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The Trauma Aesthetic: (Re)Mediating Absence, Emptiness and Nation in Post-9/11 American Film and Literature

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Abstract

This thesis proposes a concept of the trauma aesthetic in order to make sense of the ways in which particular texts have responded to the events of 9/11 as an intensely mediated and vicariously experienced cultural trauma. A central argument within existing studies of 9/11 and its cultural impact is that, in the immediate aftermath at least, the dominant interpretation of the events often relied on crude and simplistic notions of national identity and American exceptionalism. Drawing on a variety of the cultural, political and aesthetic discourses which have emerged in post-9/11 studies, this thesis argues that the trauma aesthetic (re)mediates the cultural narrative of 9/11 in more complex and nuanced ways.

The thesis examines four novels: *Falling Man* (Don DeLillo, 2007), *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (Jonathan Safran Foer, 2005), *Man in the Dark* (Paul Auster, 2008) and *The Road* (Cormac McCarthy, 2006), and four films: *A History of Violence* (d. David Cronenberg, 2005), *In the Valley of Elah* (d. Paul Haggis, 2007), *25th Hour* (d. Spike Lee, 2002) and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (d. Michel Gondry, 2004). All of these texts respond to the trauma of 9/11 either directly or indirectly and explore similar themes of masculinity, culpability and the nature of traumatic experience. My analysis identifies a series of metaphors, common to all of these texts, which are used to (re)mediate the sense of absence and emptiness integral to the experience of 9/11 and the sense of vulnerability which it inflicted upon American national identity. These include: falling, timelessness, placelessness and the absent body. By drawing on and adapting existing trauma theories from scholars such as Cathy Caruth and Kali Tal the thesis proposes the trauma aesthetic as a new critical tool for the understanding of post-9/11 film and literature.

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Introduction

Defining 9/11 and its Aftermath

Over the last ten years the events of September 11, 2001 and their impact on American culture and politics has become an increasingly prominent subject within both academic and journalistic discourses. Having produced a large body of work examining various aspects of what is now typically referred to as 'post-9/11' this preoccupation is epitomised by recent reflections on what has been putatively termed 'the 9/11 decade.' This thesis, of course, forms a part of this movement in its definition and analysis of a set of films and novels as precisely post-9/11. However, it also presents an understanding of 9/11 that highlights the specificity of the attacks as a vicariously experienced cultural trauma rather than assuming their ubiquitous presence in everything which has followed. To declare an entire decade's political action, social atmosphere and cultural output as post-9/11 is reductive and glosses over the different ways in which 9/11 has been managed within a variety of media. Furthermore, the rhetoric which surrounds this area of study often assumes that everything is, in some way, influenced by the attacks. Perhaps now, as we move out of the so-called 9/11 decade, it is even more urgent that clear distinctions are made between that which is 'post-9/11' and that which simply comes after 9/11.

Chapter one explores the question of 9/11's historical significance, its cultural status, and traumatic impact in detail. In keeping with its title, 'Finding the Right Words', this chapter introduces a range of theories on cultural trauma (Jeffrey C. Alexander et. al, Kirby Farrell, E. Ann Kaplan) and the relationship between trauma and popular culture (Frank Furedi, Mark Seltzer, Marita Sturken). By interrogating the usefulness of these theories in relation to the experience of 9/11, I construct a detailed linguistic framework which allows me to more effectively introduce and examine the phenomenon of vicarious witnessing. It is this aspect of 9/11's specificity to which the trauma aesthetic primarily responds. The second section of this chapter details how the

process of vicarious witnessing is achieved through a combination of spatial, temporal and ideological identifications, and is characterised by a profound sense of absence, emptiness and the destabilisation of cultural and personal identity. The chapter then moves to discuss the implication of the process of vicarious traumatisation on the (re)mediation of trauma in the trauma aesthetic by comparing how this specific mode of experience compares to understandings of trauma presented by scholars such as Cathy Caruth and Anne Whitehead. Through an understanding of how trauