if the performer is floating in mid-air. Auster describes a photograph of the tightrope performance where the wire is "almost invisible," where and Petit appears as if "suspended magically in space" (251). Andrea D. Fitzpatrick describes Drew's "The Falling Man" in a way that could easily be transposed to describe Petit's wire walk. She writes that "the aesthetic qualities and symmetry of [Drew's photograph] create a false sense of suspension: a strange buoyancy as if he is floating by a thread" (90). "Floating" and "flying" are common descriptors that writers use to describe both Petit and the falling bodies (Junod). The various post-9/11 portrayals of Petit consistently allude to falling bodies as it is always inevitable for any text to refer in some way to what it intends to repress, mitigate, or displace.

In an interview with BBC reporter Niel Smith, for example, Marsh rationalizes his decision to omit any juxtaposition or discussion of Petit's walk in light of the terrorist attacks: "It would be unfair and wrong to infect [Petit's] story with any mention, discussion or imagery of the Towers being destroyed. Everyone knows what happened to those buildings….The film has a poignancy for that reason, but not one that needs to be overstated" (qtd. in Smith). In the same interview, Marsh hopes that audiences will be able to "enjoy those buildings for the duration of the film, hopefully without that enjoyment being too infected by an awareness of their destruction" (qtd. in Smith). In her

article about the documentary film, Mackay critiques Marsh's comments as she writes

that there is no way *Man on Wire* can "stand free from its audience's awareness of 11

September" (9). She also takes issue with Marsh's moralistic choice of words:

> Marsh's use of the words 'unfair' and 'wrong' are an attempt to cover the
>
> fact that he must have been acutely aware that 9/11 would at least inform,
>
> if not guarantee, the success of *Man on Wire*. More than simply
>
> disingenuous, his comments are significantly loaded; using terminology
>
> such as 'wrong' implies a moral transgression on behalf of those who
>
> would see 11 September 2001 refracted in the film. Moreover, the idea that
>
> the events of that day could 'infect' the film is a particularly volatile
>
> metaphor that ascribes 9/11 an animate, even viral, status. Marsh's words
>
> are so strikingly incongruous with the film's clear relationship to 9/11 that
>
> they betray an underlying anxiety to at once address and push away the
>
> horrific association of 2001. (Mackay 10)

Mackay's critique of Marsh's rationalization demonstrates that, even in the absence of

references to the collapse of the World Trade Center, any text that features Petit's walk

or the Twin Towers will inevitably denote the presence of September 11, 2001. It is

unthinkable how an image of the Twin Towers, let alone *Man on Wire*, might exist in the

contemporary cultural climate without associatively reflecting traces of the terrorist

attacks. The imagery and language associative of falling bodies, like the broader events of

9/11, encode representations of Petit's tightrope walk regardless if the authors, artists, or

directors that reproduce his story in various cultural texts intend otherwise.

Ultimately, *Man on Wire* is a prominent example of how many representations of pre-9/11 New York City have become encoded with imagery and language that denote the 9/11 tragedy. The terrorist attacks have disrupted the temporality of certain pre-9/11 events and various representations of those events. Texts published prior to the terrorist attacks often appear prophetic as if they were predicting the demise of the World Trade Center decades in advance. McCann's narrator refers to this phenomenon in Deluca's photograph of Petit: "As if the walking man were somehow anticipating what would come later" (325). E.B. White's comment about New York City in relation to post-World War II anxieties about modernized warfare is a notable example that also serves to demonstrate how the events of September 11, 2001 encode the past. This quotation appears in White's short portrait of New York City, *Here is New York*, which was published in 1949:

> The subtlest change in New York is something people don't speak much about but that is in everyone's mind. The city, for the first time in its long history, is destructible. A single flight of planes no bigger than a wedge of geese can quickly end this island fantasy, burn the towers, crumble the bridges, turn the underground passages into lethal chambers, cremate the millions. The intimation of mortality is part of New York now: in the sound of jets overhead, in the black headlines of the latest edition. (54)

It becomes impossible to read White's comments without thinking of them in terms of terrorism and the attacks in lower Manhattan. The imagery of terrorism similarly encodes *Man on Wire* just as it might encode any number of portrayals of New York City or the

Twin Towers. The difference, however, is that *Man on Wire* is a direct response to the aftermath of 9/11, one that appears to be invested in repressing the trauma of the terrorist attacks, especially the images of falling bodies, through the familiarity of victory culture and exceptionalist tropes. As this repression is at least a partial failure due to the fragmented temporality of *Man on Wire*, the film not only demonstrates the possibility for new socio-political significance to emerge from pre-9/11 events and representations of those events, but also how the infectious imagery and language of the terrorist attacks may always trouble or haunt that new significance.

Ethics and the Photography of Atrocity or Why Should We Look?

"In the most photographed and videotaped day of the history of the world," Tom Junod writes, "the images of people jumping were the only images that became, by consensus, taboo – the only images from which Americans were proud to avert their eyes" (216). The images of falling bodies were only printed once in newspapers on the day after the attacks and would not appear in newsprint again, finding their way into virtual form instead, where they would be shared and copied onto obscure Internet sites, which freely publish images of graphic violence and death. Not only were the images not printed after the initial media coverage of the attacks, but Jeffrey Melnick writes that "[i]n the first few years after the attacks virtually no major cultural figure dared to represent the falling bodies of 9/11" (80). Although there were a handful of novels that were released in the aftermath of the attacks, prominent American novelists like Jonathan Safran Foer, Jess Walter, Colum McCann, and Don DeLillo did not release their fictional

responses to 9/11, all of which include representations of falling and falling bodies, until years after the event. In *The Spirit of Terrorism*, Jean Baudrillard writes in response to September 11, 2001 that

> [t]he whole play of history and power is disrupted by this event, but so, too are the conditions of analysis. You have to take your time. While events were stagnating, you had to anticipate more quickly than they did. But when they speed up this much, you have to move more slowly – though without allowing yourself to be buried beneath the welter of words, or the gatherings clouds of war, and preserving intact the unforgettable incandescence of the images. (4)

What Baudrillard suggests, here, is the difficultly for authors and artists to process and analyze contemporary events that are in constant flux, rapidly producing new developments. If the initial reaction to photographs of falling bodies was predominantly one of abjection or repression, it seems that as the years pass, authors and artists have begun to take their time with these images, incorporating and engaging with them in their works, giving them new meaning and providing a new context for their reception.

"By the fifth anniversary of 9/11," writes Melnick, "American artists and audiences seem to have agreed that the major taboos that structured immediate responses to the attacks had now been lifted" (91). Indeed, it is rare to find a recent novel about the terrorist attacks that does not represent the falling bodies in some way, whether in language as part of the narrative or in visual terms, which may often manifest in the form of a reprinted falling body image within the novel's pages. These novelists may partially

attempt to contextualize or historicize these images, but most often the photographs or descriptions of the falling bodies are included as part of a reoccurring metaphor or rhetorical argument put forward within the given novel.

Through their repeated use of the falling body image, authors writing post-9/11 fiction provoke a number of questions through their representations. Why should anyone look at such images of violence and atrocity? What do these images communicate? What might be gained from contemplating them at length? In *The Cruel Radiance*, Susie Linfield unravels many arguments against photographic representations of atrocity, arguments made by "some thinkers [who] believe that an imageless world would be a better one" (xvi). Critics often characterize images of atrocity as "pornographic" and "voyeuristic." In *Seeing Ghosts: 9/11 and the Visual Imagination*, Karen Engle awkwardly notes that, during the terrorist attacks, more people made online searches for documentary news photographs than for pornography for the first and only time since the Internet's inception. "A kind of metonymic substitution took over that day," writes Engle, "disaster photographs replaced Internet sex shows" (30). These sorts of characterizations, of course, usually lend themselves to arguments in support of censorship. Georgina Banita similarly notes that the videos of falling bodies on the Internet "have mushroomed into a network of exploitative clips whose very multiplicity and ready accessibility seem to gloss over the horrific loss of life" (73). Banita simply dismisses these clips as "exploitative" as she assumes that accessibility equals trivialization without considering that these videos and photographs of people falling to their deaths are the only evidence of human suffering undergone on September 11, 2001. "[N]ot until I saw Drew's

picture," Linfield writes, "did the true horror of the event, which had nothing to do with burning buildings and everything to do with burning people, begin to penetrate my numbness and shock" (254). In *Watching the World Change*, David Friend notes that the falling body images have also been likened to "the stuff of snuff films, torture videos, and sado-porn….The prurience inherent in witnessing such scenes is considered shameful in civilized societies. By not turning away, the viewer is thought to be 'rubbernecking,' as would a gaper at an auto accident – with the newspaper, magazine, Web site, or TV show serving as facilitator" (139).

Of course, these kinds of accusations directed towards images of atrocity and those that may view them are nothing new. Linfield refers to Allen Sekula's *Photography Against the Grain*, which is one of the early instances where accusations of exploitation and pornography are employed to describe photographs of atrocity. Sekula, for instance, criticizes what he calls "the pornography of the 'direct' representation of misery" (62). Similarly, in *Signatures of the Visible*, Frederic Jameson grossly generalizes in his claim that "[t]he visual is essentially pornographic, which is to say that it has its end in rapt, mindless fascination" (1). Even Sontag writes that "[m]ost depictions of tormented, mutilated bodies do arouse a prurient interest" and "[a]ll images that display the violation of an attractive body are, to a certain degree, pornographic" (*Regarding* 95). Linfield spends a considerable amount of time reacting to these longstanding arguments that equate pornography with photographs of disaster and atrocity. Ultimately, she writes that those who characterize images of atrocity as "pornographic," for instance, quash any new understanding we might have about an image like Drew's "The Falling Man":

Indeed, the term 'pornographic' is now so widely and variously – dare I

say promiscuously? – summoned in discussions of documentary

photography that it is not at all clear what it is meant to address or how it

can lead to deeper understandings. It is used to describe a suspiciously

wide variety of contradictory responses: too little concern for suffering

and a narcissistic identification with it; inappropriate numbing and

inappropriate excitement; lazy carelessness about the pain of others and a

creepy preoccupation with it….Rather than illuminate an actual

phenomenon, the term 'pornography,' like the term 'orientalism,' is used

as a weapon whose main job is to shame the accused and to silence free

discussion. Indeed, the obsessive way in which pornography is invoked,

and the whiff of prurience that surrounds it, remind me of the Nazi

condemnation of modern art as 'degenerate.' (41-42)

The practice of deriding images of suffering as pornographic trivializes and confuses

crucial differences between the photography of atrocity and actual pornography (not all

pornography is necessarily exploitative, inhumane, or violent). This failure to

acknowledge distinctions between pornography and images of atrocity essentially

suppresses any discussion of the political potential that a given image might convey.

Ultimately, critics who condemn photographs of atrocity seem to demand the

impossible. How would a photographer begin to represent human degradation and

suffering in an unproblematic way? Should photographers avoid documenting atrocities at

risk that some might find their work "offensive" or "exploitative"? What would be the

alternative? And how should we look at photographs of human suffering? Censorship is never a viable option as it can only lead to ignorance and repression, ultimately obscuring the historical record of any given event. I do not think it is hyperbolic at this point to refer to John Taylor's concluding words from his excellent study on photojournalism and images of catastrophe, *Body Horror*: "How would the Holocaust be remembered if it existed only in 'civil' representations – those which were more discreet? What would it mean for knowledge if the images ceased to circulate, or were never seen in the first place? What would it mean for civility if representations of war crimes were always polite? If prurience is ugly, what then is discretion in the face of barbarism?" (196). Linfield similarly argues that what these accusations of "exploitation" and calls for censorship actually reveal is the desire to remain ignorant or unmoved:

> These critics seek something that does not exist: an uncorrupted, unblemished photographic gaze that will result in images flawlessly poised between hope and despair, resistance and defeat, intimacy and distance. They demand photographs that embody an absolute reciprocity between photographer and subject, though absolute reciprocity is a hard thing to find even in the best of circumstances. They want the worst things on earth – the most agonizing, unjust things on earth – to be represented in ways that are not incomplete, imperfect, or discomfiting….Ultimately, pious denouncements of the 'pornographic' photograph reveal something that is, I think, fairly simple: a desire to not look at the world's cruelest moments and to remain, therefore, unsullied. (45)

Simplistic accusations of voyeurism, which Linfield contests, also tend to foreclose any attempt to understand viewing as more than a passive and indirectly exploitative act. In *The Emancipated Spectator*, Jacques Rancière argues that we need to rethink viewing as a passive and voyeuristic practice since the "spectator also acts, like the pupil or scholar" and "observes, selects, compares, interprets" (13). Rancière refigures viewing through action and critical thought, arguing that those who view a particular photograph, for example, are "both distant spectators and active interpreters of the spectacle offered to them" (13). Others claim that photographs of atrocity desensitize us to violence, normalize acts of injustice, generate compassion fatigue in viewers, and trivialize the subject's suffering within the frame. Zelizer writes, for example, that "[p]hotography may function most directly to achieve what it ought to have stifled – atrocity's normalization….The act of making people see is beginning to take the place of making people do" (*Remembering* 212). The assumption, here, is that photographs of injustice should drive us to respond with an ethical act, to stop a given injustice. The photograph of atrocity, however, "gives mixed signals," Sontag writes, "[s]top this, it urges. But it also exclaims, What a spectacle!" (77). In other words, although a photograph of atrocity may communicate that a given injustice exists, effectively making an ethical demand to "stop this," the act of looking at an image has never necessarily functioned as a catalyst for ethical action. Further, this argument about desensitization "implies that a golden age existed in which people throughout the world responded with empathy, generosity, and saving action when confronted with the suffering of others" (Linfield 46). In other words, photographs have never necessarily made us do anything, but they can actively make us

see and potentially understand something through a particular frame, especially if they are contextualized through language.

It is the context surrounding the falling body images, for instance, that authors of post-9/11 fiction are reshaping when they incorporate them into narrative form. Photographs may be irreplaceable historical documents, but they cannot be understood on their own. I suggest that novelists who engage with the falling bodies in their work encourage readers to participate in an ethical act of recognition, acknowledgement, or remembrance rather than repression or abjection in their use of these images, an act that stands in opposition to narratives of victory culture. This is much different from provoking a concrete action, but "[r]emembering *is* an ethical act, has ethical value in and of itself" (Sontag 115). Of course, each novelist approaches the images of falling bodies differently, contextualizes these images differently, but I want to suggest that, as a collective, they are involved in bringing what has been repressed back into the reader or viewer's consciousness.

Drawing from Judith Butler's recent work on ethics, I argue that the representations of falling bodies in post-9/11 fiction may communicate human vulnerability and precariousness at the level of an ethical encounter, encouraging consciousness of a mutual responsibility for one another. These fictional representations of falling bodies may effectively communicate an ethical counter-narrative to the frames of exceptionalism and victory culture. In her work, Butler draws from Emmanuel Levinas' ethics where every person is fundamentally interpellated by the face of the Other:

I think rather that access to the face is straightaway ethical. You turn

yourself toward the Other as toward an object when you see a nose, eyes,

a forehead, a chin, and you can describe them….The relation with the face

can surely be dominated by perception, but what is specifically the face is

what cannot be reduced to that. There is first the very uprightness of the

face, its upright exposure, without defense. The skin of the face is that

which stays most naked, most destitute. It is the most naked, though with

a decent nudity. It is the most destitute also: there is an essential poverty

in the face; the proof of this is that one tries to mask this poverty by

putting on poses, by taking on a countenance. The face is exposed,

menaced, as if inviting us to an act of violence. At the same time, the face

is what forbids us to kill.…The face is what one cannot kill, or at least it is

that whose meaning consists in saying: 'thou shalt not kill'. (Levinas,

Ethics 85-87)

For Levinas, the face of the Other, the naked vulnerability of another person, demands an

ethical response from each of us, and this demand exists prior to our own being. Although

the Other may be violently rejected, Levinas argues that this demand made by the Other,

this responsibility to the Other, is what first constitutes subjectivity. "I understand

responsibility," says Levinas, "as responsibility for the Other, thus as responsibility for

what is not my deed, or for what does matter to me, is met by me as face" (95). This

responsibility exists even if the Other's suffering is not a result of our own doing. In other

words, Levinas argues that our intuition is ethical as prior to our own being, our own self-

consciousness. We are preordained to the demands that the suffering or vulnerable Other

makes upon us:

> Levinas means that each of us is always already responsible for the others
>
> who people the world. Their very otherness imposes this duty upon us,
>
> before we are able to deny it….We are fundamentally responsible for
>
> others before we can theorize this relationship, and before we can place the
>
> other in relation to our own being. The otherwise than being, the totally
>
> other, comes before our being. Our unconditional responsibility is not
>
> something we take on or a rule by which we agree to be bound: instead, it
>
> exists before us and we are 'thrown' into it, without any choice.
>
> (Eaglestone, *Ethical* 138)

Butler's ethics, her understandings of vulnerability and the precariousness of life, draw

from Levinasian ethics. She argues that we are each bound to one another through our

common vulnerability, and the acknowledgement or recognition of the fact that life is

easily extinguished. Although the aftermath of 9/11 did not yield this kind of ethical

response to Others, Butler hopes that it might "be a point of departure for a new

understanding if the narcissistic preoccupation of melancholia can be moved into a

consideration for the vulnerability of others. Then we might critically evaluate and

oppose the conditions under which certain human lives are more vulnerable than others,

and thus certain human lives are more grievable than others" (*Precarious* 30). Recognition,

however, must first occur in order for us to apprehend an Other's precariousness. Butler

does not mean that there are no differences between how groups of people might

experience vulnerability, but rather that "lives are by definition precarious: they can be

expunged at will or by accident; their persistence is in no sense guaranteed" (*Frames* 25).

Of course, human vulnerability is not equally distributed across populations, but Butler's

ethics encourage a reevaluation of the political processes that shape our recognition or

repression of the Other's precarity. I now turn toward Johnathan Safran Foer's *Extremely*

Loud and Incredibly Close as an example of post-9/11 fiction, which encourages readers

to engage in a "face to face" encounter with human vulnerability, an encounter that

directly opposes narratives of victory culture.

Falling and Flipbooks: The Ethics of Vulnerability and Jonathan Safran Foer's

Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close

In Jonathan Safran Foer's 2005 novel, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, nine-

year-old protagonist Oskar Schell grieves the loss of his father to the terrorist attacks on

the World Trade Center. Early in the novel, Oskar discovers a vase in his father's closet.

The vase contains an envelope labeled "Black" with a key inside. Oskar obsessively

searches the streets of Manhattan for the lock that matches this key, personally

interviewing every person in the phonebook with the last name "Black." He believes that

the key will lead him to something that his father has left behind for him. Oskar's search

unfolds as a desperate attempt to reconnect with the father he has lost. The novel

concludes with the image of a falling body, a flipbook, actually, which in motion reveals

Lyle Owerko's falling body image in reverse with the body falling upward. Many authors

have written about the falling bodies or "jumpers" in their post-9/11 fiction, but Foer was

perhaps the first to actually incorporate this striking image of a body in free fall into a

fictional narrative.

It is important to keep in mind that Foer wrote and released this novel in a socio-political climate of uncritical patriotism where to stray from the dominant formula of victory culture often meant harsh criticism at best, or hateful backlash in various forms at worst. In Foer's case, this kind of backlash came, at least in part, in the form of book reviews. Although reviewers were overwhelmingly in favour of Foer's first novel, *Everything is Illuminated*, many took to bashing his second effort, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. Multiple prominent reviewers, to put it simply, were unimpressed by Foer's style. Novelist John Updike, for example, writes in the *New Yorker* magazine that Foer's second novel is "thinner, overextended, and sentimentally watery" when compared to his previous work and argues, "the book's hyperactive visual surface covers up a certain hollow monotony in its verbal drama" (Updike). In her review for the *New York Times*, literary critic Michiko Kakutani writes that "[Foer's] novel as a whole feels simultaneously contrived and improvisatory, schematic and haphazard" (Kakutani). Other reviewers were much more scathing, even hateful of Foer and his work. In his review for the *New York Press*, Harry Siegel claims that "Foer isn't just a bad author, he's a vile one" before launching into ridiculous personal attacks and anti-Semitism:

> Foer is supposed to be our new Philip Roth, though his fortune-cookie
> syllogisms and pointless illustrations and typographical tricks don't at all
> match up to or much resemble Roth even at his most inane. But Jews will
> be Jews, apparently. Foer, squeezing his brass ring, doesn't have the
> excuse of having written the day or the week after the attack. In a

calculated move, he threw in 9/11 to make things important, to get paid.

Get that money son; Jay-Z would be proud. Why wait to have ideas

worth writing when you can grab a big theme, throw in the kitchen sink,

and wear your flip-flops all the way to the bank? (Seigel)

Anis Shivani would later include Foer in his list of "The 15 Most Overrated

Contemporary Writers" for the *Huffington Post*. Like Seigel, Shivani claims that Foer

"[r]ode the 9/11-novel gravy train" and "cashed in on 9/11" (Shivani). Scholars, too, are

uncomfortable with Foer's representation of the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. Rachel

Greenwald Smith, for instance, argues that Foer's novel creates "sentiments that support

the emotional and political status quo" (159). In his recent survey of post-9/11 fiction,

After the Fall, Richard Gray similarly claims that Foer's narrative experiments are "close

to the surface," "deeply conventional," and "deeply traditional" (52-53). And Robert

Eaglestone writes that Foer's novel fails to "get the issues" ("The Age" 20). Indeed, most

scholars include Foer's novel in their examples of post-9/11 fiction that has participated

in "marshaling overridingly conservative reactions to the event" and "[a]lmost

unanimously rendering 9/11 as a crucible in middle-aged masculinity," as these novels

"probe the American predicament through recurrent plot devices and motifs that both

capture the domestic in jeopardy and indict narcissistic American self-reference" (Anker

464). Some of these critiques, and the anger within them, I believe, stem from Foer's use

of a traumatic event for artistic purposes four years after the attack. While I do not

explicitly disagree that many post-9/11 texts may reproduce or construct traditional ideas

regarding family, gender, and national identity, I want to suggest that to some extent these

reviewers and scholars misread *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, or, at least, foreclose the possibility of an ethical encounter within the novel's pages.

Foer's use of the falling body image is not only an attempt to restore what corporate media outlets were intent on repressing, but also a way of disrupting narratives of victory culture and American exceptionalism in his implicit juxtaposition of various historical atrocities with Owerko's photograph. I suggest that Foer's novel employs a consciousness of past atrocities that disrupts American exceptionalism in the aftermath of 9/11. Although Oskar is the main protagonist, his grandfather and grandmother also narrate large parts of the novel. The reader is not only exposed to the grandfather's unmailed letters to his son (Oskar's father), but also to the grandmother's autobiography. Juxtaposed with Oskar's story of personal loss, these documents reveal the grandparents' own prior story of trauma as survivors of World War II's bombing of Dresden. Oskar's grandfather, Thomas, tells the story of his love for Anna Schmidt, who is killed while pregnant with their baby in the bombings. Thomas and Anna's sister (Oskar's grandmother) leave separately for the United States after the incident. As a symptom of post-traumatic stress, Oskar's grandfather slowly loses his ability to speak, and is only able to communicate with a notebook and pen. Oskar's grandparents eventually meet by coincidence in New York, realize their common loss, and decide to marry. When the grandmother becomes pregnant in 1963 with Oskar's father, the grandfather flees and does not return to New York until after his son (Oskar's father) dies in the terrorist attacks. Foer begins to draw parallels between the 9/11 attacks and the bombing of Dresden by including one of the grandfather's letters to Oskar's father within the novel.

The 1978 letter recounts the horror of the Dresden firebombing perpetrated by British

and American planes in 1945, killing more than 40,000 people:[5]

> [A]ll of us tried to leave the cellar at once, dead and dying people were
>
> trampled, I walked over an old man, I walked over children, everyone was
>
> losing everyone, the bombs were like a waterfall, I ran through the streets,
>
> from cellar to cellar, and saw terrible things: I saw a woman whose blond
>
> hair and green dress were on fire, running with a silent baby in her arms, I
>
> saw humans melted into thick pools of liquid, three or four feet deep in
>
> places, I saw bodies crackling like embers, laughing, and the remains of
>
> masses of people who had tried to escape the firestorm by jumping head
>
> first into the lakes and ponds, the parts of their bodies that were
>
> submerged in the water were still intact, while the parts that protruded
>
> above water were charred beyond recognition, the bombs kept falling,
>
> purple, orange and white, I kept running, my hands kept bleeding, through
>
> the sounds of collapsing buildings I heard the roar of that baby's silence.
>
> (212-213)

Although this bombing occurred during wartime against Germany, most historians

characterize the attack on Dresden as "terror bombing campaign," one that was committed

with the express intent of murdering civilians. Robert E. Goodin, for example, writes

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[5] The exact number of people who were killed during the Dresden bombings is unknown. In the aftermath of the bombings, estimates of the death toll ranged from 60,000 to 300,000 in press articles and popular works of non-fiction. More recent scholarly research often assigns a death toll between 25,000 and 60,000. For a much more detailed discussion of debates and research surrounding the inconsistency regarding the number of dead in the Dresden bombings, see Bas Von Benda-Beckmann's *A German Catastrophe?: German Historians and the Allied Bombings, 1945-2010*.

"[t]he firebombing of Dresden was terrorism pure and simple. The targets were of no direct military value. The aim was to demoralize enemy non-combatants, to kill civilians in such large numbers that their government is forced to surrender" (63). Not only does Foer reconstruct the horrors of Dresden through the grandfather's letters, but the novel also incorporates the American bombing of Japanese cities, Hiroshima and Nagasaki, within the narrative.

Standing before his school classroom, Oskar plays a recording of a Japanese man, Tomoyasu, who recounts his experience during the explosion of the atomic bomb on Hiroshima. The mushroom cloud, the radiation, the dead bodies, and the general decimation of life are described in the interview, which concludes with Tomoyasu's words, "That is what death is like. It doesn't matter how good the weapons are. I thought if everyone could see what I saw, we would never have war anymore" (189). Although the bombing of Dresden and the bombings in Japan during World War II are often characterized as casualties of war during a campaign against two enemies, Foer aligns these instances with the attacks on Lower Manhattan to situate them historically for what they are: acts of mass murder and terrorism. Moreover, scholars have also linked one act of terrorism to the next to interrupt the devastating logic of violent retribution, as Priscilla Walton and Bruce Tucker argue, for example, "[t]hat the Germans murdered almost 12 million people in death camps does not, to apply the theorists' contentions to a specific event, excuse the violence perpetrated on Dresden" (24). Foer's discussion of 9/11 alongside of Dresden interrogates the widespread American exceptionalism that surged in popularity in the wake of the attacks. This narrative pattern illustrates that, for

Foer, 9/11 is not a unique event, but is rather a recent instance of mass trauma in a long series of other traumatic events, some of which were carried out with the United States' explicit efforts. *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* does not equate or confuse these different atrocities, but rather aligns them as instances of civilian suffering to make a significant point about American innocence and exceptionalism. The juxtaposition of two major losses of life perpetrated by American forces with the trauma of 9/11 challenges the frames of victory culture with the horrific realities of war, encouraging readers to consider a response to terrorism that stretches beyond a justification for violent retaliation.

By the end of the novel, Oskar discovers that the key was not meant for him, but was mistakenly left inside the vase, which his father bought at an estate sale. The key was meant for a different son from a different father. Oskar's grief for his father, his yearning for a reversal of events, and his nostalgia for life prior to the terrorist attacks culminate in the final pages of the novel, which is important to revisit here at length:

> Finally, I found the pictures of the falling body. Was it Dad? Maybe. Whoever it was, it was somebody. I ripped the pages out of the book. I reversed the order, so the last one was first, and the first one was last. When I flipped through them, it looked like the man was floating up through the sky. And if I'd had more pictures, he would've flown through a window, back into the building, and the smoke would've poured into the hole that the plane was about to come out of. Dad would've left his messages backward, until the machine was empty, and the plane would've flown backward away from him, all the way to Boston. He would've taken

the elevator to the street and pressed the button for the top floor. He

would've walked backward to the subway, and the subway would've gone

backward through the tunnel, back to our stop. Dad would've gone

backward through the turnstile, then swiped his Metrocard backward, then

walked home backward as he read the *New York Times* from right to left.

He would've spit coffee into his mug, unbrushed his teeth, and put hair on

his face with a razor. He would've gotten back into bed, the alarm

would've rung backward, he would've dreamt backward. Then he

would've gotten up again at the end of the night before the worst day. He

would've walked back into the room, whistling 'I Am the Walrus'

backward. He would've gotten into bed with me. We would've looked at

the stars on my ceiling, which would've pulled back their light from our

eyes. I'd have said 'Nothing' backward. He'd have said 'Yeah, buddy?'

backward. I'd have said 'Dad' backward, which would have sounded the

same as 'Dad' forward. He would have told me the story of the Sixth

Borough, from the voice in the can at the end to the beginning, from 'I love

you' to 'Once upon a time…' We would have been safe. (325-326)

These final words precede the flipbook made from Owerko's photograph of a person

falling to their death from the Twin Towers. When set in motion, the flipbook reveals a

body gradually moving upward in each frame until it disappears, presumably back into

the safety of the World Trade Center just prior to the terrorist attacks. The flipbook

provides the reader with an experience whereby they must actively engage with the falling

body image, reproducing Oskar's wish to reverse time in a visual form. Interestingly, Foer does not include numbers on the pages of the flipbook, implying that it might also be flipped in reverse (in a reversal of Foer's reversal), undoing Oskar's attempt to recuperate his father, where the body simply falls to the ground below. In a sense, there is no beginning or end to the flipbook, only the suggestion of a continuous cycle of floating and falling, forwards and backwards.

Foer's flipbook echoes a scene from Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five*, a novel deeply concerned with the horror of the American and British firebombing of Dresden. Part of the novel reflects Vonnegut's own experience as a prisoner of war and survivor of the Dresden bombings through protagonist Billy Pilgrim. After surviving the war, Pilgrim becomes "unstuck" in time and begins to travel backward and forward through his own life, living and reliving experiences of the past and future. At one point in the novel, Pilgrim watches a movie about American bombers during World War II both backwards and forwards. He experiences the bombings of Dresden in reverse:

> The formation flew backwards over a German city that was in flames. The bombers opened their bomb bay doors, exerted a miraculous magnetism which shrunk the fires, gathered them into cylindrical steel containers, and lifted the containers into the bellies of the planes. The containers were stored neatly in racks….When the bombers got back to their base, the steel cylinders were taken from the racks and shipped back to the United States of America, where factories were operating night and day, dismantling the cylinders, separating the dangerous contents into minerals….The minerals

were then shipped to specialists in remote areas. It was their business to

put them into the ground, to hide them cleverly, so they would never hurt

anybody ever again. (394-95)

Vonnegut's reversal of the bombings dramatizes an ethical alternative to the atrocity

enacted on the civilians of Dresden. The scene encourages readers to question the moral

dimensions of an American military decision to incinerate approximately 135,000

people.[6] Further, Vonnegut's 1969 novel is also a direct response to the American

military atrocities in Vietnam, an attempt to uncover past instances of violence and

trauma through the contemporary political climate of the time. Foer's use of this narrative

strategy in regards to the flipbook emphasizes a kind of connectivity between distinct

historical traumas. The flipbook creates the possibility for readers to recognize human

vulnerability in Butler's ethical terms. The anonymous falling man stands in not only for

Oskar's father, but also any other person that was trapped in the towers. This

anonymity may encourage readers to confront the reality that any person (or they

themselves) could be the victim of future atrocities. Foer's flipbook communicates the

reality that humans are irrevocably vulnerable, and are dependant upon the Other to not

violate that vulnerability.

As previously discussed, an ethics of vulnerability is perhaps best understood

through Levinas's theory of the face. While Levinas is most concerned with the face-to-

face encounter, the philosopher admits that, at its most vulnerable, "the whole human

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[6] Vonnegut marks the death toll of the Dresden bombings at 135,000. For a much more detailed discussion
of debates and research surrounding the inconsistency regarding the number of dead in the Dresden
bombings, see Bas Von Benda-Beckmann's *A German Catastrophe?: German Historians and the Allied
Bombings, 1945-2010*.

body is in this sense more or less a face" (*Ethics* 97). In this case, the body floats or falls

at the will of the reader, the person turning the pages, implying that we are responsible

for this life that has been lost. By responsibility, I do not mean that the reader or Western

subject directly or indirectly caused the death of the falling individual, but rather that this

image makes an ethical demand upon us to consider the conditions that exist in order for

this death to be allowed to happen. It is important to note that before this consideration

of the Other, we must first recognize the vulnerability of individuals and collectives in

order for an ethical encounter to take place:

> Not only is there always the possibility that a vulnerability will not be
>
> recognized and that it will be constituted as the 'unrecognizable,' but when
>
> a vulnerability is recognized, that recognition has the power to change the
>
> meaning and structure of the vulnerability itself. In this sense, if
>
> vulnerability is one precondition for humanization, and humanization takes
>
> place differently through variable norms of recognition, then it follows that
>
> vulnerability is fundamentally dependent on existing norms of recognition
>
> if it is to be attributed to any human subject. (43)

I argue, however, that part of the reason this image was heavily censored in the first place

was because viewers recognize this body as vulnerable, a narrative that is incongruent

with the dominant narrative of American exceptionalism and victory culture that resurged

following the attack. Not only this, but the viewer's identification with the falling body

images is what makes them so alarming. In viewing such images, Mikita Brottman, for

example, cannot help but identify with them, cannot help but question what such a

horrifying experience must have been like: "How did it feel to jump from the buildings, and how did it feel to stay inside? How would we have reacted in the face of such a terrifying event? Would we have stayed calm, or would we have panicked? What is it like to choke to death? What is it like to burn alive?" (174-175). This kind of reflection allows the reader or viewer an opportunity to consider his or her own vulnerability through identification with the falling image. Of course, as Linfield would agree, we can never know what the suffering in an image of atrocity felt like, but this kind of identification "means that one has the chance to reflect upon injury, to find out mechanisms of its distribution, to find out who else suffers from permeable borders, unexpected violence, dispossession, and fear, and in what ways" (*Precarious Life* xii). Foer's novel not only recovers the falling body image, but also encourages readers to engage with difficult ethical questions. Ultimately, these questions challenge victory culture and American exceptionalism through the novel's juxtaposition of historical traumas.

Throughout this chapter, I argue that viewing the images of the falling bodies, particularly when they are contextualized within a given narrative, sets the stage for ethical encounters between one person and the next. While viewing these images does not necessarily follow the neat trajectory of cause and effect (i.e. viewing the photos may not lead to recognition or contemplation of the vulnerability of others), censoring these images forecloses this encounter from the outset. In conclusion, I think it is important to return briefly to Butler in order to further underscore the impact of censoring images of atrocities. In the *Precarious Life*, Butler writes that certain images and accounts of atrocity are continually expunged from public memory. This violence is not only

unmarked, but is also unmarkable, as these horrors conflict with dominant ideologies,

nationalist narratives, and ideals of what constitutes subjectivity (35). As a result, images

of suffering, and the corresponding questions they raise, must be expunged from

collective or national memory. This process creates and reinforces a very pervasive, yet

also specific, set of conditions where a public is "created on the condition that certain

images do not appear in the media, certain names of the dead are not utterable, certain

losses are not avowed as losses, and violence is derealized and diffused" (38). Although

Butler discusses the repression of images of violence enacted upon racial and sexual

minorities in the wake of 9/11, and during the subsequent War on Terror, Owerko's and

Drew's falling body images serve as visual examples that must also be repressed in order

to consolidate American nationalist narratives. Recalling the images of falling bodies

through an ethics of vulnerability enables alternative stories of the 9/11 attacks to be told.

These stories, as in the case of Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, may have

the potential to go beyond narratives of victory culture, American exceptionalism, and the

logic of retributive violence. A continual reconsideration of these images in the context of

September 11, 2001 is necessary or we risk obscuring our ethical obligations to others,

and the connections between one historical atrocity and the next.

Globalization, Communicative Capitalism, and William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*

> I stay in. Hooked. Is this leisure – this browsing, randomly linking my
>
> way through these small patches of virtual real-estate – or do I somehow
>
> imagine that I am performing some more dynamic function? The content of
>
> the Web aspires to absolute variety….Somewhere, surely, there is a site
>
> that contains…everything we have lost? (Gibson, "The Net")

Introduction

With the publication of *Pattern Recognition* in 2003, cyberpunk novelist William

Gibson, surprised fans, reviewers, and scholars with a turn from the realm of science

fiction toward the immediate post-9/11 cultural landscape. *Pattern Recognition*'s narrative

is so deeply entrenched in the events and aftermath of September 11, 2001 that it seems

peculiar more scholars invested in researching cultural representations of the terrorist

attacks do not include the novel in discussions of what many refer to as "post-9/11

literature."[7] As I briefly discuss in the previous chapter, most scholarly criticism is

particularly dismissive of post-9/11 fiction. Scholarly articles and book length surveys,

including Gray's *After the Fall* and Martin Randall's *9/11 and the Literature of Terror*,

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[7] Scholars of post-9/11 literature have mostly ignored Gibson's novel. In *The Terror Dream*, Faludi
analyzes the initial mainstream media and popular culture responses to the 9/11 attacks, discussing a wide
variety of news stories, films, literature, and music. Curiously, Faludi does not mention Gibson or *Pattern
Recognition*. Likewise, Gibson's work receives no attention in Kristiaan Versluys's survey of post-9/11
fiction, *Out of the Blue*, nor does Richard Gray acknowledge *Pattern Recognition* in his examination of
fiction in *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/11*. Jeffrey Melnick's *9/11 Culture* does briefly
recognize *Pattern Recognition* in an excellent chapter on post-9/11 fiction, but this chapter is less
concerned with writings on globalization, technology, or visual culture and more with hegemonic
representations of fathers and sons after the terrorist attacks.

overwhelmingly charge white American male authors with participating in the reproduction of this hyper-masculine climate of victory culture and American exceptionalism. Gray, for example, provides a simplistic and reductive analysis of post-9/11 novels, dividing these texts into two categories: those that "fail" and those that "get it right" (16-17). He claims that the vast majority of this fiction "fails" as it showcases "a desperate retreat to old sureties" (Gray 16) with white, middle-aged, American males at the center of these narratives. Gray's characterization of "successful" novels are those that "pursue some form of mimesis that dips above and below the discourses of nationalism, combining closeness and distance, registering at once the communal tragedy…and the structural connections to tragic experiences elsewhere" (83). In "9/11 as European Event," Versluys identifies "the novel of recuperation" as a major category of post-9/11 popular fiction. He argues that these novels are "always the same," insofar as "9/11 is the occasion for conversion, from sinful or worldly to religious and pious and/or from lukewarm citizenship to flag-waving patriotism" (68). Although Randall provides a more forgiving and nuanced analysis of post-9/11 fiction in *9/11 and the Literature of Terror*, he, too, maintains that authors "generally failed to identify and describe the 'wounds' left after the attacks" and ambiguously calls for "hybrid forms" (3) that might be more ethically engaged with issues of transnationalism and globalization. It appears odd that so many critics claim that the majority of post-9/11 fiction ignores the tensions of globalization and emphasizes the precariousness of manhood and the nuclear family, as they ignore Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*, one of the earliest novels to engage with the terrorist attacks, which portrays a female protagonist immersed in a globalized world

where national borders seem to be rapidly dissolving as a result of advanced technologies.

This is not to say, however, that *Pattern Recognition* has received no academic attention. A number of scholars committed to the study of science fiction and Gibson's work (Easterbrook; Haslam; Hayles; Hollinger; Jameson; Konstantinou; Marx; Wegner) focus on a variety of issues in their articles on *Pattern Recognition*, including neoliberalism, branding, history and historicism, globalization, even the relationship between trauma and computer programming code. Each of these scholars briefly situate *Pattern Recognition* in its post-9/11 context, yet, relatively few of their arguments incorporate a detailed discussion of how the narrative and its representation of new technology and digital media is relevant to the social and political aftermath of 9/11.

I turn, then, to *Pattern Recognition* not only because it is one of the earliest examples of post-9/11 fiction, one that engages with questions of globalization and visual culture, but also because I feel as if this important novel has received little attention from scholars invested in surveying and studying post-9/11 fiction and culture at large. To some extent, I wonder if Gibson's status as a writer of science fiction, a writer catering to more of a mass-market audience, might preclude him, to some degree, of being seriously considered by a variety of academics invested in the study of "literary fiction" or "9/11 literature." Granted, many of the references to 9/11 in *Pattern Recognition* are subtle or allegorical, leading some critics to claim that "[t]he primary storyline…has little to do directly with 9/11" (Oxoby 107). As I have already discussed in the previous chapter, however, widespread corporate media self-censorship and uncritical patriotism was commonplace in the aftermath of the terrorist attacks. Releasing *Extremely Loud and*

Incredibly Close nearly four years after the attacks, Jonathan Safran Foer was subject to significant criticism for his more explicit representation of the tragedy. Allison B. Moonitz writes, "[b]ecause 9/11 happened so recently and was experienced so deeply in public, the social mindset isn't as forgiving of writers who take liberties with the 'plot' element of the terrorists' acts" (5). Perhaps, then, it is unsurprising that Gibson's novel, one of the first fictional, literary ventures into the "howling void" that DeLillo describes, makes use of allegory (a longstanding strategy of literary self-protection) to indirectly interpret and portray the 9/11 attacks in the immediate social climate of national trauma and self-censorship.

In 1984, Gibson released his first novel, *Neuromancer*, to wide commercial and critical success. The novel sparked the genre of "cyberpunk," sold millions of copies, and became the first to win the science fiction "triple crown," the Hugo, Nebula, and Philip K. Dick awards. Two years prior to the publication of *Neuromancer*, Gibson coined the term "cyberspace" in a short story, "Burning Chrome." *Neuromancer*, however, is often credited with popularizing the term, providing computer scientists and engineers with new terminology to communicate their ideas about the virtual. Ken Hillis writes that "[i]t is hard to overstate *Neuromancer*'s influence on the [virtual reality] community" as it "offered researchers…a blueprint of the virtual world" (20). Due to *Neuromancer*'s early representations of cyberspace, virtual reality, and advanced computer systems, many of Gibson's book reviewers tend to characterize him as a "futurist" or as a "prophet" of new technologies. Gibson's depictions of emerging technologies have also led some scholars to claim that he is a proponent of hyper-masculine "technofetishism" (Fernbach 251;

Rapatzikou 153) as his portrayals of male bodies might suggest a need to merge with

advanced technologies in order to become more fully masculine.

　　　　While I have no doubt that the language and rhetoric around technology and

cyberspace in Gibson's fiction may often allow, for example, "the disavowal of bodily

differences in a fantasy that privileges the white male body" (Fernbach 248), I want to

suggest that Gibson's interest in new technologies is not a simple, fetishistic celebration

of computers or machines. In *Science Fiction*, Adam Roberts nicely outlines Gibson's

ambivalence towards technology in *Neuromancer*:

> One the one hand, this is a text that delights in the ingenious and
>
> fascinating toys its imaginative universe produces, although, given the
>
> spy/crime genre Gibson is working in, this delight is expressed chiefly in
>
> terms of the damage the technology can do….[T]echnology in this
>
> imaginative universe is almost always threatening, alienating, a negative
>
> quantity….One of the things Gibson does best is create…[a] sense of
>
> ambient technological paranoia. (125)

This "ambient technological paranoia" is at work in much of Gibson's fiction, especially

in his more recent post-9/11 novels. Gibson's *Bigend Trilogy*, which is also sometimes

called the *Blue Ant Trilogy*, consists of *Pattern Recognition* (2003), *Spook Country* (2007),

and *Zero History* (2010). In these novels, Gibson devotes significant narrative energy to

portrayals of new technologies, especially the Internet, but I contend that rarely does this

fiction lend itself to any democratic, progressive, or emancipatory political vision through

the use of computers or digital media.

In this chapter, I primarily focus on *Pattern Recognition*, the first novel of Gibson's post-9/11 trilogy. I place emphasis on this novel over Gibson's subsequent works for a number of significant reasons. Although each novel of the *Bigend Trilogy* deals with new technologies and cyberspace, *Pattern Recognition* is more specifically concerned with the significance of the digital images in its various forms. The novel explores the global dissemination, circulation, and exploitation of online content in the form of digital images and text-based exchanges about them. I contend that Gibson's attention to the circulation of online "footage" offers a critical commentary of the digital image through the representation of "communicative capitalism" at work in the novel. Further, I am particularly interested in *Pattern Recognition* because the novel communicates many of the immediate social and political anxieties regarding globalization that circulated in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. In other words, *Pattern Recognition* might be more easily categorized as post-9/11 fiction while some reviewers describe *Spook Country*, for example, as "arguably the first example of the post-post-9/11 novel" (Itzkoff). Of course, this is a murky distinction, one that I will not attempt to elaborate in detail, here, except to say that the phrase "post-post-9/11" demonstrates an attempt to describe a period or cultural text that moves beyond both the immediate effects and affects generated from the terrorist attacks in a world that is still under the reverberant influence of them. For now, suffice to say that *Pattern Recognition* is more in tune with the initial anxieties generated by the terrorist attacks than either of the other novels in the trilogy.

In fact, Gibson was actually working on a novel prior to the attacks and rewrote

this work-in-progress, which would later become *Pattern Recognition*, to reflect the post-9/11 social and political climate:

> When I came back to the manuscript, and went to my computer and opened the file, about three weeks after Sept. 11, and I saw that my protagonist's back story, that I'd been sort of interrogating and looking for and starting to find, was taking place right then – her memories were of *that autumn* – It hadn't occurred to me until I was looking at the screen that she was there….[M]y world no longer existed and…the meaning of everything, *ever* that had gone before had to be reconsidered in the light of something that had happened. At that point I had a choice of abandoning the narrative….I was just sitting there looking at the screen: I either erase this and go elsewhere, or I go back right now and go back to page 1 and go back through it, knowing where she came from. (Leonard)

Reworking a novel that was already in progress, Gibson was able to release *Pattern Recognition* in February 2003, making it one of the earliest fictional responses to the terrorist attacks. As Jason Haslam writes in "Memory's Guilded Cage," the novel is "possibly the first literary, fictional exploration by an (ostensibly) American author of the position of 9/11 within an American global history – and future" (79). The narrative itself takes place between August and September 2002 and follows protagonist Cayce Pollard. She is a "coolhunter," a predictor of marketing trends, hired by Hubertus Bigend, founder and owner of the multinational corporation, Blue Ant. Cayce suffers from allergic reactions to corporate branding, a side effect of her ability to discern valuable patterns in

fashion and visual culture that corporations can then use to better market products to consumers. The novel's plot revolves around mysterious segments of footage that are electronically buried within obscure websites as frame-grabs and short video clips. Once new segments are unearthed, however, they become the topic of discussion and debate for a global community of online followers. Bigend hires Cayce to find the creator of this visual footage, believing that the way the segments and discussions about them virally circulate both online and in the physical world might hugely benefit his business in corporate marketing. Cayce also participates in the Footage:Fetish:Forum (F:F:F), the primary online message board and chat community that works to uncover the segments of the footage. The F:F:F continuously debates and analyzes the mysterious footage online, attempting to discern its origin and meaning. While Cayce searches for the creator of the footage, she also grieves the loss of her father, Win, who disappeared in Manhattan on the morning that the Twin Towers collapsed. Her search for the footage's creator parallels her search for the truth about her father's disappearance on September 11, 2001.

In "Fear and Loathing in Globalization," Frederic Jameson argues that Gibson's turn from the realm of science fiction to the immediate post-9/11 cultural landscape does not necessarily signal a shift from style or approach, but rather a move "closer to the 'cyberpunk' with which he is often associated….sending back more reliable information about the contemporary world" (105). In his previous assessment of the cyberpunk genre in *Postmodernism*, Jameson argues that Gibson's early work is "an expression of transnational corporate realities," and "an exceptional literary realization within a predominantly visual or aural postmodern production" (38). Jameson argues that

Gibson's earlier fiction might operate through the aesthetics of cognitive mapping, which could "endow the individual subject with some new heightened sense of its place in the global system" (54). In many ways, *Pattern Recognition* fulfills Jameson's hope for a political aesthetic that critically engages with the individual's immersion within global capitalism and technological ubiquity. In this sense, Gibson's novel is less the result of technological fetishism and more symptomatic of an attempt to grapple with a globalized post-9/11 technoculture embedded in surveillance, paranoia, and conspiracy. I contend that *Pattern Recognition*'s representation of postmodern global capitalism calls attention to ideologies that structure the conditions of daily existence, but cynically and satirically conveys a world of disorientation and capitalist complicity where subjects are fully immersed in the political futility of digital media and online communication technologies.

In this chapter, I discuss *Pattern Recognition*'s allegorical depiction of certain anxieties pertaining to technology, visual culture, and globalization in a post-9/11 world. My discussion touches on the interconnections between technology, globalization, surveillance, affect, and conspiracy theory through Gibson's portrayal of the F:F:F users as participants in the processes of electronic exchange that Jodi Dean describes as "communicative capitalism," "the materialization of ideals of inclusion and participation in information, entertainment, and communication technologies in ways that capture resistance and intensify global capitalism" (*Democracy* 2). Part of Gibson's portrayal of communicative capitalism, of course, involves the F:F:F's use of digital technology, the way that F:F:F users are able share and engage with the footage, still images distributed via the Internet. Although Internet technology may sometimes aid in the promotion of

democracy and the organization of offline political activism (or at the very least, emerging technology produces the illusion that it is inherently linked to the ideals of democracy and progress), I contend that Gibson's characterization of this technology reflects not only the underlying paranoia generated through online communication networks, but also provides a harsh critique of online communication, specifically the electronic exchange of digital images and the quasi-political debates about them. Ultimately, *Pattern Recognition* reflects an attempt to cognitively map the totality of global capitalism and its communication networks, but partially does this through a questionable expression of skepticism at the possibility of these networks producing any kind of progressive political action in the aftermath of 9/11.

Globalization, Terrorism, and the Cultural Brandscape

 Pattern Recognition opens with a direct referent to globalization when protagonist Cayce Pollard suffers from jet lag after a long flight from New York to London. She lies in her friend's flat, contemplating the disruption of her circadian rhythms:

> It is that flat and spectral non-hour, awash in limbic tides, brainstem stirring fitfully, flashing inappropriate reptilian demands for sex, food, sedation, all of the above, and none really an option now….She knows, now, absolutely, hearing the white noise that is London, that Damien's theory of jet lag is correct: that her mortal soul is leagues behind her, being reeled in on some ghostly umbilical down the vanished wake of the plane that brought her here, hundreds of thousands of feet above the Atlantic.

Souls can't move that quickly, and are left behind, and must be awaited,

upon arrival, like lost luggage. (Gibson 1)

Throughout the novel, Cayce frequently describes the physical and mental strain of airline

travel in terms of "soul delay" or "displacement," admitting that sometimes the exertion

of moving so quickly through time and space becomes too much, pushing her body and

mind "beyond soul-delay metaphors…into physical collapse" (Gibson 188). Gibson's

employment of this metaphor, of course, portrays the human body's physical limitations

within globalization, its inability to keep pace with the technology that propels it forward

in the name of progress.

In "Virtual Travellers: Cyberspace and Global Networks," Ursula K. Heise refers

to this same passage in *Pattern Recognition* when she writes of the many theoretical

frameworks that have been proposed as attempts to understand this cognitive and cultural

predicament between the acceleration of technology and the limits of the mind and body:

"In different ways, it was addressed from the 1960s onwards in a wide variety of

theoretical frameworks from McLuhan's 'global village' to Toffler's 'future shock,'

Harvey's 'time-space compression' and Cairncross's 'death of distance,' and it was often

conceptually associated with the sense of period break, the advent of a new era in

modernization processes" (212). Heise suggests that one of the best ways to understand

the disorientation that Cayce experiences throughout *Pattern Recognition* might be

through Jameson's classic interpretation of postmodern architecture, his analysis of John

Portman's Bonaventure Hotel in Los Angeles. Jameson writes that the hotel's "mutation

of space…has finally succeeded in transcending the capacities of the individual human

body to locate itself, to organize its immediate surroundings perceptually, and to map cognitively its position in a mappable external world" (*Postmodernism* 44). "This alarming disjunction," Jameson continues, "between the body and its built environment…can itself stand as the symbol and analogue of that even sharper dilemma, which is the incapacity of our minds, at least at present, to map the great global, multinational and decentered communicational network in which we find ourselves caught as individual subjects" (*Postmodernism* 44). Although I think that Heise's use of Jameson's analysis is beneficial, I suggest that a broader understanding of globalization and its processes is necessary in order to properly frame Cayce's disorientation.

I will begin with an attempt to contextualize some common understandings of globalization and its processes before resuming an analysis of *Pattern Recognition* in terms of its representation of what Dean defines as communicative capitalism. Throughout this chapter, I partially draw from the work of Paul Virilio, as his theories are particularly relevant to a discussion that involves connections between technoculture, speed, affect, and geographical mobility. Gibson's representation of globalization reflects many of Virilio's concerns, foregrounds some of the effects that globalization produces, and conveys contemporary anxieties around the breach of national borders and the instability of territorial sovereignty after September 11, 2001. Although I primarily want to focus on the way *Pattern Recognition* engages with online technologies, I think it is important to first establish Gibson's representation of globalization in terms of mobility and space-time compression as these issues are so fundamental to the novel and feed into understandings of global communication and the electronic exchange of digital images and

other forms of new media via the Internet.

"After the World Trade Center," Wai Chee Dimock writes, "few of us are under the illusion that the United States is sovereign in any absolute sense" (1). In other words, the 9/11 terrorist attacks call attention to the complex and unpredictable ways that nations are bound to each other through processes of globalization. The attacks were a global event in that they magnified the interconnected relationship between physical and digital networks that rapidly distribute people, consumer goods, technologies, and information around the world. When I refer to "globalization," as murky as this term may be, I am also invoking the social processes associated with the concept of global capitalism. Of course, there is much debate around understandings of globalization, but I will briefly attempt to outline a few distinguishable characteristics in order to provide some context for Gibson's representation of global capitalism and its effects in *Pattern Recognition*.

In "Nationalist Postnationalism: Globalist Discourse in Contemporary Culture," Frederick Buell carefully outlines two distinct ways that scholars formulate the processes of globalization. The first formulation frames globalization as a new development in the "narrative of capital," which produces a "regime of flexible accumulation," or what many refer to as "late capitalism":

> As such, globalization means deeper penetration, integration, and postmodern hyperdevelopment. Fredric Jameson has argued that multinational capitalism 'ends up penetrating and colonizing [the] . . . precapitalist enclaves of Nature and the Unconscious.' But penetration

retains also a more geographic meaning, describing the forcible

incorporation of remote, fourth world peoples and locales. Tighter

integration means increasingly that capital goes above and below the

nation, both splintering it and transnationalizing it. Capital encourages, on

the one hand, transnationalization, and, on the other hand, subnational

localization to which the vocabulary of marketing has responded by

inventing the term glocalization. Thus, for example, transnational

corporations…have, via disaggregated production and the

transnationalization of finance, knit remote localities throughout the world

together, and just-in-time production has helped make this happen in real

time. Penetration and integration are usually accompanied by

hyperdevelopment, which means commodification of all areas of

experience, and the development of a new kind of global postmodern

consumer culture of flexibly produced, heterogenous, customized

simulations. (549)

In this understanding of global capitalism, multinational corporations and international

banking institutions threaten the relevancy of nation states, dissolving national borders

and eroding territorial sovereignty through the transnational exchange of capital. The

second formulation of globalization that Buell outlines is more sociologically focused,

extending the debates around nationalism, postcolonialism, and internationalism into a

"different kind of transnationalism," one that utilizes and relies upon global networks of

communication:

> Tighter communicative integration of the globe means, potentially, the
>
> splintering of national communities locally and the creation of a
>
> heterogenous transnational public sphere globally. Nations are no longer so
>
> separated by their own borders; instead, they – along with a host of new
>
> sub- and supranational actors – communicate more interactively in real
>
> time, along multiple, more decentered, and more polyglossic
>
> communication circuits, and via a greater complexity of positions from
>
> which to speak. Enclaves are thus opened onto each other not colonized,
>
> and conversations and transport across them sponsor a new, critique of
>
> universalism as parochial and advocacy of an uncertain-creative kind of
>
> hybridity. Though such a communicative and interactive system may seem
>
> fundamentally cosmopolitan, it is important to point out that these same
>
> processes may produce increased fundamentalism, ethnic conflict and
>
> globalized terrorism. (550)

Although this second formulation of globalization emphasizes the liberating aspects of

social interconnections between nations, Buell briefly highlights that fundamentalism and

terrorism are also symptomatic of these processes. Buell, however, does not elaborate

upon this mention of global terrorism, but goes on to offer a broader critique of discourses

on globalization instead. "[W]hile current global reorganization has had profound effects

on culture," Buell writes, "these effects have not signaled the end of nationalism in the

cultural arena. Instead, they have…set the stage for the reconstitution of U.S. Cultural

nationalism in an interesting, new, 'postnational' form" (551). Post-9/11 American

politics definitely attest to Buell's contention, here, as the United States sought to reinforce nationalist ideals and the security of its borders, generating a climate of uncritical patriotism and exceptionalism after the attacks.

Buell's summary of discourses on globalization is far from exhaustive, but his article provides some working definitions that help contextualize a discussion of *Pattern Recognition*. I could refer to any number of scholars that focus on aspects of globalization and this would only reveal some more of the contradictory, overlapping, and multifaceted ways that scholars theorize the processes of global capitalism. In *Globalization*, Manfred B. Steger confirms that "[s]cholars not only hold different views with regard to proper definitions of globalization, they also disagree on its scale, causation, chronology, impact, trajectories, and policy outcomes" (11). Steger acknowledges, however, that regardless of conflicting views on globalization, a general scholarly consensus would suggest that it is an irregular and asymmetrical process as it affects people in different parts of the world in radically different ways. In *Towering Figures: Rereading the 9/11 Archive*, Sven Cvek similarly argues that "[i]f we agree on some basic assumptions about globalization – and agreement is by no means universal – we must conclude that it is fundamentally uneven in its effects, negative or positive. This unevenness is not accidental; it is the key to the logic of the social processes that fall under the all-encompassing term globalization" (113). Echoing Buell and Steger, Cvek contends that any proper understanding of globalization must acknowledge "the asymmetrical effects of globalization processes and their dependence on local, often national power centers – a feature that can be obscured by unconditional appeals to transnational or global forms of consciousness, sociality or

sovereignty" (114). Although globalization is a difficult process to define in any tidy

way, it is clear that *Pattern Recognition* attempts to emphasize some of the characteristics

commonly associated with global capitalism: space-time compression, advanced

communication networks, assimilation or homogenization of world culture, and growing

social and economic inequalities between separate nation-states as a result of corporate

exploitation.

Gibson's engagement with globalization and communication networks in *Pattern

Recognition* partially functions as an aesthetic that attempts to represent the complex

ideological and political processes that shape the contemporary world. In *Postmodernism*,

Jameson refers to this aesthetic as "the invention and projection of a global cognitive

mapping" (54). Drawing from Kevin Lynch's *The Image of the City*, Jameson suggests

that people's alienation within the city is partially the result of being unable to mentally

map their position in relation to the entirety of their surroundings. "Disalienation in the

traditional city," Jameson writes in his brief summarization of Lynch, "involves the

practical reconquest of a sense of place and the construction or reconstruction of an

articulated ensemble which can be retained in memory and which the individual subject

can map and remap along the moments of mobile, alternative trajectories" (51). Jameson

suggests that Lynch's theorization of the individual's cognitive map of the city might be

extrapolated to an aesthetic that would represent and reorient subjects within complex

ideological, national, and global spaces. "[C]ognitive mapping in the broader sense,"

argues Jameson, "comes to require the coordination of existential data (the empirical

position of the subject) with unlived, abstract conceptions of the geographic totality"

(52). In *Frederic Jameson: Live Theory*, Ian Buchanan writes that the representational

object of the cognitive map

> is an abstract concept whose effect is to render visible the various forces
>
> and flows that shape and constitute our world situation. To even speak of
>
> the 'world' is already to begin to produce a cognitive map because it is the
>
> articulation of a concrete 'totality' greater than what one can empirically
>
> verify. The very concept of the 'world,' at its most mundane, amounts to
>
> the recognition and registration of a mysterious set of forces and effects
>
> that I cannot see, but nonetheless know have an influence over my
>
> existence. (109)

Jameson cautiously argues that the genre of cyberpunk, referring to Gibson's early work

in particular, may encourage the formation of a new political art that could "enable a

situational representation on the part of the individual subject to that vaster and properly

unrepresentable totality which is the ensemble of society's structure as a whole" (51). In

other words, Jameson suggests that Gibson's work may express a utopian dimension

through its potential to function as a cognitive map that would enable individuals to locate

themselves in relation to broader ideological and technological frameworks in a

postmodern world. The aesthetic of the cognitive map produces representations that

enable readers to engage with the political unconscious of everyday life.

In many ways, *Pattern Recognition* functions as a kind of cognitive map, explicitly

theorizing and working through the multifaceted processes of globalization. Gibson's

novel, however, does not necessarily gesture toward, as Jameson hopes, "a

breakthrough…in which we may begin to grasp our positioning as individual and collective subjects and regain a capacity to act and struggle which is at present neutralized by our spatial as well as our social confusion" (54). *Pattern Recognition* does not depict political alternatives or utopian possibilities, but recognizes and affirms the extreme difficulty for individuals to locate themselves within the disorientation of globalization. The novel continuously emphasizes that the contemporary world is one where the speed of technology has compressed time and space, as Cayce travels between New York, Paris, Tokyo, London, and Moscow searching for the creator of the mysterious online footage. As a result of her travels between these major cities, Cayce frequently forgets where she is upon waking, also forgetting what time-zone she is in, at one point stating that she's not sure what time it is and that she must be "all on [her] own time, now" (Gibson 215). She is unable to locate herself, unable to generate her own cognitive map in relation to her constantly shifting surroundings. Traveling on her expense account from Blue Ant, a corporation that Gibson describes as "more post-geographic than multinational" (Gibson 6), Cayce never feels whole in one place, as a part of her is always left to lag behind during travel, hence the reoccurrence of the soul-delay metaphor throughout the novel. Cayce is temporally and spatially divided between different nation states, as borders between those states seem to have eroded as a result of accelerated geographical mobility.

In this way, Gibson's novel calls attention to globalization's compression of time and space, a concept that Paul Virilio has theorized for decades. Virilio examines how technologies of speed shape and change how people experience and understand the world. He calls this study of speed "dromology," which Ian James summarizes as "that body of

knowledge concerned specifically with the phenomenon of speed, or more precisely, with the way speed determines or limits the manner in which phenomena appear to us" (29). In *Open Sky*, Virilio theorizes that the compression of spatial experience is due not only to the speed of travel, but also to the growing ubiquity of "teletechnologies" or telecommunication. He argues that the "markers of position and location are disappearing one by one in the face of progress. Not progress in the acceleration of historical knowledge any more but, this time in the acceleration of geographical knowledge, the very notions of scale and physical dimension gradually losing their meaning in the face of the infinite fragmentation of points of view" (63). Virilio contends that modern technologies of travel and corporate media's ability to disseminate images and information in "real-time" destroy the experience of distance, giving the impression of instantaneous access to other geographies. "[T]he tragic thing in this temporal perspective," writes Virilio, "is that what is thereby polluted, fundamentally damaged, is no longer just the immediate future, the sense of what the weather will be like, but the space that is *already there*, the sense that the environment is missing: in a word, *the death of geography*" (65). In other words, the experience of distance narrows or disappears through high-speed mobility and "real-time" media images. For Virilio, this amounts to the loss of a sensible reality, as the speed of travel compresses spatial experience, allowing less and less for the comprehension of the distance and environment between the point of departure and the final destination.

Of course, Cayce's experience with space and time throughout *Pattern Recognition* reflects many of Virilio's concerns. The novel depicts a world where the

compression of time and space results in rapid global mobility and cultural exchange between nations. In *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Arjun Appadurai describes the result of this phenomenon of mobility as the "ethnoscape," "the landscape of persons who constitute the shifting world in which we live: tourists, immigrants, refugees, exiles, guest workers, and other moving groups and individuals" (33). Of course, Appadurai acknowledges that relatively stable and fixed communities and networks may remain within nation states, but argues that "the warp of these stabilities is everywhere shot through with the woof of human motion, as more persons and groups deal with the realities of having to move or the fantasies of wanting to move" (33-34). Gibson constantly depicts such an ethnoscape through the variety of cultures and ethnic groups that Cayce encounters. In his article on *Pattern Recognition*, Brian Jarvis outlines the cultural diversity and displacement that is always present in the novel:

> On her travels, Cayce encounters migrant workers: Polish and African and Russian antique dealers in London; an Israeli street vendor selling Chinese sunglasses in Tokyo; cabbies and limo drivers from Cambodia and the Carribean….The hordes of American and Japanese tourists on the Portobello Road remind us that transnational mobility is as integral to leisure as labour. In each location she passes through, Cayce experiences a prodigious ethnographic diversity….[T]he effect produced by Cayce's constant travel…is both stimulating and somewhat disorienting. (243-44)

This cultural diversity that Cayce encounters throughout the novel reflects the kind of postmodern disorientation that Jameson describes in his analysis of the Bonaventure

Hotel. Ultimately, Cayce finds herself embedded in a globalized "mirror-world," a term that Gibson employs to describe similar objects in different countries that have materialized through parallel processes of corporate manufacturing. An example might be cars made to drive on opposite sides of the road or the subtle differences that appear in the same consumer good that is produced in different parts of the world. In a sense, Cayce travels from one city to the next, each reflecting its branding, advertisements, and material goods back upon the other, creating a mirror effect, where it becomes difficult to discern the differences between major cities when traveling so quickly between them.

In this way, it is significant that Cayce travels between global financial centers like New York, London, Paris, and Tokyo as the novel suggests that these cities have more in common with each other as a result of global capitalism than with the cultures of their respective countries. As Cayce travels between these cities, Gibson invokes this mirror-world experience so frequently that it sometimes becomes difficult to discern where the immediate action of the novel is taking place. Part of this experience is also generated through Gibson's constant references to corporate brands and brand-name products. Jarvis actually provides a comprehensive list of all the brand names featured in the novel in order to communicate how this corporate branding "ubiquity is key to its practical invisibility" (247). Jarvis also observes that Gibson's depiction of brands suggests that the "identity of the cosmopolis may be under siege by the signifiers of transnational capital" (248). For Jameson, the constant references to brand names "conveys both instant obsolescence and the global provenance and neo-exoticism of the world market today in time and space" ("Fear and Loathing" 108). The inescapable presence of brands

in major cities contributes to Cayce's mirror-world experience as each major city supplies

the identical products of multinational corporations.

During a conversation about mirror-world objects, Cayce's hacker accomplice,

Boone Chu, predicts the loss of spatial experience and geographical compression when he

states that eventually, if the corporations of the world continue to further the processes

of globalization, there will be "no borders, pretty soon there's no mirror to be on the

other side of" (Gibson 106). *Pattern Recognition* portrays a world where boundaries

between certain nations are on the verge of non-existence, highlighting one of the main

anxieties generated by global terrorism, opening a space for readers to engage with

questions of globalization and deterritorialization that so many critics claim is lacking

from post-9/11 literature.

Cayce also suffers from anxiety or a kind of allergic reaction when immersed in

surroundings oversaturated with brand names. In "Global War, Global Capital, and the

Work of Art in William Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*," Alex Link notes that the specific

brands that actually trigger Cayce's aversion (Disney, Zippo, DKNY, Levis, Virgin, but

not Starbucks, Hello Kitty, or the various logos in Tokyo) communicate that the logos

"function in a specific context of cultural resonance" as their "most important common

quality is that the majority of the brands to which Cayce feels the greatest aversion, if not

actively engaged in the colonization of the local, share an intimate codependency with

twentieth-century warfare" (216). Link argues that *Pattern Recognition* juxtaposes the

history of twentieth-century warfare with the expansion of global capitalism as the novel

refers to events such as the Boer War (Gibson 225), the firebombing of Japan (161),

Germany's firebombing of the United Kingdom during World War II (170), the Vietnam

War, and the American Civil War (14). Link particularly focuses on Cayce's greatest fear

in terms of brand logos, Bibendum, the Michelin Man, historicizing the Michelin tire

company's connections to globalization and war. Of course, neither Link, nor Gibson,

make any simple cause and effect claims that war and conflict are a direct result of

globalization. Link's suggestion, however, is that *Pattern Recognition* deliberately aligns

the history of twentieth-century warfare with global corporate culture in order to

"constitute a provisional, tentative argument," one that is an "attempt to offer a history

that is not custodial and that recognizes contingency" (216). Perhaps the most striking

juxtapositions between war and global capitalism in *Pattern Recognition* are between the

images of the World Trade Center and the Coca Cola logo, one of the most globally

recognized brands. At one point, Cayce stares at a huge Coca Cola logo in Tokyo only to

blink and imagine "the towers burning there, framed amid image-flash and whirl" (125).

Later, while in Moscow, she visits an office space where she picks up an acrylic square,

presumably a coaster for beverages, noticing that "laser-etched in its core are the Coca-

Cola logo, a crude representation of the Twin Towers, and the words 'WE

REMEMBER'" (302). Here, I would agree with Link that *Pattern Recognition* refrains

from suggesting direct cause and effects between global capitalism and terrorism or

warfare, but the novel certainly attempts to suggest "a patterned complicity of global

capitalist expansion and global violence" (Link 216). In many ways, *Pattern Recognition*

suggests the need to examine terrorism as symptomatic of the systemic violence of global

capitalism, perhaps providing a kind of cognitive map of ideological totalities that might

otherwise elude comprehension.

In his condemnation of post-9/11 fiction, Eaglestone argues that "the West has not yet begun to understand fully what this current crisis is about, and that these texts, for all their intellectual courage, illustrate this" (22). He adds that in order "to understand better the sources of terrorism in its own terms is to begin to think about better ways of defeating it" (22). Curiously, Eaglestone does not suggest what the current crisis is about nor does his article provide any direction for how to better understand the sources of terrorism. Unsurprisingly, Eaglestone's discussion also omits any mention of Gibson's novel. In *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, Slavoj Žižek argues, "the only way to conceive of what happened on September 11 is to locate it in the context of the antagonisms of global capitalism" (49). On a similar line of thought, in *The Spirit of Terrorism*, Baudrillard writes that "[w]hen global power monopolizes the situation to this extent, when there is such a formidable condensation of all functions in the technocratic machinery, and when no alternative form of thinking is allowed, what other way is there but a *terroristic situational transfer?* It was the system itself which created the objective conditions for this brutal retaliation" (8-9). Baudrillard argues that terrorism is the inevitable product of neoliberal market economies and globalization. For Baudrillard, terrorism is the counterpart to globalization; it is "globalization battling against itself" (11). Douglas Kellner describes this as "the objective ambiguity of globalization," where global mobility "both brings people together and brings them into conflict…creates social interaction and inclusion as well as hostilities and exclusions, and…potentially tears regions and the world apart while attempting to pull things

together" (42). Indeed, a number of scholars have controversially argued that the 9/11 attacks were, to some degree, a product of global inequality as a consequence of global capitalism's oppressive and exploitative tendencies (Amanat; Barber; Brinkerhoff et al; Jacquard; Steger; Stern). The Bush Administation's reluctance to analyze systems of power and globalization after the attacks, its infamous insistence that civilians should carry on with "business as usual" and "go shopping," suggest the U.S. government's attempt to repress or ignore any role that the violence of global capitalism might play in enabling or fostering global terrorism.

In terms of *Pattern Recognition*, however, as Link suggests, Gibson does not necessarily posit globalization as the direct cause of terrorism, but the novel's depiction of global mobility, corporate branding, and the kind of ethnoscape that Appadurai describes, suggests a world that may easily produce cultural conflict, including terrorist violence, through the influence and processes of global capitalism. Gibson's recent fiction encourages readers to rethink globalization and its relationship to violence. Further, *Pattern Recognition*'s depiction of globalization foregrounds global capitalism's media network and communication systems as tools that partially enable terrorism. Steger writes that Bin Laden, for example, may have denounced the destructive forces of globalization, "but the smooth operation of his entire organization was entirely dependant on information and communication technology developed in the globalizing decades of the waning 20th century" (4). The media networks of global capitalism disseminate and reproduce the terror of terrorism through the spectacle of images, offering these images to viewers as commodities, a process of which is at constant play in *Pattern Recognition* in

Gibson's depiction of the F:F:F's interaction with the footage.

Gibson also symbolizes post-9/11 anxieties of globalization through the loss of Cayce's father, Win Pollard, a former Cold War security expert, associate of the CIA, and "evaluator and improver of physical security for American embassies worldwide" (44). As Cayce searches for the creator of the mysterious footage, she frequently thinks of her father, Win, whose disappearance at the site of trauma in Lower Manhattan is no coincidence in the context of signification within the novel. Win's disappearance embodies the national sense of insecurity and paranoia in post-9/11 America, the loss of symbolic figures of protection. Baudrillard refers to the Twin Towers as "image[s] of banking and finance" (41), material symbols of wealth, stability, security, and power. Their collapse consequently generated widespread feelings of fear, insecurity, instability, and emasculation. Faludi describes the psychological affect of the terrorist attacks on America's collective sense of security:

> The intrusions of September 11 broke the dead bolt on our protective myth, the illusion that we are masters of our own security, that our might makes our homeland impregnable, that our families are safe in the bowers of their communities and our women and children safe in the arms of men. The events of that morning told us that we could not depend on our protectors…in short, that the entire edifice of American security had failed to provide a shield. (12)

As Win is both a father and CIA operative, his disappearance signifies the destruction of this national myth of protection: the inability of fathers to protect their children and of

the American government to protect its people. When Cayce remembers the words of her mother, this point becomes clear: "Her mother had once said that when the second plane hit, Win's chagrin, his personal and professional mortification at this having happened, at the perimeter having been so easily, so terribly breached, would have been such that he might simply have ceased, in protest, to exist" (Gibson 351). Win ceases to exist at the impact of the second plane as this plane's impact signifies the certainty of the attacks; the crash of the second plane indicated that the first plane crash was not an accident. Haslam writes, "[t]he fact that Cayce's father, the CIA Cold War spy, goes missing [the morning of September 11] is representative…of the way in which the past of America's global politics – like the fight against communism that people like 'Win' Pollard supposedly 'won' for the U.S. – was missing in narrations of 9/11" (96). For Cayce's mother, Win's personal mortification at being unable to protect his family and professional mortification at being unable to protect his country is what dissolves his existence. As Haslam indicates, American protective myths went missing on 9/11, much like Cayce's father, Win. In "The Deterritorialization of American Literature," Paul Giles describes this realization of vulnerable borders and permeable boundaries in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks:

> Whereas for most Americans the Second World War and the subsequent Cold War took place in alien locations, the distant world of European battlefields or the shadowy realm of spies coming in from the cold, the most uncomfortable thing about 9/11 was the way it demonstrated how borders separating the domestic from the foreign can no longer be so easily

policed or indeed, even identified….The most powerful impact of 9/11

might thus best be understood not in terms of how it appeared as an

entirely unexpected event, a bolt from the blue, but, on the contrary, how

it resonated as a symbolic culmination of the various kinds of

deterritorializing forces that had been gathering pace since the Reagan

years. (51)

Pattern Recognition reflects this loss of protective borders through symbolic means, as

Cayce is constantly paranoid of being monitored. She fears intruders entering her

apartment, worries that spies are tapping her phones and viewing her emails. Cayce's

paranoia leads her to realize that the use of a personal computer cannot "ever really [be]

private anymore" (Gibson 266). Although it turns out she has good reason to suspect

these intrusions of privacy, Cayce's paranoia and the repeated break-ins to her apartment

also point to a common theme in post-9/11 narratives: the inability for characters to feel

safe and secure in their homes.

Eaglestone observes that break-ins or home invasions are a common theme in

post-9/11 literature where "the break up of the world order" is figured as "a significant

break-in to a home" ("The Age" 19). Even though Cayce remembers her father's words to

"secure the perimeter" (Gibson 44), intruders continue to break into her apartment

regularly. Each intrusion emphasizes Win's disappearance as representative of the

absence of both masculine and governmental protective myths in a post-9/11 world as

well as the loss of secure borders. Faludi traces this sense of domestic insecurity to the

majority of President Bush's speeches made after 9/11, which rationalize that the largest

threat of terrorism is not to "commercial and governmental hubs but to [the American] domestic hearth….as if the hijackers had aimed their planes not at office towers and government buildings but at the white picket fences of the American domicile" (5). Similarly, Giles argues that the Bush administration's rhetoric of "homeland security," turns the home into a "homeland," moving "from a zone in which domestic comforts and protection could be taken for granted to one in which they had to be anxiously and self-consciously guarded; in that sense, the very phrase, 'homeland security' is almost a contradiction in terms, since it evokes the very insecurity it is itself designed to assuage" (51). In other words, whereas most civilians would be as safe in their homes as they were before the attacks, the Bush Administration's rhetoric produces a culture of paranoia as the state invokes a responsibility to defend individual American homes. In this respect, the intrusions in *Pattern Recognition* denote the terrorist breach in national security, anxieties of domestic insecurity, and the realization of permeable borders and boundaries after September 11, 2001.

Technology, Conspiracy Theories, and Communicative Capitalism

Pattern Recognition not only depicts rapid mobility and corporate ubiquity as part of globalization in the physical world, but also figures "real time" media and the virtual realm of Internet communication as part of global capitalism's framework. The novel's portrayal of online communication networks is primarily framed through Cayce's interaction with a global community of message board users over the Footage Fetish Forum (F:F:F), a website dedicated to debate and discussion of the segments of footage

with which they are fascinated. Gibson actually writes large portions of the novel in epistolary form, including various email exchanges and message board conversations between characters. Interestingly, Cayce feels no connection to physical space as a result of globalization, but she does feel a sense of place in the virtual world through the message board community: "It is a way now, approximately, of being at home. The forum has become one of the most consistent places in her life, like a familiar café that exists somehow outside of geography and beyond time zones" (4). As Cayce and the global community of F:F:F users continually debate the footage, try to discover its secrets, and uncover new segments and information in hopes that they will reveal a deeper conspiracy, they fail to understand that they are engaged in the practice of "communicative capitalism," a process whereby online social interactions contribute to significant distortions and assemblages of wealth through their capitalization and commoditization. I contend that Gibson's portrayal of the F:F:F partially functions as a harsh critique of online political debates that emerged in the wake of September 11, 2001. Gibson's portrayal of this Internet forum denotes conspiracy theories that were circulating through Internet message boards and blogs shortly after the terrorist attacks. This portrayal of online technology calls attention to the way that Internet communication presents itself as inherently democratic and progressive while producing a public of suspicious subjects that participate in the logic of conspiracy theory that is so fundamental to the framework of communicative capitalism.

By early 2002, while Gibson was still working on *Pattern Recognition*, many conspiracy theories were already in circulation. Jack Z. Bratich writes, "9/11 alternative

conspiracy accounts began to circulate soon after the attacks, as did conspiracy panics"

(131). The majority of these conspiracy theories first began online through message

boards and relatively basic "web logs," or what would later become known as "blogs." It

is important to note that most online social networking platforms or "Web 2.0" sites such

as Facebook, Flickr, Tumblr, Twitter, various "wikis" (including Wikipedia), and

YouTube were not in existence at the time of *Pattern Recognition*'s publication. Message

boards, an early Internet technology developed from even earlier online bulletin board

network systems of the 1970s, and blogs, which emerged with platforms like LiveJournal

and Blogger in 1999, became the primary places of conspiracy theory debate and

discussion in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. In fact, "[m]ore than one observer," Melnick

writes, "has noted that the 'birth of the blog' coincided with 9/11" and that "a consensus

has developed that the events of 9/11 contributed to the rapid development of Web 2.0 in

the early twenty-first century" (13). Sharon Meraz writes that "blogs on Web technology

development were the overwhelming majority of early blogs" and "[b]efore blogging

became popular in 2001, the practice of blogging existed without a formal name among the

tech savvy as a way to discuss new developments in technology" (150). In the aftermath

of 9/11, however, blog platforms became hugely popular as a service, especially for the

purposes of reporting news and debating politics.

    Melnick writes that the "blogosphere" was transformed from a tech savvy news

network focussed on emerging computer gadgets into "a kind of wireless wire service, an

undefined, anarchic first-responder news and opinion service" (13). Although these blogs

varied widely in their content and political alliances, the common narrative expressed in

the blogosphere was one of general distrust in mainstream media networks. Stuart Allan

writes, for example, that the majority of these blogs placed emphasis "on documenting

sufficient evidence to demonstrate the basis for dissatisfaction with what they deemed to

be the apparent biases of the mainstream news coverage of the ensuing conflict in [the

Middle East]" (107). In *Terror Post-9/11 and the Media*, David Altheide describes

blogging as a practice that contributed to the "counter-narratives" of 9/11, which most

often perceive the mainstream news media with "[m]istrust and charges of deceit, if not

conspiracy" (41). Similarly, Philip Hammon suggests that the "proliferation of available

news and comment means that we are less likely simply to accept the truthfulness of any

single account" and that blogging, as a news reporting culture, "centrally involves

challenging, satirizing and criticizing mainstream news" (64). Mark Fenster observes that,

within months after 9/11, "enough conspiracy theories were in circulation on the Internet

that journalists and commentators began to express their concern about them and about

those who believed them. Talk radio and cable access and satellite television shows

popularized theories" (246). Although the 9/11 Truth Movement, an international group

of activists that demands government transparency concerning the events of 9/11, would

not fully emerge as a more official organization until 2004, conspiracy theories spread

widely through websites, blogs, and message boards almost immediately after the terrorist

attacks.

Gibson's representation of the footage and the debates surrounding it denote the

circulation of conspiracy theories pertaining to the 9/11 attacks. I contend that the F:F:F

forum debates signify conspiracy theories that emerged shortly after 9/11. Throughout

Pattern Recognition, Gibson constantly invokes conspiracy theories, denoting those that appeared pertaining to the 9/11 attacks. Cayce, for example, refers to conspiracy theories and her father's interpretations of conspiracies. She often worries that she and the F:F:F group may have a misconstrued understanding of the footage, one that she describes as "apophenia." Cayce recounts her father's explanation of apophenia as "the spontaneous perception of connections and meaningfulness in unrelated things" and as evident when an individual perceives each thing "as part of an overarching pattern of conspiracy" (Gibson 115, 294). Cayce characterizes conspiracy theorists as those who experience apophenia, as those who look for patterns and coincidences in order to draw certain conclusions.[8] Ultimately, Gibson's portrayal of Cayce and the F:F:F group closely aligns with Fenster's outline of the key characteristics of modern narratives of conspiracy:

> Each concerns an alleged truth hidden by and damaging to an existing order. Each presents a narrative of heroic investigation – an intrepid investigative reporter is punished for uncovering the truth [or] the master interpreters of symbols and codes succeed in discovering and preserving the historical truth in the other. And at the bottom, each suggests that although the underlying truth of conspiracy remains hidden to the general public, anyone with enough fortitude and intelligence can find and properly interpret the evidence that the conspiracy makes available. (7-8)

While *Pattern Recognition* obviously deviates from some of these characteristics, Gibson

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[8] Scholars often note the influence of Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* on Gibson's representation of conspiracy throughout *Pattern Recognition*.

certainly relies on elements of conspiracy to form the novel's narrative. Cayce appears as the "investigative" hero, a "master interpreter of symbols and codes" in her ability to predict marketing trends and patterns, as she searches to "uncover the truth" about the mysterious footage. Further, the majority of 9/11 conspiracy theories were, and still are, widely circulated over Internet forums, videos, and discussion boards, much like the F:F:F group's circulation of theories pertaining to the mysterious footage.

It might be useful to draw a comparison, here, between Dean's understanding of the 9/11TM and Gibson's portrayal of the F:F:F in order to unravel some of the inconsistencies with these representations of communicative capitalism. In Gibson's novel, the F:F:F forum appears political and democratic, but finally serves no political function, as the users constantly search to uncover the secrets of the footage, reflecting the ideological framework that communicative capitalism supports. In *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, Dean characterizes the 9/11TM as a project of depoliticization even as it outlines a variety of clear political objectives:

> From the standpoint of the conspiracy theories, 9/11 is the founding
> obscenity or crime that initiates a new order. The primary political task is
> dissolving this order. Yet at this point, the 9/11 conspiracy theories come
> up against their fundamental fantasy – the subjects or, in their words,
> 'sheeple,' who fail to share their certainty. And here they overlap with the
> official discourse on 9/11….The gap between official and unofficial
> accounts of events can't be filled in with a set of facts. It's more
> fundamental, an indication of the larger decline of symbolic efficiency,

diminution of conditions of credibility, and change in the status of knowing

and knowledge. As an event that can be signified, it's never fully verified

precisely because there is no external limit to it. The official and unofficial

accounts thus perpetually circle around a void that cannot be filled,

deriving their enjoyment from the circuit of drive. (171-72)

For all of the 9/11TM's online efforts to disseminate their political perspective, Dean

sees these efforts only as examples of communicative capitalism, efforts that merely

foreclose progressive politics. For Dean, the 9/11TM's online blogs, videos, and

discussion groups only enable users to "feel" political without actually resulting in any

kind of influential political activism. She argues that as a conspiracy theorist group, the

9/11TM also lacks political credibility and can only serve to further the agenda of the

politics it opposes as the group continually contributes to communicative capitalism in

various forms of online exchange.

     In a brief summary of how individuals engage with online technologies in everyday

life, Dean summarizes the crux of her argument at the end of her essay, "Communicative

Capitalism: Circulation and the Foreclosure of Politics":

> [b]usy people can think they are active – the technology will think for
>
> them, alleviating their guilt while assuring that nothing will change too
>
> much. The responsive, relatively democratic virtual community won't
>
> place too many (actually any) demands on them, fully aware that its
>
> democracy is the democracy of communicative capitalism – opinions will
>
> circulate, views will be expressed, information will be accessed. By sending

an email, signing a petition, responding to an article on a blog, people can

feel political. And that feeling feeds communicative capitalism so far as it

leaves behind the time-consuming, incremental, and risky efforts of

politics. (70)

Dean argues that the Internet has become a technological fetish, one that allows people to

constantly "feel" political, to "feel" as though their voices are being heard, when in

actuality, "facts and opinions, images and reactions circulate in a massive stream of

content, losing their specificity and merging with and into the data flow. Any given

message is thus a contribution to this ever-circulating content….[A] constitutive feature

of communicative capitalism is precisely this morphing of message into contribution"

("Communicative" 58). Reflecting Dean's assessment of online communication, Cayce

describes the F:F:F's contributions to communicative capitalism in its "hectic speed, and

the brevity of the lines in the thread, plus the feeling that everyone is talking at once, at

counter-purposes" (Gibson 4). *Pattern Recognition* contains numerous sections where

correspondences between F:F:F members are printed in the format of message board

posts and emails. The forum users constantly speculate the significance of the footage,

forming online allegiances with some users over others.

Jameson observes that the F:F:F users who endlessly debate and analyze the

footage appear as "political sect[s]" ("Fear and Loathing" 111). Jameson writes that these

sects possess an anxiety that "[the footage] will go public: that CNN will get wind of this

interesting development; that the footage or the completed film, the identified and

reconstructed work of art, will become, as they say, the patrimony of mankind, or in

other words just another commodity" (111). This becomes a distinction between the F:F:F users and groups like the 9/11TM. Where the F:F:F users want to keep the footage and its "truth" secret or private within the circle of the online group, the 9/11 conspiracy groups wish to recruit as many new members as possible, making their information easily available to the public. The 9/11 conspiracy theorist groups, however, are similarly exclusive. Those who accept and believe that there are hidden government "truths" about 9/11 become part of an exclusive online community. In this way, the F:F:F refers to the online communities that seek to uncover the "truth" of 9/11. The online forum allows users to exchange their ideas and interpretations of the footage in a democratic fashion. These users also distinguish themselves politically as either Progressives or Completists, those who deem the footage to be a work in progress and those who view it as a previously completed work, one that surfaces in disordered fragments. 9/11 conspiracy groups also distinguish themselves in two different groups: LIHOP (Let it happen on purpose) and MIHOP (Made it happen on purpose) (Fenster 342-43). These two groups share a common goal in gaining more government transparency or access to the "truth" while disagreeing on whether or not the US government purposefully "let" or "made" the events of 9/11 happen. Similarly, the F:F:F users share a common goal in uncovering the "truth" about the footage, but disagree on how to interpret it.

Gibson's portrayal of the F:F:F group as conspiracy theorists fully supports Dean's characterization of "communicative capitalism." Both Gibson and Dean separately, but similarly, depict the possibility of political activism through new Internet technology outside of the virtuality of communicative capitalism as futile and unlikely.

Any of Gibson's allusions to post-9/11 conspiracy groups are always entrenched in communicative capitalism as Dean describes it. One of the fundamental components to Dean's theory of communicative capitalism is her assertion that the structure of online information and communication technologies fuels the public's belief in secrecy and the desire to reveal secrets. She argues that contemporary suspicions of government, the idea that secrets are being withheld from the public, is deeply connected with the way users engage with online technology:

> The intense circulation of information in the networks of contemporary technoculture is trapped in a weird matrix: at just that moment when everything seems fully public, the media pulses with invocations of the secret. Secrets appear as markers of vulnerability. They stand in for that which is threatened by new technologies, providing a file for our anxieties about the mysteries of digital life: just what can really be done these days? *Corporations trade in our secrets. Surveillance cameras capture them. The government accesses them.* Secrets appear as lures, enticing us as ever-present objects of desire….*Somebody out there knows.* (1)

Here, Dean communicates the paradoxical sensibility that the Internet produces in the public. On one hand, the Internet provides the democratic illusion that everyone has access to information and that all information is freely available online. On the other hand, the Internet generates the suspicion that information is constantly being withheld from the public, covered up, and hidden from sight in order to conceal various conspiracies:

As the global networks of the information age become increasingly

entangled, they ever more successfully reproduce the suspicious

subjectivities posited by publicity as a system of distrust. Many of us are

overwhelmed and undermined by an all-pervasive uncertainty. Wars in

one place seem diversions from the *real* wars going on elsewhere.

Disclosures may really be concealments. Far from passively consuming

the virtually entertaining spectacles of integrated media, we come to

suspect that something is going on behind the screens. What we see is not

what we get. The truth may not be out there, but something, or someone,

is. Accompanying our increasing suspicions are seemingly bottomless vats

of information, endless paths of evidence. (47)

Online technologies often present themselves as serving democratic ideals of universal

access, freedom to information, and open exchanges of debate and discussion. "In

communicative capitalism," writes Dean, "what has been heralded as central to

enlightenment ideals of democracy takes material form in new technologies" (3). She

argues that new media, particularly the Internet and its technologies of global

communication, generate the illusion of a democratic public, a public that declares the

right to freedom of information. As the binary of publicity, however, secrecy suggests

that information has been hidden from public access. While the Internet, for example,

enables users to access an endless flow of information, giving the illusion of democracy

through ideals surrounding freedom of information, it simultaneously produces a

paranoid public that is preoccupied with uncovering secrecy. The more information there

is, the more this data flow gives the impression that there is always more to find, more to

uncover. Secrets, however, are immaterial; they can take on any form:

> The secret is a form that can be filled in by all sorts of contents and
> fantasies – economic secrets, military secrets, sexual secrets, secrets to
> power, wealth, and immortality. Thus what is at stake is not content but
> connection, the relationship within and between communities held
> together and apart within a matrix of secrecy and publicity. The secret
> promises that a democratic public is within reach – as soon as everything
> is known. All that is necessary to realize the ideal of the public is to
> uncover these secrets, to bring them to light. (Dean 10)

In light of the norms of public information that new technologies produce, secrets appear

as the exception. Dean argues that this, of course, gives the secret its impression of

mystery and aura of importance, creating the desire to have it uncovered. Ultimately, the

secret "presupposes a subject that desires, discovers, and knows, a subject from which

nothing should be withheld. The public as a subject with a right to know is thus an effect

of the injunction to reveal" (Dean 10-11). In light of Dean's assessment of

communicative capitalism, Gibson's title begins to make sense. The constant flow of

online information forces users to become skilled in what Marshall McLuhan refers to as

"pattern recognition," a strategy to cope with the rapid acceleration of media, the ability

to discern patterns and assign meaning to them.

Dean argues that "the practices of searching, clicking, and linking in

technoculture turn us all into conspiracy theorists, producing, as it were, suspicious

subjects who trust no one because the technologies believe for us….In technoculture, as

in conspiracy theory, we make the connections" (48-49). In contemporary technoculture,

users are perpetually distracted with the secret, with the endless search for information online without questioning the structure of technoculture's ideology. Therefore, although new technologies appear democratically progressive in many ways, they actually serve global capitalism, distracting from the reality that equal access, inclusion, and open forums for discussion are not available to most people of the world.

In *Pattern Recognition*, the secret, of course, is the "truth" of the footage, the knowledge of its origin. Through her various online contacts, Cayce is finally able to locate Stella and her twin sister, Nora, the creator of the viral footage. Here, an obvious allegorical connection becomes clear as their initials, N and S, refer to the North and South World Trade Center towers. Cayce learns that Nora and Stella are both recovering from the trauma of their parents' death as a result of a bomb explosion. A piece of shrapnel from the bomb remains embedded in Nora's brain. The penetration of the T-shaped object into Nora's head is also representative of the penetration of planes (also T-shaped objects) into the Twin Towers. Nora is only able to communicate through the creation of the footage that Stella later disseminates online. She works through the trauma of her parents' death by editing surveillance footage from CCTV cameras, generating the artistic fragments that the F:F:F discusses. In a sense, Nora symbolizes the semiotic collapse that both Derrida and Baudrillard describe, the struggle for authors and artists to use language due to its supposed inadequacy to represent or interpret trauma after 9/11. Her footage initially seems to gesture at a new artistic form that may begin to fill the linguistic void created by the terrorist attacks.

Nora's trauma is absorbed and translated through the footage, rendered into

images, and although these fragmented images are not produced for financial gain, they hold the potential for enormous profits and are distributed and exchanged as a kind of commodity, generated and sent electronically to online consumers across the globe. While Nora's footage initially seems to materialize as a new art form that might cognitively map the disorientation of globalization, it ultimately becomes part of Bigend's broader marketing project through communicative capitalism. Nora's production of the footage also mirrors Baudrillard's description of the electronic images that absorb the 9/11 events. Baudrillard writes, "[t]he role of images is highly ambiguous. For at the same time as they exalt the event, they also take it hostage. They serve to multiply it to infinity and, at the same time, they are a diversion and a neutralization….The image consumes the event, in the sense that it absorbs it and offers it for consumption" (Baudrillard 27). Nora's footage, like the events of 9/11, is disseminated electronically and consumed by a global community of viewers. Her images are also fragmented and without order or context. The forum users rearrange the footage in an attempt to find meaning, but ultimately, much like Derrida's conceptualization of the media images of 9/11, the footage is open and indeterminable. Kelly Oliver writes, "[t]he urgency of [television and the Internet] violently rips images out of context and fixes them in an eternal moment, the perpetual present, that collapses past, present, and future into one media moment" (99). This directly relates to the function of Nora's footage, its lack of a specifically defined temporal context, but also to Gibson's description of Cayce's experience on the morning of September 11.

At one point, Cayce's memories of her father bring her to recall the first moment

she saw the media images of the terrorist attacks on television:

> The television is on, CNN, volume up….Cayce and the German designer
> will watch the towers burn, and eventually fall, and though she will know
> she must have seen people jumping, falling, there will be no memory of it.
> It will be like watching one of her own dreams on television. Some vast and
> deeply personal insult to any ordinary notion of interiority. An experience
> outside of culture. (Gibson 137)

Cayce's uncanny experience, feeling as though she is watching her own dreams on television, might be attributed to the fact that "we have dreamt of this event…everyone without exception has dreamt of it….The countless disaster movies bear witness to this fantasy" (Baudrillard 5-7). Additionally, Haslam writes that Cayce's memory of watching the Twin Towers collapse "combine[s] the popular, the public, and the personal, erasing their differences in a masking of meaning" (95). In other words, Gibson portrays 9/11 as an event "outside of culture" as does Dori Laub in his argument that there is not necessarily a singular or collective, cultural account of the 9/11 terrorist attacks: "no unified voice has emerged to challenge, dispute, and contradict the radically divergent, often mutually exclusive, versions of reality that are being spouted from different corners of the earth. It is as though there is no truth and no sense of conviction, a collective uncertainty regarding the veracity of the truth and one's own experience" (212-13). Laub sees 9/11 as a replacement of a cultural or national narrative with a multitude of overlapping voices and debates from around the world. Similarly, for Gibson, 9/11 is fragmented by multiple media images, which absorb its context, offering the resulting

commodities to viewers, much like Nora's footage offers an ongoing supply of decontextualized fragments for the consumption of online viewers.

Global media's ability to spread information in real time across multiple nations simultaneously is precisely why Bigend wants Cayce to find the maker of the footage. He believes the footage's lack of context, its absence of historical and geographical specificity, which "has a way of cutting across boundaries, transgressing the accustomed order of things" (20), might be extraordinarily valuable for his business in corporate marketing. The footage's "timelessness," its "absence of stylistic cues" (23), and lack of a geographical context becomes its potential for global corporate branding and viral advertising. "My passion is marketing, advertising, media strategy," Bigend tells Cayce, "and when I first discovered the footage, that is what responded in me. I saw attention focused daily on a product that may not even exist….The most brilliant marketing ploy of this very young century" (Gibson 65). Additional to its potential for marketing, the characteristics of Nora's footage and the F:F:F forum debates resemble "the multiplicity of voices," the lack of a "unified voice," and the various "versions of reality…spouted from different corners of the earth" (212) that Laub locates in 9/11 media images after the terrorist attacks. The members never reach a consensus about the footage, but only fuel the unending process of online social exchange. Ultimately, the symbolic meaning of the footage is multifarious and overdetermined, which is why it so easily enables the conspiracy theories of the F:F:F, but it nonetheless conveys the interconnected relationship between global capitalism, paranoia, media narratives, and online technologies.

Online Technology and the Misrepresentation of Political Possibilities

Dean argues that because so much is deemed to be political on the virtual space of the Internet, debates like the ones that take place between Cayce and the forum users effectively contribute to a process of depoliticization. The rapid circulation of messages on the footage forum allows Cayce and the users to feel as though they are engaged in a kind of political immediacy, when in actuality, their messages are more significantly absorbed as "part of a circulating data stream" (Dean, "Communicative" 58). Dean writes, "the political purchase of the technological fetish is given in advance; it is immediate, presumed, understood. File sharing *is* political. A website *is* political. Blogging *is* political. But this very immediacy rests on something else, on a prior exclusion. And what is excluded is the possibility of politicization proper" (Dean, "Communicative" 65). Throughout *Pattern Recognition*, the forum users continuously debate the "meaning" of the footage, its potential author/creator, and its possible origins. The footage forum provides a venue for the users to discuss and debate the significance of the footage, providing the illusion for each user that they are making some meaningful political contribution to their respective camp, Progressive or Completist. Although Cayce and the online community of forum users may admire the illusion that the footage exists apart from the capitalist world of commoditization and marketing, their pseudo-political debates on the footage forum only function to strengthen its usefulness as a marketing tool for the Blue Ant Corporation. Cayce and other forum users see the footage as "a mastery of anti-productization, wherein the two characters [in the fragments] are rendered

completely context-less, outside of history" (Haslam 94). The footage's lack of historical

or cultural signifiers, its supposed existence outside of commercialism, is what most

fascinates the F:F:F community.

But Gibson's portrayal of the way participants utilize the online technology of

the forum to debate the meaning of the footage is effectively counterproductive to their

appreciation of the footage's supposed "purity" outside of capitalism. Jameson writes

that the footage "is an epoch of rest, an escape from the noisy commodities themselves"

(114), but Gibson's portrayal of the forum's function is ultimately contradictory to this

notion as it exists as a part of global capitalism. Essentially, the F:F:F forum becomes a

control group in Bigend's capitalist experiment involving the footage, its exchange, and the

debates surrounding it. In Dean's theorization of communicative capitalism, the exchange

of messages is equivalent to the exchange of commodities. Both the message and the

commodity are important in "their economic function, their role in the capitalist

exchange" (Dean, "Communicative" 59). Therefore, the forum allows users to exchange

and spread the fragments of footage and their messages as commodities available for

consumption, presumably benefiting Bigend's corporate motives and continuously

fuelling the network of communicative capitalism as Dean defines it. Ultimately, then,

Gibson's representation of Nora's footage and the F:F:F forum debates portray the

electronic image's ability to absorb an event and render it as a commodity for circulation

in the network of communicative capitalism in a post-9/11 world.

Although *Pattern Recognition* does not present any direct depoliticized outcome

as a result of the F:F:F users' contributions to communicative capitalism, the novel does

portray

> [i]deals of access, inclusion, discussion and participation [that] come to be
>
> realized in and through expansions, intensifications, and interconnections
>
> of global telecommunications. But instead of leading to more equitable
>
> distributions of wealth and influence, instead of enabling the emergence of
>
> a richer variety in modes of living and practices of freedom, the deluge of
>
> screens and spectacles undermines…opportunity and efficacy for most of
>
> the world's peoples. (Dean, "Communicative" 55)

While Gibson constantly presents the inequity of global capitalism throughout *Pattern Recognition* in the depiction of homeless people (70, 88, 146) and Asian factory workers (12), the most striking example of the inequity of communicative capitalism appears at the end of the novel when Bigend describes his prison farm which is responsible for rendering Nora's footage. Cayce and the users of the forum remain privileged as they have the freedom to electronically debate, consume, and exchange Nora's footage. Gibson communicates, however, that this freedom comes at the expense of others, in this case, prisoners who are denied participation in the freedom of online communication, as they are not permitted the use of phones or the Internet (329), earning a miniscule wage, while Bigend presumably profits enormously from their work. Baudrillard writes that the Twin Towers "left us a symbol of their omnipotence, [they] have become, by their absence, the symbol of the possible disappearance of that omnipotence – which is perhaps an even more potent symbol. Whatever becomes of that global omnipotence, it will have been destroyed here for a moment" (47-48). Gibson's representation of communicative

capitalism suggests that the omnipotence of global capitalism is not destroyed at all, but rather continues to prosper in spite of the absence of the Twin Towers.

This representation, however, at least partially misrepresents the political possibilities of new online technologies. Both Gibson's portrayal of the F:F:F users and Dean's characterization of the 9/11TM may misconstrue Internet technologies as devices that contribute to a foreclosure of politics. For Dean, "real" or actual progressive activism would "contribute to the formation of political solidarities with more duration....politics in the sense of working to change current conditions may well require breaking with and through the fantasies attaching us to communicative capitalism" ("Communicative" 71). What Dean advocates is not entirely clear, but it seems that some kind of activism involving, in her words, "time-consuming, incremental, and risky efforts" outside of Internet technology (47). But Gibson and Dean similarly fail to acknowledge or nuance the political potential of Internet technologies and their ability to create the kind of "on-the-ground" activism that Dean seems to advocate. Dean's conceptualization of communicative capitalism seems to suggest that Internet activism and "real" or non-virtual activism are mutually exclusive concepts. While Gibson denotes the 9/11TM in his portrayal of the F:F:F users, Dean explicitly discusses this movement as one that contributes to communicative capitalism. Although the secret of the footage is finally revealed when Cayce discovers Stella and Nora, the business partnership that Gibson implies between Bigend and the twin sisters' politically powerful uncle, Volokov, suggests that users of online technology are simply serving the exploitative tendencies of global capitalism. For both Dean and Gibson, it is not the exposure of the secret, but the

framework of global capitalism that needs to be reassessed in the name of progressive politics.

Although the ways Gibson and Dean formulate the secret as a political concept may be accurate, I suggest briefly, here, that the 9/11TM may be taken up as an example that at least partially contradicts understandings of new Internet technologies as contributors to the foreclosure of progressive politics. Gibson wrote *Pattern Recognition* alongside the emergence of 9/11 conspiracy theories, but the novel was published before the 9/11TM became an organized "movement" between 2004 and 2005. Of course, the 9/11TM used and continues to use Internet technology, blogs, videos, and other electronically viral means to spread their political agenda, the most notable viral video being the film, *Loose Change*. In this sense, the 9/11TM does contribute to communicative capitalism. The 9/11TM heavily relies upon Web 2.0 and its development as an organization is "inconceivable without the growth of YouTube, Google video, internet message boards, and political blogging and wikis" (Melnick 43). What both Dean and Gibson underestimate or fail to nuance, however, is the activist's ability to utilize Internet technology for political means that manifests offline in the physical world.

In *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, for example, Dean claims that the 9/11TM's political credibility as a group of conspiracy theorists precludes it from being influential in any progressively political sense (160). Contrary to Dean's notion, Fenster's *Conspiracy Theories* reveals many correlations between the 9/11TM's activism and American public opinion polls, the Bush administration's policies, and various government responses to the 9/11 events. Fenster sees the American public's doubt in its

government, the formation of the 9/11 Commission, and the publication of the *9/11*

Commission Report as political consequences partly due to the activism of the 9/11TM.

Further, Bratich summarizes the 9/11TM's offline activity in New York through 2005:

> Their activities included street protests (including a protest on 9/11/05 at
>
> the *New York Times* offices and vocal presence at Ground Zero around the
>
> fifth anniversary), coordinated letter-writing campaigns, calling in to radio
>
> talk shows, passing out literature at events, and maintaining the mobile
>
> local infoshop (at Ground Zero). Beginning in summer 2005, a weekly
>
> public presentation/meeting was held at St. Mark's Church in the East
>
> Village. (133)

This activism (often organized online) appears to be what Dean calls for when she writes

about the need for more "time-consuming, incremental, and risky efforts" on behalf of

political activists. The 9/11TM's activities are always reliant upon technology, but this

does not simply preclude the organization from having a political impact. Bratich writes

that the 9/11TM is a movement where "[s]ome desire to spread couternarratives widely –

seeking to influence mass-media organizations to broadcast their message…[and] [o]thers

seek to build a movement though a variety of grassroots activities, media, and spaces. In

2006, the newest phase of the movement was called a 'citizen's countercoup,' embodying

this ambivalence between bottom-up and vanguardist forms of organizing (134). The

9/11TM utilizes new technologies in order to supplement or organize grassroots or "on-

the-ground" forms of activism, contrary to Gibson's denotation of 9/11 conspiracy

theorist groups as a collective of superficially political message board users in his

portrayal of the F:F:F. Christopher Sharrett sees the 9/11TM as a "revival of sixties-style popular resistance," but with the political advantage of new technologies, which were obviously not available to many previous activist organizations:

> The 9/11 Truth Movement, with its abundant information via videos, Internet, and books, is occurring at the same moment that numerous antiwar and social justice organizations respond to the miseries imposed by the Bush era, giving the Movement a complexion and context never enjoyed by the research movements of the past….The 9/11 activists and documentarians, with their deft proficiency with the new media, have the potential to accomplish goals lost on previous generations. (n. pag.)

Fenster writes that the 9/11TM uses its website to connect "its global audience with locally situated communities by posting how-to guides for creating local 'community hubs' of truth activists. At the level of the community 'hub,' the Internet meets and enables local and regional activism, melding the two seemingly disparate levels of communication and political activism" (248). The 9/11TM's use of Internet technologies, then, demonstrates a clear contradiction within Gibson's representation of the F:F:F and Dean's characterization of 9/11 conspiracy theorists, revealing their portrayals of Internet activists as partially flawed.

Pattern Recognition reflects the depoliticization of communicative capitalism as Dean describes it and provides a harsh critique of Internet technology, the use of digital images, and 9/11 conspiracy theorists, such as the 9/11TM. As I've said, many scholars and critics describe Gibson's work as prophetic, claiming that he "envisioned the internet

before it existed and reality TV before it existed" (Parker 237), but in retrospect, *Pattern Recognition*'s critique of new technology and its users seems to be less prophetic and more temporally located in suspicion regarding the events of 9/11.

Perhaps Gibson's negative depiction of new technology is a reaction to the widespread reports that cite the Al-Qaeda's Internet use as an essential component of the organization's ability to carry out the 9/11 attacks. For instance, the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks notes in the *9/11 Commission Report* that the terrorists relied upon Internet technology in order to plan the attacks:

> Terrorists…have benefited from…[the] rapid development of communications technologies. They simply could buy off the shelf and harvest the products of a $3 trillion a year telecommunications industry. They could acquire without great expense communications devices that were varied, global, instantaneous, complex, and encrypted. The emergence of the World Wide Web has given terrorists a much easier means of acquiring information and exercising command and control over their operations. The operational leader of the 9/11 conspiracy, Mohamed Atta, went online from Hamburg, Germany, to research U.S. flight schools. Targets of intelligence collection have become more sophisticated. These changes have made surveillance and threat warning more difficult. (88)

Pattern Recognition seems mesmerized by and anxious about this perception of new technology that surfaced in the political aftermath of terrorist attacks. Perhaps Gibson distances or censors his novel from any identification with the political potential of new

technology and the exchange of digital images because in a post-9/11 world, new

technology also invokes the anxieties around global capitalism, global terrorism, and the

links between them. Gibson's ambivalence towards new technology in *Pattern*

Recognition ultimately does not necessarily reflect how users actually engage online, but

rather registers the political tensions and immediate anxieties surrounding globalization

and terrorism in the aftermath of 9/11.

Photography of Ground Zero: Aesthetics and the Event in Joel Meyerowitz's *Aftermath*

> [W]eary men and women had a sandwich or a smoke, and stared at the
>
> spectacle in front of them. No matter how many hours you had just put in,
>
> or how long you had been working on the pile, the fascination with what it
>
> looked like always called you back. (Meyerowitz 105)

Introduction

On the morning of the 9/11 terrorist attacks, photographer Joel Meyerowitz was producing images in Chatham, a small seaside town near Provincetown, MA. Upon hearing the news, Meyerowitz attempted to return to his home in New York, but found that entrances to the city were closed due to a travel ban. Five days later, the photographer returned to his apartment in the West Village, and promptly went to view the site of the terrorist attacks. Standing at the corner of Chambers and Greenwich, four blocks north of Ground Zero, Meyerowitz found that the entire perimeter of the World Trade Center had been sealed with cyclone fences and tarps, blocking visibility of the site. Meyerowitz recounts looking through the viewfinder of his camera at the smoke rising above the site of disaster only to be abruptly confronted by a police officer:

> Whack! Someone behind me smacked me sharply on the shoulder. 'No
>
> photographs, buddy, this is a crime scene!' I whipped around and found
>
> myself face to face with a female police officer. I was furious – both at
>
> being hit and the absurdity of the command. 'Listen, this is a public
>
> space,' I replied. 'Don't tell me I can't look through my camera!' But she

came right back at me with 'You give me trouble and I'll take that camera away from you!' 'No you won't,' I said. 'Suppose I was the press?' 'The press? There's the press,' she said, jerking a thumb over her shoulder at about a dozen TV cameramen and reporters, roped off by yellow police tape, halfway up the block. 'When are they going in?' I asked. 'Never,' she said. 'I told you, this is a crime scene. No photography!' (16)

Mayor Giuliani's ban on unauthorized photography, however, would ultimately become Meyerowitz's motivation for seeking access to Ground Zero in order to make images of the site. "No photographs meant no visual record of one of the most profound things ever to happen here," writes Meyerowitz; "[t]here *needed* to be a record of the aftermath….I was going to get in there and make an archive of everything that happened at Ground Zero" (16). Meyerowitz sent various proposals to numerous organizations in an attempt to gain access to the site, but his requests were rejected or ignored. He appealed to the office of the Mayor with no results. Meyerowitz finally obtained a letter of support from Robert MacDonald, director of the Museum of the City of New York, that enabled him to get a worker's badge for a 24 hour period, which the photographer would then repeatedly counterfeit on a computer in order to match the daily changes of the badge's colour and design, returning to the site each day with a new duplication of the pass. Without any official funding or support from any organization, Meyerowitz would enter the site and photograph for up to twelve hours each day. Although the photographer finally had access to his subject matter, security personnel were still under strict orders to maintain the photography ban inside the site. Since Meyerowitz's primary photographic tool for the project, a large format view camera stabilized on a tripod, was impossible to hide,

security would frequently eject him from the site. After nearly two months of continuously being removed from Ground Zero and sneaking back inside to resume making pictures, Meyerowitz met detectives of the NYPD's Arson and Explosion Squad, who, upon hearing about the project, would help him obtain a special police badge, enabling him to work for nine more months at the site without trouble. Ultimately, Meyerowitz would produce thousands of medium and large format negatives at the site, generating an enormous photographic archive of the World Trade Center ruins and the enormous effort to deconstruct the site of disaster.

Midway through this project members of the Bush Administration commissioned a series of Meyerowitz's photographs, which became a touring exhibition, *After September 11: Images from Ground Zero*. This exhibition of 27 photographs, coupled with speeches from political figures such as Colin Powell and Lynne Cheney, travelled to more than 60 countries from February 2002 until the end of 2004. The exhibition's main purpose was to gain international sympathy for the United States as a community of victims and generate public support for the War on Terror. In "Remembering September 11: Photography as Cultural Diplomacy," Liam Kennedy examines the rhetoric and mandate of the American Government's exhibition of Meyerowitz's images in *After September 11*. As a result of this exhibition and Kennedy's subsequent critique, scholars have hardly engaged with Meyerowitz's photographs of Ground Zero. Many academics mention Meyerowitz's project in passing, but instead of exploring the aesthetics of these images further, they simply cite Kennedy's article in order to contextualize or dismiss the photographs as government propaganda. Kennedy, however, is careful not to equate the politics of *After September 11* with the aesthetics of Meyerowitz's photographs in and of

themselves. He argues that "we need to distinguish the exhibition from the archive" (Kennedy 322). Kennedy's article is primarily concerned with the rhetorical frame of the exhibit and less with how the aesthetics or imagery of the photographs interacts with this frame.

In this chapter, I do not disagree that Meyerowitz's photographs function and may continue to function as a form of propaganda, serving the dominant discourse of exceptionalism and reactionary politics for war. My contention, however, is that Meyerowitz's photographs of Ground Zero aesthetically engage with a broader imaginary of ruins, which not only contributes to their affective capacity as propaganda, but may also allude to unrealized interpretive possibilities beyond dominant narratives of the terrorist attacks. Photographs are not necessarily a form of propaganda until they are contextualized and mobilized through discourse as such. It can be difficult to attach fixed meanings to any given series of images, as Marianne Hirsh writes in regards to photography: "things spill over and containment is ultimately impossible" (82). Barthes refers to this phenomenon as the "third meaning" or "obtuse meaning" whereby the photograph may contain aesthetic aspects that resist or elude more obvious or literal meanings generated through dominant cultural frames. According to Barthes, the photograph's obtuse meaning is "the supplement that…intellection cannot succeed in absorbing, at once persistent and fleeting, smooth and elusive" ("Third Meaning" 320). The obtuse meaning "is outside (articulated) language while nevertheless within interlocution" (326). Although obtuse meaning is discontinuous and behind the back of signification, its flickering emergence through aesthetics may "open the field of meaning totally, that is infinitely," conveying "the epitome of a counter-narrative" (320; 328). The

significance of the obtuse meaning is important to emphasize in the context of Meyerowitz's photographs and their signification through dominant discursive frames of the terrorist attacks. *After September 11* has not existed as a touring exhibit for more than ten years and a far more extensive collection of Meyerowitz's photographs has since been published as a book, *Aftermath: World Trade Center Archive* (2006). In this more recent context of reception, I maintain that the obtuse meanings of Meyerowitz's photographs, the unconscious aesthetics that they harbour, may suggest possible significations beyond exceptionalism and reactionary politics.

In this chapter, I primarily focus on Meyerowitz's *Aftermath* over any number of other photography publications on the terrorist attacks, as it is the most comprehensive photographic record of the unbuilding of Ground Zero, a site that has become representative of the broader complexities of September 11, 2001. Its publication extends the prominent role that Meyerowitz's images play in defining the collective memory and history of the terrorist attacks. Dominant discursive frames of victory culture surrounding Ground Zero certainly hold a strong resonance with Meyerowitz's images, but the publication of *Aftermath* presents these photographs in a new context, one that is unaffiliated with the Bush Administration and the *After September 11* exhibition. Further, I turn to Meyerowitz's work, as there is currently no research that closely examines its aesthetic potential to convey obtuse meanings through politically complex and multifaceted connotations beyond the frames of propaganda.

I approach the images of ruins in Meyerowitz's *Aftermath* through Jill Bennett's theorization of aesthetics and the event. In this theorization, September 11, for example, is not an event that is fixed or final in its emergence and interpretation, but rather it is an

event that resonates in a relational series with other temporalities, occurrences, and events. The event occurs, but also has not yet occurred in the sense that it is continuously becoming. In other words, as meaning is continuously generated around the event, there is always the potential for new knowledge and interpretative meaning to unfold. Bennett draws from Gilles Deleuze's *The Logic of Sense* in order to conceptualize art and photography as an affective encounter with the event in its becoming. For Deleuze, the event in its emergence holds the possibility for reordering, extending, or shifting an actualized or presupposed state of affairs. Revisiting the event through its representation in photographs, then, holds the possibility for expanding what is sensible and sayable about the event itself. If the event is always becoming, it is also becoming in the subject's encounter with the aesthetic and affective dimensions of the photograph. An attention to the affective encounter is necessary in order explore the potential for aesthetics beyond dominant frames that seek to fix or actualize the event in signification.

In my examination of Meyerowitz's photographs through the event, I draw from recent discussions of ruins and their aesthetic dimensions. Although scholars have done much work on the aesthetics of industrial decay and the ruins of modernity, there is much less research devoted to ruins of disaster and the aesthetics of destruction. Many scholars argue that industrial ruins of modernity transgress borders of space and time, generating new experiential possibilities for subjects caught within increasingly ordered and regulated spaces. Meyerowitz's photographs, however, raise questions about the possibilities of ruins and the limits of those possibilities through affective and aesthetic encounters with the ruins of destruction. I contend that Meyerowitz's *Aftermath* and the ruins of destruction primarily stage affective encounters through sublime and uncanny

aesthetics. These aesthetics, however, easily lend themselves to political discourses of

paranoia and fear. Drawing from Bennett's approach to aesthetics as an affective

encounter, a kind of sense event that is distinctive through its abstraction of the historical

event, I argue that an examination of the affective dimensions of ruins might map the

potential for viewers of Meyerowitz's photographs to be caught between multiple and

contradictory histories and geographies, memories and temporalities, affects and

imaginings. Through this approach, I outline how the aesthetics of Meyerowitz's

Aftermath align with reactionary politics, but also attempt to recover some of the ethical

possibilities in these aesthetics, which are overwritten through the dominant discourses

surrounding Ground Zero. Ultimately, I argue that Meyerowitz's *Aftermath* confronts

viewers with the repressed imagery of ruins of destruction, imagery that uncannily

communicates political anxieties, which both serve and run counter to the intense

memorialization and victory culture narrativization of Ground Zero.

Joel Meyerowitz and Aestheticizing the Ruins of Atrocity

On February 27, 2002, at the launch of *After September 11: Images from Ground

Zero* in Washington, DC, Colin Powell spoke to the American public on the importance

of Meyerowitz's images: "There's not much that I can add to what these poignant images

already say. They are stunning. They are stunning in every sense of the word….We send

these chilling photographs out to the world as a remembrance and as a reminder, a

remembrance of those who perished, and a reminder of our commitment to pursuing

terrorists wherever they may hide" (Powell). Powell's statement seeks to reduce the

images to a single evidentiary message, one that serves the Bush Administration's pursuit

of terrorists and promotion of victory culture. Miles Orvell argues that when framed by these words in the exhibit, "Meyerowitz's pictures lose their autonomy and are coerced into a national narrative" (247). With support from the U.S. State Department and local promotion from American embassies and consulates across the globe, *After September 11* would travel to more than three hundred cities in ninety countries (Friend 260). Ultimately, the exhibition sought to maintain collective memory of the terrorist attacks and gain international support for the War on Terror.

A number of scholars have noted that *After September 11* was a revival of cultural diplomacy that echoes *The Family of Man*, a famous photography exhibition curated by Edward Steichen in 1955 at the Museum of Modern Art in New York (Friend 261; Orvell 247). Kennedy explores this observation in some detail, contending that *After September 11* was reminiscent of *The Family of Man*'s promotion of a universal culture of humanity in response to the threat of nuclear war, of which the United States posited itself as the ideal. *The Family of Man* exhibition sought to convey commonalities across humankind through 503 photographs that depicted life in 68 countries. "The exhibition," writes Steichen, "was conceived as a mirror of the universal elements and emotions in the everydayness of life – as a mirror of the essential oneness of mankind throughout the world" (4). The photographs consisted of a wide variety of subject matter, but, as a collective, were meant to reflect a range of daily activities performed from youth to old age with an emphasis on the importance of the family unit in both hardship and happiness. A clear example of cultural imperialism, *The Family of Man* homogenized human diversity throughout the world under the banner of American values and then disseminated those values worldwide. After its opening at the Museum of Modern Art,

the exhibition went on a four year long global tour in an effort to circulate American ideals during the Cold War and would be seen by more than nine million people in twenty-eight different countries. Much like *The Family of Man*, Kennedy argues, *After September 11* functions as a kind of propaganda designed to convey a universal message through photography that surpasses any political or cultural difference:

> [T]he historical tensions between exceptionalism and universalism that have shadowed American diplomacy are reanimated in *After September 11* through its visual assumption that the United States is the epicentre of the culture of humanity. This assumption may be challenged in certain contexts but is clearly an ideological component of the State Department's broader efforts to remobilize the 'soft power' of cultural propaganda in the service of national security. It lends ideological support to 'us against them' politics and policies, and is likely to remain a core motif of American cultural diplomacy as it works 'to tell America's story to the world' in the wake of September 11. (325-26)

Although Kennedy makes a number of important connections between Cold War propaganda and *After September 11*, his article does not examine the aesthetics of Meyerowitz's images or the politics of those aesthetics. Since the publication of Kennedy's article, scholars mention Meyerowitz's photographs in passing and typically dismiss them as propaganda without exploring their broader aesthetic and political complexities (Holloway 131; Olin 175; Orvell 247; Redfield 21; Ryan 17; Sturken 198). Although *After September 11* may share similarities with *The Family of Man* in terms of the exhibit's rhetorical and political goals, these images communicate an entirely

different aesthetics. Meyerowitz's photographs are not the black and white images of

people from around the world performing their daily routines. The majority of his images

of Ground Zero are highly detailed and extremely sharp, full colour representations of

ruination and mass destruction.[9]

In *Industrial Ruins: Space, Aesthetics, and Materiality*, Tim Edensor notes that

"the most enduring recent image of ruination has, of course, been the remnants of New

York's World Trade Centre [sic], following the attacks of September 11, 2001" (17). Any

attempt to understand the social and political complexity of Meyerowitz's images in their

reception must also account for their aesthetics in the context of ruins. There is, however,

currently no research that attempts to situate Meyerowitz's photographs in relation to

current discussions on ruins and their representation. Before entering into a more detailed

analysis of *Aftermath*, I think it is important to outline some of the tensions and

associations that photographs of ruins raise in contemporary academic criticism. Here, I

begin with a brief discussion of controversies surrounding ruins and their representation

in order to contextualize how Meyerowitz's photographs of Ground Zero might unsettle

common expectations regarding documentary ethics and the aestheticization of ruins.

In recent years, photographic representations of ruins and ruination have become

increasingly popular as objects for display in print publications, museum exhibits, and

online websites. "The cult of ruins has accompanied Western modernity in waves since

the eighteenth century," writes Andreas Huyssen, "[b]ut over the past decade and a half, a

strange obsession with ruins has developed in the countries of the northern transatlantic

as part of a much broader discourse about memory and trauma, genocide and war" (7).

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[9] The extreme depth and detail of Meyerowitz's photographs is a result of higher image resolution
attributable to large format negatives used in the view camera. These negatives also allow the photographer
to produce enormous prints without losing quality.

Many scholars are sceptical about the motivations behind the photography of ruins and the current preoccupation with these images. Photographs of ruins, especially of ruins that might signify human suffering, often have a fragile relationship between their status as either necessary historical documentation of an atrocity or the trivialization of that atrocity and its political complexities through the spectacle of aestheticization in representation. Photographs of destruction often only allude to human suffering without depicting it, which raises the implication that "these images gratify some desire, perhaps voyeuristic, to uncover the ruin, to lay it bare and to indulge in the pleasure of a ruin aesthetic" (Fraser 148). Photographs of disaster or industrial decline are sometimes referred to as "ruin porn," a term that positions the viewer as a passive and voyeuristic consumer of dereliction. Negative critiques of ruin photography seem to stem from a general discomfort with the representation of ugly realities and often do not account for more complex understandings of aesthetics.

Meyerowitz's *Aftermath* intentionally aestheticizes the ruins of atrocity, effectively disturbing anxieties surrounding ethics in debates on documentary photography. Although Meyerowitz partially contextualizes *Aftermath* through the rhetoric of historical evidence and documentation, describing the images as an archive and as "a photographic record of the 'unbuilding' of Ground Zero for future generations" (16), his images are deliberately and artistically composed, exercising a complex perspective, which is acutely aware of tensions surrounding aestheticization and the ethics of representation. These tensions between aesthetics and atrocity in relation to Ground Zero were perhaps first raised when five days after the collapse of the twin towers, German avant-garde composer Karlheinz Stockhausen held a press conference in

Hamburg for the promotion of upcoming performances of his work. During the question

period, a journalist asked Stockhausen to comment upon the recent terrorist attacks in

regards to themes of harmony and humanity in his compositions. Stockhausen's

forthright response would ultimately result in widespread media backlash and haunt the

composer until his death in 2007:

> Well, what happened there is, of course – now you all have to adjust your
>
> brains – the greatest work of art that has ever existed. That spirits achieve
>
> in one act something which in music we could never dream of, that people
>
> madly practice for ten years, totally fanatically, for one concert. And then
>
> die. And that is the greatest work of art that exists for the whole cosmos.
>
> Just imagine what happened there….There are things that go on in my
>
> mind set off by such experiences. I have used words that I never use
>
> because it is so monstrous. That is the greatest work of art ever taking
>
> place. Just imagine I were able to create a work of art and you would not
>
> only be astonished but you would drop dead on the spot….This is
>
> incredible. (qtd. in Hänggi)

Following these words, the concerts in Hamburg were cancelled, Stockhausen left the

city declining further comment except on his website where he would claim his words

were taken out of context, and his daughter, a pianist, stated to a Berlin newspaper that

she would no longer perform under her family name. In an interview with the *German*

Financial Times, composer György Ligeti expressed that "Stockhausen had taken the side

of the terrorists and should be confined to an insane asylum" (Scherpe 60). Anthony

Tommasini described Stockhausen for the *New York Times* as "a raving has-been," "an

egomaniac who, sadly, has long been losing touch with reality," contending that his career "may be unsalvageable" (n. pag.). When Stockhausen died in 2007, nearly every obituary would mention the scandal, which in some ways "overshadowed his extraordinary musical career" (Castle). A year later, on the day before the first anniversary of the September 11 attacks, English artist Damien Hirst would echo Stockhausen's comments in an interview with BBC News Online. "The thing about 9/11," stated Hirst, "is that it's a kind of artwork in its own right. It was wicked, but it was devised in this way for this kind of impact. It was devised visually" (qtd. in Allison). Widely known for his transgressive artworks, Hirst promptly apologized and retracted his comments after they surfaced in media stories around the world.

Although Stockhausen's and Hirst's comments were tactless, lack nuance, and trivialize important distinctions in attempts to gesture at similarities between the visual dimensions of art and terrorism, I raise them because they signal the controversial relationship between atrocity, its representation as image, and the aesthetics of that representation. Additionally, Stockhausen's and Hirst's comments suggest that the act of thinking through representations of atrocity or speaking about them beyond what images themselves might state as fact, as documentary evidence of suffering, is almost always figured as morally repugnant. Further, photographers of atrocity are often expected to downplay aesthetics in order to avoid severe criticism or censorship as in the case of Richard Drew's "The Falling Man." Bennett writes that the "rhetoric of atrocity photography typically disavows aestheticism, the presence or absence of which becomes the measure of respect for the subject matter. Reflecting a general discomfort with looking at the scene of disaster, aestheticism in these negative terms is a mark of

lingering too long, an undesirable tendency of professional photographers" (173). The common rhetoric surrounding the industrial ruins of atrocity photography perceives aestheticism as trivial in comparison to the reality of suffering that is depicted. By extension, any consideration for aesthetics in the context of atrocity is often understood as offensive, inappropriate, exploitative, or pornographic. In *Regarding the Pain of Others*, Susan Sontag similarly summarizes the tensions between aesthetics and atrocity in regard to photography:

> Photographs tend to transform, whatever their subject; and as an image something may be beautiful – or terrifying, or unbearable, or quite bearable – as it is not in real life. Transforming is what art does, but photography that bears witness to the calamitous and the reprehensible is much criticized if it seems 'aesthetic'; that is, too much like art. The dual powers of photography – to generate documents and to create works of visual art – have produced some remarkable exaggerations about what photographers ought or ought not to do. Lately, the most common exaggeration is one that regards these powers as opposites. Photographs that depict suffering shouldn't be beautiful, as captions shouldn't moralize. In this view, a beautiful photograph drains attention from the sobering subject and turns it toward the medium itself, thereby compromising the picture's status as a document. (76-77)

Ultimately, the tension in a photograph of atrocity lies between the questionably opposite poles that Sontag outlines. It is the tension between aesthetics and ethics, art and documentary evidence, exploitation and "proper" respect for subject matter. If the

photograph is too well composed or too revealing, expressing any amount of artistry over objective portrayal of subject matter, the photographer may be accused of violating a code of ethics, ultimately contributing to further suffering, violence, or exploitation. In *Photography: History and Theory*, however, Jae Emerling writes that the aesthetics and ethics of photographic images are "aspects that are inseparable; they form a movement, a circuit….These are not opposing predicates, nor are they entirely isolatable. Rather this double-bind is a primary way that photography initiates a complete reconsideration as of the image as such" (82-84). Of course, there is a long history concerning the aesthetics of documentary photography, a tradition that concerns the integrity of how an "objective" document or representation of suffering ought to look. "For much of the twentieth century," writes Parvati Nair, "the assumption remained in place that because deliberate aestheticization was an obvious eschewal of realist representation, it could not be socially or politically engaged….thus firmly planting the notion that ethics and aesthetics are opposed" (259-60). Especially in regards to atrocities and ruins of destruction, the aesthetics of images are often expected to avoid drawing attention to artistic and stylistic elements, which might distract from the document's status as historical evidence. This expectation of documentary encourages a kind of "anti-aesthetics," a style that gives the photograph its evidentiary weight.

Since its inception, photographic technology has been thought to procure a kind of evidence, an imprint or reproduction of reality that captures the object, person, or scene represented in the frame. The photograph can function as a visual record or document, lending itself to claims of objectivity and truth. Photographs are sometimes described as if they were transparent windows onto a given depicted scene, a metaphor

that "effectively naturalizes that artifice of the Western picture, claiming for it the status

of reality or, at least, of a perfect duplication of reality" (Edwards 93). The medium's

presumed objectivity partially results from the indexical link between the image and its

referent. In other words, the image directly depends upon that which it depicts.[10] Of

course, despite this indexical characteristic of photography and assumptions that confuse

photographic realism with reality itself, the act of making a photograph is a highly

subjective technical and artistic process. In "Actuality and Affect in Documentary

Photography," David Philips writes that

> photography is a cultural practice and not a natural process. As such, it
>
> needs to be understood as an interpretive rather than as a transcriptive
>
> medium. Not only is there little correspondence between the constantly
>
> shifting focus and continuity of binocular human vision and the frozen
>
> photographic image, but….[t]he actual process of taking a photograph is
>
> also, to some degree, always a highly orchestrated event. (57)

Not to mention the variety choices of photography equipment and camera settings that

produce a wide variety of desired aesthetics and effects, the photographer also decides

how to frame a given picture, including some details and excluding others, cropping,

enlarging, and editing the final print in the darkroom or now more commonly through

post-processing computer software. Objectivity or neutrality is not inherent to

photographs. Carol Zemel argues that to "insist on only the evidentiary status of atrocity

pictures obscures the ways in which aesthetic effects deliver historical data, reify

fragments of memory, and enable the passage from document to icon. It also sidesteps the

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[10] The photograph's indexical quality is debated at length among experts in the field throughout "The Art Seminar," a roundtable discussion on the ontology of photography transcribed in *Photography Theory*, edited by James Elkins.

ways in which the pictures continue to fascinate….To aestheticize…need not be to

anesthetize. On the contrary, consideration of these effects may help us understand the

enduring interest in images of terror and atrocity" (205). For the purposes of this chapter,

suffice to say that matters of privilege and exploitation in regard to relationships between

photographers, subjects, and viewers are always important to keep in mind in terms of a

given image's aesthetics and composition, production and dissemination. This notion,

however, that aesthetics and ethics are elements that could possibly be understood

separately, or that a repression of aesthetics is necessary out of respect to photographed

subjects and subject matter, fails to acknowledge that photographs of atrocity and ruins

cannot escape inhabiting both realms of art and documentary as they simultaneously

represent reality and inevitably aestheticize that reality in representation.

In order to avoid controversy regarding the aestheticization of Ground Zero,

Meyerowitz frequently emphasizes the photograph's role as historical document in early

interviews regarding the exhibition of *After September 11*. In a 2002 interview with

PBS's *Frontline*, for instance, Meyerowitz responds to a question about his approach to

photographing Ground Zero. He stresses the importance of history over aesthetics,

emphasizing the technical role that his wooden view camera plays in the representation of

the World Trade Center ruins:

> It was important for me right from the beginning, working the way I'm
>
> working with a view camera that I use, to understand that the only way to
>
> translate this residue, this aftermath, to the future was to make a record
>
> that was exquisitely described the way a view camera can do it. So those
>
> people in the future who looked at this work – not as a work of art, but as

history, as what happened here – could literally look at the photographs

and feel what it was like to stand in front of the pile. (qtd. in Whitney)

Here, Meyerowitz understates his attention to aesthetics, underlining his responsibility to

history instead. He emphasizes the essential role of his view camera and its production of

large format negatives. The large prints of the *After September 11* exhibit stood many feet

high and wide and were meant to reproduce the direct experience of being at Ground

Zero. Most interestingly, Meyerowitz underscores the importance of the viewer's

affective experience as part of historical understanding. In a 2002 interview with

McSweeney's Internet Tendency, Meyerowitz continues to emphasize the function of his

work in terms of documentary work, comparing his project to the Farm Security

Administration's photography program during the Depression era, which recorded the

plight of poor farmers and their families: "I was very attracted to the Farm Security

Administration (FSA) archive at the National Library of Congress and the archives of the

Museum of the City of New York and in Paris. And so, after my first visit to Ground

Zero, I thought, 'I am going to make an archive'" (qtd. in Kawalek). Kennedy also notes

that, during the exhibition of *After September 11*, Meyerowitz would skirt questions from

interviewers regarding aesthetics in order to "shore up the meanings of his images as an

archival record" (321). Meyerowitz's comments in early interviews during the *After*

September 11 exhibition appear as an attempt to limit the interpretive meaning of his

photography of Ground Zero. His cautious responses to questions suggest that

commentary beyond the importance of historical documentation might raise controversy

regarding the motivation of his project.

Ground Zero Ruins: Aesthetics, Affect, and the Event

A multifaceted term, "aesthetics" often denotes principles and value judgements associated with artistic beauty, balance, tradition, and composition. The study of aesthetics is also an iconology, a study of visual and textual imagery through symbolism and signification. Aesthetics, however, also concerns the "sensuous aspects of experience," the subject's affective response to the object's appearance (Fenner 8). Additionally, aesthetics can influence the possibilities of political discourse and this discourse has a bearing on the subject's affective encounter with a given object. In *The Politics of Aesthetics*, Ranciére describes aesthetics as "the system of a priori forms determining what presents itself to sense experience. It is a delimitation of spaces and times, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, that simultaneously determines the place and the stakes of politics as a form of experience" (8). In my discussion of Meyerowitz's *Aftermath*, I argue that the aesthetics of this ruin photography, especially concerning the ruins of destruction, might best be understood through the philosophical concept of the event. I draw from Bennett's theorization of aesthetics in *Practical Aesthetics*, where she situates the subject's relation to a given art object (or photograph) as the recasting of the event through an affective encounter. Representations of the ruins of destruction at Ground Zero might provoke any number of affective responses: fear and disgust, sadness and grief, anger and indignation. Although affective encounters with the photography of Ground Zero are fundamentally overdetermined, it is precisely this overdetermination that suggests the possibility for Meyerowitz's images to communicate meaning beyond propagandistic frames.

In my analysis of Meyerowitz's *Aftermath*, I limit my focus to the sublime and the uncanny as affective concepts often associated with the aesthetics of ruins. I argue that Meyerowitz's *Aftermath* engages with a broader imaginary of ruins through its representation of the event, which partially suggests the affective capacity for images of Ground Zero to function as propaganda, but also alludes to alternate narrative possibilities through aesthetic fragments or traces beyond and through the terrorist attacks. In my conclusion, I very briefly draw from Ranciére's concept of "dissensus," as I argue that Meyerowitz's *Aftermath* does not offer a clear critique of American exceptionalism, but rather the aesthetics of this Ground Zero photography might intrinsically produce contradictory, critical, or utopian impressions or traces of history at odds with dominant narratives through the affective encounter with ruins of an event.

Meyerowitz's *Aftermath* begins with three consecutive images of the Twin Towers taken at the photographer's Manhattan studio. These images effectively establish a period prior to the event in actualization, but simultaneously foreshadow the event's occurrence. The publication chronologically progresses through images of the World Trade Center in ruins and the work being done at the site of this destruction. Meyerowitz includes landscapes, still life scenes, and portraits, all made within or around the sixteen-acre perimeter of Ground Zero. Some images, taken with a 35mm Leica, reflect Meyerowitz's early work as a street photographer, the movement of bodies and machinery frozen at fast shutter speeds, the spontaneous aesthetics of the "decisive moment" popularized by Henri Cartier-Bresson. Most of the images, however, are made using much longer shutter speeds on large format cameras, depicting incredibly deliberate compositions. Meyerowitz includes captions alongside many of the images, which

usually take the form of autobiographical reflections, brief thoughts, or memories about particular moments depicted in the photographs. The images and commentary of *Aftermath* express the gradual removal of rubble, the search for human remains, and the diverse ways that people working at the site created meaning from the ruins. *Aftermath* includes many images that might serve as counter-narratives, small stories that would rarely be captured by corporate media outlets as a result of the photography ban.

One image in particular stands as contradictory to narratives of victory culture, depicting a large pile of fire hoses, the futility of efforts by firefighters to extinguish the burning towers. Meyerowitz writes that these hoses were

> rendered useless on September 11 – first by the height of the fire itself and then, after the towers fell, by the lack of water and the destruction of the fire trucks. As a result, these coils of hoses lay piled here for weeks. Fire hoses were one of the most ubiquitous items on the pile. Everywhere you looked, thousands upon thousands of feet of hose lay entwined with debris, an intricate web of effort and loss. (76)

Of course, a number of images might reflect the strength and stoicism of firefighters on the pile, their incalculable effort to restore order in the face of destruction. American flags are frequently present in these images, hanging from various buildings, sometimes in tatters, perhaps suggesting nationalist resilience despite the ruins. One image, however, depicts workers with a Mohawk variation of the American flag, potentially raising historical questions regarding the rightful ownership of land at Ground Zero (Meyerowitz 108). A set of two photographs further raise questions regarding nationhood, nationality,

and exceptionalism, capturing a group of people standing in front of a wall of small flags representing all of the nations that lost citizens in the terrorist attacks (Meyerowitz 285).

Much of Meyerowitz's commentary also does not necessarily recreate the hyper-masculine media stories of heroic firefighters and police officers, but rather focuses on the ways that the site could take its emotional and physical toll on many of the workers. One photograph, for instance, depicts a police officer in a moment of vulnerability, overcome with tears, pointing at a photograph of his partner lost in the terrorist attacks (129). Often, Meyerowitz photographs and describes the various ways that workers did not come together in unison, but dealt with their emotions on the pile through frustration and anger with one another. One image captures a number of firefighters in charge of "spotting," a job that entails directing crane operators moving and removing rubble to avoid dangerous holes, pits, or other obstacles. Meyerowitz describes the frustration involved in this job, the difficulty at directing the crane operators amidst long hours in the smoke and noise, which often resulted in throwing rocks or pieces of steel at the crane drivers out of frustration in order to get their attention. "The pressure of working so close to death," Meyerowitz writes, "often brought people to their limits" (183). Meyerowitz also outlines much of the infighting, tensions, and imbalances of authority between members of the FDNY and NYPD at the site. One image starkly depicts the division between police officers and firefighters, as they stand far apart in two separate groups (Meyerowitz 277). Many of these images and captions convey a level of nuance and complexity that is absent from dominant historical frames surrounding the recovery effort at Ground Zero.

Of course, the most numerous and most striking images in *Aftermath* are landscapes of the enormity of destruction, the ruins of atrocity at Ground Zero. These images are often assembled from multiple negatives to form panoramas, which depict the sheer size and scale of the ruins of the World Trade Center. I contend that these images of ruins might best be understood though Bennett's theorization of the affective encounter with the aesthetics of the event in representation. Drawing from Deleuze, Bennett theorizes the approach of "practical aesthetics" as "the study of (art as a) means of apprehending the world via sense-based and affective processes – processes that touch bodies intimately and directly but that also underpin the emotions, sentiments and passions of public life" (3). Bennett proposes the term "practical" insofar as she does not want to engage questions of what art is, but rather of what art does, characterizing her approach as an attention to "aesthetics informed by and derived from practical, real-world encounters….actual events or problems" (2). Her approach to aesthetics does not analyze a fixed or actualized set of objects, but rather embraces a kind of contemporaneity that perpetually reforms itself, extending "the broader field of social enquiry or humanities by, to quote Bruno Latour, turning 'the solid objects of today into their fluid states' so as to render visible the network of relations that produces them" (5). For Bennett, the subject's encounter with a photograph might be understood in terms of the event in its continual becoming. The individual's encounter with any art object is always an affective encounter.

Deleuze's understanding of events enables Bennett to theorize the subject's experiential encounter with visual art, including photography, as a potential event itself. She writes that "[t]he issue is less whether art can capture and frame an event, and more

how the ambient, supervening event may be apprehended – grasped distinctively –
through aesthetic process (38-39). Photographs have the ability to transform actualized
events through the virtual, producing an affective encounter between viewer and image, a
kind of aesthetic event that is relational, open-ended, and indeterminate. The encounter
"generates a means of inhabiting and simultaneously reconfiguring the historical event as
a radically different experience" (40). This approach partially conceptualizes events
outside of history in order to imagine an alternative practice of genealogy where the
actual event's elements might be continuously reordered and reassembled through the
aesthetic and affective encounter.

Bennett does not figure the event as a general or specific concept from the
perspective of linear history or as a predetermined subject for study. An aesthetic
approach to the event, Bennett contends, must envision a different kind of event time
(38). She primarily draws from Deleuze in order to situate the event not as a time that
exists between two other times on a linear plane, but rather as a "meanwhile," an
alternative kind of time with its own characteristics. Deleuze conceptualizes events in
terms of the actual and the virtual. For Deleuze, there is no purely actual object, reality,
or event, only a continual renegotiation of the actual through the circuits and relations of
the virtual. "Every actual," writes Deleuze, "surrounds itself with a cloud of virtual
images" and these virtuals encircle the actual, "perpetually renew[ing] themselves by
emitting yet others, with which they are in turn surrounded and which go on in turn to
react upon the actual" ("The Actual" 148). The actual does not exist except in terms of a
multiplicity of virtual potentials that are continually reshaped and reduced to form the

impression of the actual. Coexisting in a circuit, the actual and virtual retrace each other in a continual process of becoming.[11]

In *The Logic of Sense*, Deleuze conceptualizes events as instigations of change and difference within fixed or actualized structures of relations or states of affairs. An event of deviation from a certain social practice, for example, might shift a society's recognized or expected patterns, introducing novelty and variance. For Deleuze, however, events do not exist as singularities, new beginnings, or absolute historical breaks. James Williams writes, that from Deleuze's perspective, the event slides through a relational series:

> [A]n event runs through series in structures, transforming them and altering relations of sense along the series. According to this view an event, such as the beginning of a book, is never an absolutely new start, it is rather a change in waves resonating through series. This event is never simply an occurrence for the mind of a conscious human being. It is rather a set of multiple interactions running through bodies, ideal structures (such as languages or moral codes) and virtual structures (such as relations of emotional investment considered in abstraction from the bodies that carry them)….*As an event, a beginning must be understood as a novel selection in ongoing and continually altering series*. (*Gilles Deleuze's Logic* 1-2)

Here, "selection" means the emergence of a connected series, not a kind of deliberate choice. The event runs through a series, but the series also transforms the event. Deleuze

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[11] In his guide, *Gilles Deleuze's Difference and Repetition*, James Williams notes that Deleuze's notion of the virtual as that which "cannot be grasped, only operated on, and the effect of this operation can only be grasped in the actual" is an extension of the Freudian unconscious (116). Williams maintains, however, that the actual and virtual must be understood as distinct from what is conscious and unconscious as they reflect a process that cannot be reduced to the effects that individuals experience as part of consciousness.

theorizes this as a kind of "two-sidedness" or resonance where the event is always

unfolding or becoming in the series. In this view, the event is not a particular happening,

but rather that which is made actual in the happening. "The event is not what occurs,"

writes Deleuze, "it is rather inside what occurs, the purely expressed. It signals and

awaits us….[I]t must be understood, willed, and represented in that which occurs" (*Logic*

149). The event is the shift or transformation in that which is actualized, giving rise to

alternative forms of actualization. "For Deleuze," writes Williams, "these ongoing

transformations are non-linear through time and discontinuous through well-ordered

spaces. This means that the relations cannot be plotted on a timeline that goes

continuously from past to future, nor located as points in a continuous and well-ordered

space" (*Gilles Deleuze's Logic* 2). The event is both immanent and external to time,

where it is both yet to occur and has already taken place, always becoming.

Affect is closely linked to the event in the sense that it is an intensity of the virtual

that gives rise to actualization. In this context, affect is not necessarily synonymous with

emotion. More recent work on affect theory often collapses distinctions between emotion

and affect. In *Parables for the Virtual*, however, Brian Massumi argues that this

distinction is important to maintain since emotions are cognitively and subjectively

qualified feelings while affect designates those unconscious and unknowable sensations

that precede and exceed the subject. Massumi draws from Deleuze in order to describe

affect as

> the simultaneous participation of the virtual in the actual and the actual in
>
> the virtual, as one arises from and returns to the other. Affect is this two-
>
> sidedness *as seen from the side of the actual thing*, as couched in its

perceptions and cognitions. Affect is *the virtual point of view*, provided

the visual metaphor is used guardedly. For affect is synesthetic, implying a

participation of the senses in each other….Affects are *virtual synesthetic*

perspectives anchored in (functionally limited by) the actually existing,

particular things that embody them. The autonomy of affect is its

participation in the virtual. *Its autonomy is its openness*. Affect is

autonomous to the degree which it escapes confinement in the particular

body whose vitality, or potential for interaction, it is. Formed, qualified,

situated perceptions and cognitions fulfilling functions of actual

connection or blockage are the capture and closure of affect. (35)

This does not mean that emotion and affect are separable, but in Deleuze's terms,

emotion is that which is actualized or identified while affect is an intensity of the virtual

as a continuous becoming in the actual. In their introduction to *The Affect Theory Reader*,

Melissa Gregg and Gregory Seigworth similarly outline affect as an intensity or force that

emerges and passes through, often flickering but sometimes more sustained, relations:

[A]ffect is found in those intensities that pass body to body (human,

nonhuman, part-body, and otherwise), in those resonances that circulate

about, between, and sometimes stick to bodies and worlds, and in the very

passages or variations between these intensities and resonances

themselves. Affect, at its most anthropomorphic, is the name we give to

forces insisting beyond emotion – that can serve to drive us toward

movement, toward thought and extension, that can likewise suspend us (as

if in neutral) across a barely registering accretion of force-relations, or that

can even leave us overwhelmed by the world's apparent intractability. (1)

Affects have no specific origin, but rather circulate in-between, beside, and through

bodies, relations, and events. Although affects may not always register consciously or

cognitively for the subject in a given encounter, "affect provides a motivating force for

consciousness" (Watkins 279). For the purposes of this chapter, affect may be understood

as an underlying multiplicity of virtual intensities, which effectively influences a

subject's perception and apprehension of the actual. The encounter with an event in

representation is always inevitably an affective encounter.

A number of scholars identify the affective dimension of the sublime in

Meyerowitz's photographs of ruins without really exploring the significance of this

assertion (Campany 132; Friend 262; Perry 10). Gilblett and Tolonen, for instance,

facetiously refer to Meyerwitz as "the Ansel Adams of 9/11" and proceed to make an

awkward comparison of similarities between the ways that these two photographers

engage with sublime aesthetics (222). Meyerowitz's expression of the sublime, of course,

draws from radically different subject matter when compared to Adams' monochrome

depictions of wilderness landscapes and other natural wonders. Meyerowitz's attention to

detail, colour, light, and composition reflect his sensibility for the aesthetics of the

sublime in ruins of atrocity.

Scholars commonly interpret ruins and ruination "as an invitation to thought and

as the site of the sublime" (Dillon 11). As both an aesthetic concept as well as an

affective experience with a long history of theorization through thinkers such as Edmund

Burke, Immanuel Kant, and Jean Francois Lyotard, the sublime is typically thought of as

"an encounter with something tremendous: an infinite; something indefinitely great, grand or boundless; a longed-for absolute" (Battersby 3). The sublime is the aesthetic sensation which arises from an encounter with the art object that is awe-inspiring, breathtaking, terribly beautiful, or paradoxically, that which seems unrepresentable in its representation. "As a subjective feeling, a bodily response," writes Gene Ray, "the sublime can never be verified" (7). In Deleuze's terms, the sublime is of the virtual. It is an experience that cannot be fully actualized. For this reason, scholars often align the sublime with the experience of an event, often an event of shock or trauma, where the moment of the encounter generates a suspension in the subject's ability to fully comprehend what has taken place. In *American Ground*, William Langwiesche conveys this sense of the sublime in his disbelief at the enormity of destruction at Ground Zero: "More than 1.5 million tons of heavy steel and debris lay densely compacted there….The weight alone defied imagination. What does a chaos of 1.5 million tons really mean? What does it even look like?" (12). Simon Morely describes the aesthetic experience of the sublime as "what takes hold of us when reason falters and certainties begin to crumble. [It is] about being taken to the limits. The sublime experience is fundamentally transformative, about the relationship between disorder and order, and the disruption of the stable coordinates of time and space. Something rushes in and we are profoundly altered" (12). The sublime experience often occurs in the viewer's encounter with danger distanced through mediation, which encourages a sensibility of human vulnerability or one's own mortality.

In *Aftermath*, Meyerowitz's photography works within sublime aesthetics, giving the impression of destruction that is beyond comprehension, always becoming. "Standing

in front of the South Tower," writes Meyerowitz, "it was impossible not to feel one's own fleshy vulnerability, and easy to understand why there had been so few survivors" (26). Many of the landscapes throughout *Aftermath* convey this sense of the sublime in the form of large foldout panoramas of the site. "Assembled Panorama of the Plaza, Looking South and West," for instance, the first image of Ground Zero in the book, depicts a vast and horrific landscape of rubble and dust over a four-page, foldout spread (Meyerowitz 19-22). Steel fragments protrude from the ground as smoke rises from the site, the result of jet fuel still burning beneath the rubble. Skeletal structures, remnants of the World Trade Center walls, stand in the distance before other severely damaged buildings with windows blown out, jagged shards of glass still protruding from the edges of their frames. In this assembled image, the sky is overexposed, leaving only a blank white void behind this site of destruction, giving the impression that nothing exists beyond the expanse of rubble. Meyerowitz writes in one of his notations that it is "hard to come to terms with the awful beauty of a place like this. After all, the site – thick with grief and death – was dangerous, noisy, dirty, poisonous, and costly beyond measure. And yet the demolition at Ground Zero was also a spectacle with a cast of thousands, lit by a master lighter and played out on a stage of immense proportions….It all looked wondrous" (185). The photographer validates any engagement that the viewer may have with the sublime, simultaneously suggesting a kind of artistic performativity at Ground Zero with a "cast" on a "stage."

Although the panorama of the Plaza shows no people in the frame, Meyerowitz often emphasizes the sublime through a juxtaposition of the magnitude of destruction with this "cast" of workers scattered around the site. These workers often appear tiny and

insignificant when set against the scale of ruins. At one point, Meyerowitz describes the workers as "ants busily scouring a hill and cleansing it" (278). "Inside Building 5, Looking West," for example, features a single worker leaning on a building column in the bottom right corner of the frame (Meyerowitz 159). The worker wears an orange construction vest, which stands out sharply in contrast to the grey ruins. The wreckage dwarfs the worker by comparison. The frame is shot at an upward angle, revealing the height of the ruins, which stretch beyond the edge of the photograph, high above the worker into the sky. The photograph depicts a single life in the presence of the ruins of an event. The heaps of twisted steel rebar and debris in contradistinction to the worker on the edge of the frame convey the precariousness of life.

Orvell refers to Meyerowitz's photography as an inversion of the "technological sublime," an experience of wonder and awe at the power of human creation in its various forms, whether it is a skyscraper, bridge, or battleship. He calls this inversion "the destructive sublime" (246). Although Orvell does not really explore the term beyond mentioning it in regards to Meyerowitz's images, the destructive sublime presumably refers to the overwhelming experience of an encounter with the massive implosion of impressive technological achievements. Of course, the images of *Aftermath* might lend themselves to a frame of exceptionalism, much like the frame of *After September 11*, that would rely upon the aesthetics of the sublime to reinforce the event in its actualization as unrepresentable, unfathomable, unprecedented. In *Aftermath*, for instance, Meyerowitz describes the debris of the pile as "so overwhelming" that it might be "impossible to read it in any meaningful way" (100). Of course, this discourse regarding the terrorist attacks confirms the logic of exceptionalism, justifying retaliation for a terrorist act of such

enormity that it exceeds understanding. The experience of the sublime, however, also opens onto overdetermined interpretations of the encounter where "the comprehension of the sublime object is never complete" (Clemente 171). In Deleuze's terms, Meyerowitz's images necessarily resist actualization as they extend into the virtual through the aesthetics of the sublime. The sublime event, writes Ray, "would take place at that nexus where an empirical, psychological subject is driven by both social reality and the openings of the possible or virtual realities that would push beyond it" (7). In this exposure to the virtual, what might become possible in the subject's encounter with Meyerowitz's photographs is the temporary cognitive suspension of dominant narratives in sublime experience, the momentary possibility for fragmented meanings or new connections to emerge in consciousness.

Although the sublime might partially characterize the affective encounter with Meyerowitz's photographs, I suggest that the aesthetics of *Aftermath* might further be understood through an extension of the sublime: the Freudian concept of the uncanny. Curiously, scholars have not described Meyerowitz's photographs in terms of their uncanny aesthetics. As an affective and aesthetic concept, the uncanny extends from the experience of the sublime, as it is similarly an encounter with thresholds and limits, the transgression of verifiable borders and boundaries. Anneleen Masschelein, for instance, refers to the uncanny as a kind of "negative sublime" which highlights the more radical and disturbing qualities of aesthetic experience (132-33). In his essay devoted to the topic, Freud describes the uncanny experience as that which "belongs to all that is terrible – to all that arouses dread and creeping horror….[and] coincide[s] with whatever excites dread" (122). The uncanny is an experience of cognitive dissonance resulting from an

encounter with something both strange and familiar. Julia Kristeva draws from Freud's understanding of the uncanny to theorize the relational concept of abjection, but the uncanny remains distinctive from the abject as it does not manifest as a violent and intense rejection of the object in question. In *The Uncanny*, Nicholas Royle writes that the experience frequently arises from "a sense of repetition or 'coming back' – the return of the repressed, the constant or eternal recurrence of the same thing, a compulsion to repeat" (2). Often in association with death, corpses, live burial, darkness, and the foreign, the uncanny disrupts any clear sense of borders between inside and outside. The uncanny is an experience of liminality, an uncomfortable encounter with the foreign that is yet recognizable. "The uncanny," writes Royle, "is a feeling that happens only to oneself, within oneself, but is never one's 'own': its meaning or significance may have to do, most of all, with what is not oneself, with others, with the world 'itself.' It may thus be constructed as a foreign body within oneself, even the experience of oneself as a foreign body" (2). The uncanny cannot be reduced to a direct happening, statement, or description. It is a supplement that manifests not through what is already known or presented, but rather emerges through what is unpredictable and additional to what is happening, stated, or shown. In this way, the uncanny is not necessarily, for example, an encounter with death itself, but rather an encounter with the implication of death.

The uncanny aesthetic of *Aftermath* partially stems from the knowledge that Meyerowitz's photographs of Ground Zero are documents of a site where many people lost their lives. "Thousands of people were murdered in the attacks of that day," writes Royle, "at least some of them, an uncountable number, buried alive" (viii). *Aftermath*, however, only alludes to death, never depicting the actual bodies of the dead.

Meyerowitz, for instance, does not include bodies in the frame of "Five More Found," an image that captures the recovery of those who died inside a North Tower stairwell. Meyerowitz photographs the firefighters as they gather around the orange and smoky glow of the lit stairwell entrance as many of them presumably look down towards the bodies, but the viewer only sees the implication of death (163). Granted, many bodies were never recovered from Ground Zero as they were vaporized in the World Trade Center's collapse. Meyerowitz photographs the workers in charge of sifting and raking through fields of the rubble, usually searching for tiny fragments of bone (316-320). In *Tourists of History*, Sturken writes that "only 1,592, or 58 percent, of the 2,749 people killed were identified" (178). At times, Meyerowitz's images starkly convey the gothic aesthetics of a gravesite and these aesthetics would ultimately lend themselves to parts of the ruins becoming substitutes for unrecoverable bodies. Workers would preserve the toxic dust, repurposing it as ashes signifying those lost for families of the victims (Sturken 165). The skeletal walls of the World Trade Center would become colloquially known among workers as the "shrouds," the protective fabric or wrapping for bodies of the dead (Meyerowitz 24). Meyerowitz's photographs of the ceremonial removal of the last column, which was meant to resemble a military funeral service, also captures the symbolic work of substituting parts of the building for the bodies of the dead (Meyerowitz 269). Ultimately, Meyerowitz captures a site that both signifies and embodies death as uncannily present in its absence.

Meyerowitz's photographs of Ground Zero primarily stage affective encounters through the uncanny experience of the event in its becoming. Many scholars have written on the aesthetic spectacle of the Twin Towers' collapse. Meyerowitz's images of

ruination, however, represent a different kind of aestheticism of the subject in comparison

to media images of the terrorist attacks. David Campany refers to Meyerowitz's work in

his discussion of "late photography," a term which designates a kind of practice or genre,

whereby the photographer captures the actual event after its happening. This approach

partially draws on the aesthetics of some of the earliest war photography, which displays

the scene of ruins after the bombs have fallen and the bodies have been removed (Bull

117). Many of Meyerowitz's images also quietly convey the horror of the event through

abandoned and dust covered interior spaces still seemingly frozen in the moments of

panic and evacuation. "Interior of the Devon and Blakely Deli in Building 5," for

instance, captures an abandoned shopping space still waiting for the customers of that

morning. Meyerowitz describes this image in detail:

> It had been early in the day when the towers were hit, so the counters and
>
> cases were fully stocked, the bagels in all their varieties neatly stacks, the
>
> cookies and fruit alluringly arrayed near the cash register. In the
>
> refrigerated glass cases, cheeses and cold cuts, salads and chicken wings,
>
> cakes and pies still waited for hungry office workers to come down for a
>
> coffee break. Except for the bananas gone black as licorice, and the dust
>
> covering every surface, you might think everything on display was still
>
> edible. (191)

Campany writes that Meyerowitz's imagery is "not so much the trace of an event as the

trace of the trace of an event" (124). *Aftermath* does not present the viewer with images

of the actual event in its happening, but with the distinct and uncanny fragments of what

has taken place.

This sense of a late arrival to the event is characteristic of the aesthetics of ruins. "Ruins," writes Dylan Trigg, "occupy the spectral trace of an event left behind, serving to testify to the past through a logic of voids, disruptions, and hauntings" (xxvii). This encounter with late photography and the ruins of destruction alludes to the event in its becoming as it imposes an uncanny awareness of the before through the depiction of the aftermath in the present. The ruin of destruction also has a relationship with future occurrences. Dillon writes that "the ruin casts us forward in time; it predicts a future in which our present will slump into similar disrepair or fall victim to some unforeseeable calamity" (11). Meyerowitz's photographic representation of destruction paradoxically communicates the event both as already having occurred and as not yet happened. The ruin of disaster is always becoming the event in the photograph. Ultimately, Meyerowitz's photography gives the viewer an impression that they have arrived late to the actual event, leaving what is past and future to the imagination. *Aftermath* depicts the event through an encounter with the uncanny, a haunting that is becoming on the edge of every frame.

Haunting the Frame: Ruins of Destruction and Traces of the Virtual

Meyerowitz's photographs of Ground Zero engage with the uncanny aesthetics of ruination, invoking a broader imaginary of ruins. "Our imaginary of ruins," writes Huyssen, "can be read as a palimpsest of multiple historical events and representations" (8). In other words, representations of the ruins of destruction typically echo the ruins of other temporalities and geographies through uncanny aesthetic and affective traces. In Delueze's terms, the virtual aesthetic traces of other events circle Meyerowitz's

photographs of Ground Zero in their actualization. If events are interconnected through relational series, the aesthetics and affects of those events must also reverberate through that series, influencing previous and still to come events, which are both in the process of becoming. A number of writers, for example, highlight the aesthetics of Ground Zero in relation to ruins of destruction of the twentieth century, particularly the bombings of Dresden and Berlin during World War II (Josyph 254; Perry 8; Smith 303). Many scholars also refer to the spectacle of the September 11 attacks through Slavoj Žižek's contention that the collapse of the Twin Towers was an eerily familiar and uncanny doubling of Hollywood disaster films. Žižek argues that the virtual images of disaster movies entered reality, producing the experience of the uncanny through the media spectacle of the actual disaster: "The fact that, after September 11, the openings of many 'blockbuster' movies with scenes which bear resemblance to the WTC collapse were postponed should thus be read as the 'repression' of the fantasmatic background responsible for the impact of the WTC collapse….the question we should have asked ourselves as we stared at the TV screens on September 11 is simply: Where have we already seen the same thing over and over again?" (17). The aesthetics of Meyerowitz's images produce a similar uncanny encounter, conveying the spectral traces of past atrocities.

Many of Meyerowitz's images also resemble the iconography that disaster films employ to signify the apocalypse or the end of capitalism. Of course, the World Trade Center was itself symbolic of global capitalism, but many of Meyerowitz's photographs convey this symbolism through representations of well-known corporate organizations in abandoned states of devastation. In the early pages of *Aftermath*, for instance,

Meyerowitz captures the American Express and Bankers Trust buildings with many of their windows broken or blown out, their sides raked by fragments of the World Trade Center (29; 32). *Aftermath* also includes many photographs of the Century 21 storefront on Church Street, boarded up, covered in dust (78; 124; 151). One photograph depicts the inside of a Borders bookstore with advertisements and signs pushed over or dangling awkwardly from the ceiling, books strewn all over the floor (Meyerowitz 190). Another image shows a giant McDonald's advertisement for a restaurant location that was scheduled to open in the walkway of the underground mall (Meyerowitz 197). These images of capitalism in ruins may produce excitement in the photographic encounter that produces a feeling of proximity to death. In other words, Meyerowitz's photographs of ruins might function as a visual fulfilment of the death drive, which Freud formulates as the primary motivation for life, which is constantly determined through "complicated *detours*" and "circuitous paths to death," the desire to "return to the inanimate state" of rubble and dust (*Beyond* 46). In the *Spirit of Terrorism*, Baudrillard refers to the death drive in regards to the collapse of the Twin Towers when he writes that "we have dreamt of this event…everyone without exception has dreamt of it – because no one can avoid dreaming of the destruction of any power that has become hegemonic to this degree….we can say that they did it, but we wished for it" (5). Meyerowitz's images might also uncannily manifest as a fulfilment of utopian fantasies of a post-capitalist future, the end of an American empire. Representations of disaster, however, may suggest, as Frederic Jameson notes, "that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than to imagine the end of capitalism," which is also the equivalent of saying that individuals "imagine capitalism by way of imagining the end of the world" ("Future City" 76). In other words,

representations of disaster may convey that, without capitalism, there can only be chaos. Total catastrophe becomes easier to imagine than even incremental changes towards equitable distributions of wealth.

Like many representations of disaster, Meyerowitz's images may not offer alternative narratives beyond the return and recuperation of capitalist and militaristic structures of American imperialism. They may, however, enable temporary or fleeting engagements with the aesthetics of fragmented and disordered space as a utopian potential in representation. This potential manifests only through inarticulacy and obtuse meaning. It is an encounter with the virtual prior to actualization. This sense of future potential in aesthetics of destruction is the aesthetic possibility of new beginnings always becoming in the present encounter with the photography of ruins. Meyerowitz's photographs of ruins as well as other representations of disaster may not clearly narrativize any sort of progressive politics, but they implicitly align with desires for reconstruction through the aesthetics of deconstruction. Of course, many narratives of rebuilding and reconstruction have emerged from Ground Zero in actualization, but Meyerowitz's photographs return viewers to the wound of disaster, the moment of possibility that emerges from the event, conveying the fleeting potential for alternative futures never realized as actual to emerge from the virtual.

The American government and corporate media manufacturers, however, repressed these utopian possibilities of destruction in order to maintain complicity with state exceptionalism through explicitly communicated fears of annihilation. If Meyerowitz's photographs are reminiscent of urban destruction depicted in disaster films, for instance, these images may also suggest an entirely different narrativization of Cold

War propaganda than that of *The Family of Man*. The Bush Administration deliberately made use of the spectral aesthetic traces of Cold War imagery of nuclear ruins in its exhibition of Meyerowitz's images as part of the justification for the War on Terror. In "Survival is Your Business," Joseph Masco argues that in "the aftermath of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, D.C., on September 11, 2001, the affective coordinates of the Cold War arms race provided specific ideological resources to the state, which once again mobilized the image of a United States in nuclear ruins to enable war" (363). Through the *After September 11* exhibit, the U.S. Government was able to utilize the aesthetics of Meyerowitz's Ground Zero photography in order to recall anxieties of nuclear annihilation during the Cold War, simultaneously projecting those fears into the future. Ultimately, this strategy justified the War on Terror as a necessary course of action in order to avoid the possibility of future "Weapons of Mass Destruction" detonating on American soil.

Ground Zero is itself an uncanny term that many scholars have linked to nuclear explosions and test sites. "Ground Zero is a name pulled from history," writes Sturken, "its origins inextricably tied to the destruction caused by nuclear bombs; it began as a term used by scientists for a bomb's point of detonation, thus defining a bomb's central site of destruction" (167). As a term, then, Ground Zero evokes the threat of nuclear disaster as much as the aesthetics of Meyerowitz's photographs depict mass destruction as an uncanny evocation of that same threat. These images of Ground Zero, however, may also evoke the aesthetic impression of the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Marc Redfield argues that Ground Zero "both calls up and wards off the ghost of Hiroshima, remembering that other scene of destruction while also distancing or

demoting it by rendering it an other ground zero" (Redfield 23). Although the narrative of exceptionalism may repress the bombings of Japanese cities during World War II, Meyerowitz's images might return the destruction of Hiroshima and Nagasaki to the consciousness of viewers through these uncanny rhetorical and aesthetic links.

Of course, I am not suggesting that these tragedies are necessarily directly comparable in their historical complexities, but rather that ruins connote a connective multiplicity through the relational aesthetics of events. I concur with David Simpson when he writes that "Lower Manhattan, in complex and recursive ways, may have a connection to Hiroshima, but the most urgent point to be made is that it is not Hiroshima, not our Hiroshima, not our price of full admission into the community of global suffering" (44). Again, my intention is not to trivialize the historical complexities of specific tragedies, but I would suggest that the affective encounter with Meyerwitz's photographs might uncannily refer to other tragedies and atrocities, generating fragmentary traces that cannot align with narratives of exceptionalism. Further, the United States has never fully acknowledged its perpetration of atrocity through the terror bombings of Japanese cities. Ray argues that in

> a catastrophic ethical and political failure, U.S. Leaders committed a crime against humanity for which they have never been held to account and which U.S. Citizens have so far avoided confronting. For more than 50 years, American denial of Hiroshima and Nagasaki has been protected by a carefully administered myth according to which the obliteration of those cities and the people who lived in them was a 'necessary' action – one that, moreover, actually saved lives by eliminating the need for an

invasion of the Japanese main islands. While that myth has been refuted

by a large body of recent historical scholarship, it remains 'the official

story.' (53)

If Meyerowitz's *Aftermath* engages with a broader imaginary of ruins, the photographs of

Ground Zero may intrinsically suggest the potential for ethical relations to emerge from

the aesthetics of destruction. There may be an unrealized narrative potential for

Meyerowitz's photographs beyond their previous use as state propaganda. These images

of Ground Zero inevitably connote the ruins of other geographies and temporalities. John

Dower notes that "[i]n the wake of September 11, there was a brief moment in the United

States when it seemed possible that Al Qaeda's crime against humanity might help foster

a popular consciousness and imagination concerning air war and terror bombing in

general, past as well as present and future, that transcended patriotic parochialism and a

reflexive thirst for retaliation in near-kind" (157). Of course, this ethical consideration in

response to atrocity did not occur.

　　　　The affective encounter with Meyerowitz's photographs, however, may function

as a continual repetition or return to this moment of possibility. Again, if *Aftermath*

conveys the uncanny fragments and traces of other events without a dominant narrative

form, this may suggest the potential for new ethical alternatives to emerge through

affective encounters with the event as represented in a photograph. In regard to

appropriative naming of Ground Zero in Lower Manhattan, Ray suggests that the

'latent' or unconscious meaning of 'ground zero' gradually becomes clear.

It acknowledges, unconsciously, what the United States as a nation had

long resisted acknowledging consciously and officially. What it 'says' is

that Americans know: they know that Hiroshima and Nagasaki were terrible crimes. They knew, even as they suddenly and horribly found themselves the target of an atrocious day of attacks, that their own government had, in their name, committed a great atrocity. (138)

Meyerowitz's photographs communicate the potential for the actual event in its virtual representation to be transformed on the condition of aesthetic apprehension for the viewer, the possible production of new potentialities through the subject's affective encounter with the photograph.

Ariella Azoulay similarly understands photographs not as the fixed product of an event, but rather as an encounter that "continues the event of photography that happened elsewhere" (23). A photograph is a representation of an actual event that reproduces and mediates that event as both immanent and external to the original event upon each subject's encounter with the image. This encounter is abstracted from the original event itself, becoming a new event, which may reorder, suspend, or contradict the dominant frames of the actual event in the viewer's experience. A study of aesthetics, then, must escape dominant frames of historical interpretation in order to make new connections. Bennett's approach to aesthetics encourages attempts to engage the event "from the inside, from the point-of-view of the affective engagements that give it traction in experience and imagination" as part of an attempt to "trace threads of aesthetic enquiry" (32). This approach encourages viewers to engage with photographs in terms of what aesthetics might communicate beyond the frame.

Although the *After September 11* exhibition sought to limit what viewers might imagine outside the evidentiary frame of the photographs, the publication of *Aftermath*

suggests a narrative shift from the rhetoric of propaganda. This shift is partially realized through Meyerowitz's own commentary on his images. During an interview with Lawrence Weschler to promote the publication of *Aftermath* in 2006, Meyerowitz and Weschler actually dispense with all questions regarding documentary photography and history, solely focusing on the photography of Ground Zero and its relation to visual art. Weschler pairs a number of Meyerowitz's images with iconic paintings as they discuss aesthetic and iconological similarities and differences between the juxtapositions. In one example, Weschler likens the first photograph in *Aftermath* of the New York skyline to Vermeer's *View of Delft* (1660). At the beginning of the interview, Weschler states that the goal will be to discuss a scrapbook of images that he has put together in order to see if any of them resonate for Meyerowitz in the context of his images. Following this, Weschler proceeds to compare Albert Bierstadt's *Among the Sierra Nevada Mountains* (1868), Casper David Friedrich's *Abbey in the Oak Wood* (1809), Rembrandt's *The Night Watch* (1642), Millet's *The Gleaners* (1857), Grant Wood's *American Gothic* (1930), Auguste Rodin's *Adam* (1880), and Jasper Jones' *Three Flags* (1958) with a corresponding number of Meyerowitz's photographs from Ground Zero.

It is an interview that attempts to speak to the artistry of the Ground Zero photographs and the way that Meyerowitz's aesthetics connote other images, other artists' work, and other time periods and places. Although Weschler's interview does not critically explore the pairings or raise questions of art and aesthetics in relation to documentary photography at Ground Zero, this engagement with imaginative reflection, iconology, and aesthetics is something that Meyerowitz also draws from and emphasizes throughout *Aftermath*. In *Aftermath*, Meyerowitz speaks of his images as eighteenth-

century Romantic paintings (58; 160) and compares them to the relics and ruins of Rome and Pompeii (58; 63). "I wonder," writes Meyerowitz, "why so many of these…images stimulate connections to art of the past" (317). Although Meyerowitz does not suggest any kind of ethical possibility through his photographs of ruins, his encouragement of comparisons to other ruins and canonical works of art suggest a narrative attempt to shift perception of these images into a realm of open and indeterminable interpretation.

This attention to aesthetics ultimately may call into question dominant narrative frames as it demonstrates an attempt to call aesthetics into account, to call our responses and reactions to these images into question through contemplation beyond exceptionalist understandings of these images as simply documentary evidence of an unimaginable atrocity. There is an effort here to expand the frame, generate counter-actualizations through the event, and call attention to the fact that photography is not a transcriptive medium, but is rather interpretative and discursive.

The sublime and uncanny aesthetics of Meyerowitz's photographs do not necessarily suggest any direct correlation to progressive or ethical politics. Photographs do not necessarily offer a view of history in its complexity, but rather produce affective encounters through the relational aesthetics between events. Drawing from Ranciére, I maintain Meyerowitz's photographs of Ground Zero might ultimately present viewers with an experience of dissensus. In this case, dissensus emerges as the potential for the photograph to reorder or suspend common experiences of sense through uncanny aestheticism. An experience of dissensus would be a realization of the event in its becoming and the openness to the potential of alternative actualizations. There is no

cause and effect relationship between aesthetics and political action, but rather aesthetics function in the form of metapolitical possibility. Ranciére writes that

> There is no straight path from the viewing of a spectacle to an
> understanding of the state of the world, and none from intellectual
> awareness to political action. Instead, this kind of shift implies a move
> from one given world to another in which capacities and incapacities,
> forms of tolerance and intolerance, are differently defined. What comes to
> pass is a process of dissociation: a rupture in the relationship between
> sense and sense, between what is seen and what is thought, and between
> what is thought and what is felt. What comes to pass is a rupture in the
> specific configuration that allows us to stay in 'our' assigned places in a
> given state of things. These sorts of ruptures can happen anywhere and at
> any time, but they can never be calculated. (*Dissensus* 143)

Conclusion: A Note on *Mad Men* and Falling Bodies

> An archive of images is…something like a seedbed in which images, like
>
> seeds, are planted, waiting for the spring to bring them back to life and
>
> into the light. (Mitchell, *Cloning* 128)

Every episode of AMC's popular television series, *Mad Men*, begins with an animated opening credits sequence that depicts a man falling from the top of a skyscraper. Wearing a suit and tie, the man only appears to the audience in silhouette. At the beginning of the sequence, the man steps into a corner office. He places his briefcase on the floor. With this act, the office starts to crumble and collapse around him. The animation proceeds in slow motion as picture frames fall from the walls, blinds drop from the windows, a lamp tumbles down, the chairs and desk separate into pieces, and all gives way to gravity. The next cut reveals the silhouetted man plummeting from the top of a skyscraper in a slow motion free fall as if he has just leapt from the office window. As the man continues to fall, the buildings behind him reflect the imagery of various advertising tropes and product slogans: "Enjoy the Best America Has to Offer" and "It's the Gift That Never Fails." The man falls through this backdrop of imagery, passing depictions of seductive women, a glass of whiskey, housewives, wedding bands, and nuclear families. He drifts out of view. The final cut shows the man relaxed on a sofa with his back to the camera, arm outstretched, holding a cigarette in his hand, as the show's title appears in the top right corner of the frame. The fall appears to have been a dream, but obviously one that speaks to certain realities.

In the context of the show, these opening credits allude to the downward trajectory of *Mad Men*'s protagonist, Don Draper (Jon Hamm), who is frequently caught between many of the gendered responsibilities, distractions, and ideals reflected through the advertisements on the buildings. Following Don through the 1960s decade, *Mad Men*'s episodes are frequently set against a backdrop of the era's social, political, and technological upheavals and uncertainties. Historical events such as the assassinations of President Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr., Vietnam and the Cold War, early office computer technology and the moon landing, all figure prominently over the course of the series. The falling silhouette calls attention to Don's difficulty in maintaining personal and professional stability in rapidly changing and turbulent surroundings. *Mad Men*'s opening credits, however, not only become a metaphor for Don's personal strife, but also suggest a national and individual sense of crisis in a constantly changing world.

The imagery of *Mad Men*'s falling silhouette clearly draws from Richard Drew's falling body photograph of September 11, 2001. Curiously, when the first episode of *Mad Men* debuted in the fall of 2007, relatively few critics and scholars would note this connection to the iconography of Drew's image. Reviewers of the show most commonly discuss the influence of Saul Bass and his credit sequences for Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* (1959) and *Vertigo* (1958) without any mention of *Mad Men*'s explicit nod to Drew's photograph. In an interview with *Art of the Title*, an online publication devoted to the creative process behind title sequence designs, one of the creative directors of *Mad Men*'s opening credits, Mark Gardner, candidly admits that "AMC had all kinds of issues with someone falling from a skyscraper" and that "[s]ome people saw references to 9/11 and all of that, and in the beginning AMC were totally against the idea" (Landekic). In

initial storyboard concepts, the creative directors went so far as to animate the man's

impact with the ground, having the silhouette explode into small pixels. In the interview,

Gardner admits that it took much convincing and editing before AMC approved of the

final sequence. Six years after the terrorist attacks, *Mad Men*'s use of falling body

imagery in its opening credits seems not to have generated public discussion or

controversy during the broadcast of seasons one through four. "This credit sequence

itself," writes Jeffrey Melnick, "has received a great deal of positive comment, mostly for

how it captures some important elements of the graphic arts of the 1960s and how it

invokes a couple of Alfred Hitchcock movies. But no one seems much bothered by the

fact that this plummeting ad man is a double of the 'falling man' of 9/11" (21). The

show's opening credits also did not generate controversy in September 2008 when *Mad

Men* won the Primetime Emmy Award for Outstanding Main Title Design. There was no

discussion about how a network television show had reconfigured an image previously

denounced as exploitative, voyeuristic, and pornographic. There was no comment on the

possibility that AMC might be disrespecting a national tragedy or taking advantage of a

man's death in order to boost ratings.

AMC's use of the falling man silhouette for the promotion of *Mad Men*'s fifth

season premiere, however, was finally met with a minor media debate. In the early

months of 2012, advertisements for the show were visible all over New York City. Most

of these ads featured a variation of the silhouetted falling man from the show's opening

credits set against a plain white background. Each advertisement starkly juxtaposed the

vast white space of the background with the considerably smaller size of the silhouette in

order to emphasize the height and severity of the fall. Not only were the ads displayed in

subway stations, at bus stops, and on a number of large billboards, but they could also be found on the sides of numerous large buildings as if to suggest the possibility of an actual fall from the given building in question. In each ad, the silhouette of the man was positioned upside down at the top of the frame with one knee slightly bent, inevitably reproducing the iconicity of Drew's photograph. There were no words on these advertisements except for the date of *Mad Men*'s season premiere, "March 25." The campaign clearly relied on the audience's familiarity with the falling silhouette from *Mad Men*'s opening credits, but it also unquestionably relied on the distinctly shocking context of Drew's photograph in order to attract and hold the attention of potential viewers.

The debate surrounding AMC's advertisements would initially surface online through blogs, discussion boards, and other social media platforms. Articles about the ads appeared from January through March of 2012. Most of the articles discussed the depiction of the falling body as controversial and offensive. Articles raising questions about the use of Drew's photograph appeared in *Salon*, *Forbes*, and *The Telegraph*. In an article for the *New York Times*, David W. Dunlap interviewed a number of New Yorkers about their reactions to the advertisements featuring the falling body. He quotes a number of people with personal and familial connections to those lost in the terrorist attacks. Most of the respondents admitted that they found the ads disturbing, characterizing them as hurtful or insensitive. In response to the controversy, an AMC spokesperson denied any likeness of the falling body advertisements to Drew's photograph from September 11, 2001: "The image of Don Draper tumbling through space has been used since the show began in 2007 to represent a man whose life is in turmoil. The image used in the campaign is intended to serve as a metaphor for what is happening in Don Draper's

fictional life and in no way references actual events" (qtd. in Dunlap). Paradoxically,

AMC's response points to *Mad Men*'s metaphorical use of the image, but denies that this

metaphor could potentially signify actual events beyond the show's narrative. Regardless

of AMC's comments, the show's opening credits are quite obviously meant to draw

connections between contemporary cultural anxieties and those of the past. If understood

as a direct reference to Drew's photograph, *Mad Men*'s falling silhouette conveys a

relatively obvious metaphor for falling backwards in time in order to engage with the

present through the past.

In his article for *Forbes*, Doug Hill describes this metaphorical reconfiguration of

Drew's photograph for AMC's *Mad Men* as an affective symbol that communicates a

sense of psychological disorientation as a result of rapid technological change in an

unpredictable social and political climate. Hill writes that the image of the falling body

not only captures "the literal terror of 9/11," but also "what it feels like, existentially, to

be living in a world of radical uncertainty" ("Decoding"). In other words, *Mad Men*'s

opening credits, and the show itself, indirectly explores contemporary anxieties such as

terrorism, the Global Recession, and climate change, through representations of the past.

"The source of our anxiety isn't only terrorism," writes Hill, "[i]t's about a loss of

psychic footing in a world of overwhelming change" ("Decoding"). Author of the

original *Esquire* article on Drew's photograph, Tom Junod, provides a similar analysis in

his brief article on the advertising campaign, partially defending AMC's use of falling

body iconography. Junod agrees that there is no question that the advertisements refer to

Drew's photograph. He also acknowledges that *Mad Men* often presents the 1960s as an

oblique commentary on post-9/11 American culture. Junod argues that *Mad Men*'s

representation of the falling body brilliantly utilizes the affective legacy of 9/11, conveying the "almost vertiginous sensation of the ground giving way beneath our feet, along with just about everything else" ("Falling (Mad) Men"). Ultimately, Junod embraces the show's appropriation of Drew's image as a universal symbol for contemporary American life. "We're all falling men now," writes Junod, who argues that the *Mad Men*'s use of the falling body confronts viewers with the suggestion that American exceptionalism is in its decline ("Falling (Mad) Men").

In this light, *Mad Men*'s opening credits and the advertisements in New York City transform Drew's photograph from a its status as literal depiction of death to a more abstract signification of contemporary affective disorientation. Although Junod claims that *Mad Men*'s opening credits signify the decline of American exceptionalism, the show's metaphorical reconfiguration of the falling body as a universal signifier for turbulent times dispenses with the historical specificity of Drew's photograph and does not signal any ethical responsibility or engagement toward the vulnerability of others. Here, there is no attempt to recognize precarious life beyond an American context. If *Mad Men*'s reconfiguration of the falling body photograph conveys the decline of American exceptionalism, it only imagines that decline in terms of the personal struggles of Don Draper. In other words, *Mad Men*'s use of the falling man as an abstract commentary on contemporary American life reaffirms the scholarly consensus that post-9/11 cultural texts often translate the terrorist attacks through an interiorized lens of traumatized domesticity. In the context of *Mad Men*, the falling body is not the abject opposite of victory culture, but is transformed as part of a broader symbolic narrative depicting the tragic loss of American triumphalism.

Throughout this dissertation, I have attempted to move beyond the hermeneutics of suspicion in order to reread and recuperate some valuable political, ethical, and affective aspects of post-9/11 visual culture. I have sought to form reparative readings of literary and visual texts in order to foreground cultural responses to the terrorist attacks that may suggest alternative significations to narrative elements of victory culture and American exceptionalism. Although *Mad Men*'s metaphorical translation of Drew's photograph only seems to legitimize the universalization of collective trauma in the wake of the terrorist attacks, the media debate surrounding AMC's advertising campaign does clearly communicate an ongoing cultural preoccupation with the visual legacy of 9/11. *Mad Men*'s opening credits demonstrate the uncanny and unpredictable potential for images to emerge in alternative forms and gain narrative energy in new directions. In other words, visual culture of the terrorist attacks may continue to reproduce or redefine particular meanings or resonances across multiple temporalities. There is always the possibility for the event of September 11, 2001 to emerge through alternative significations in affective and aesthetic encounters with images.

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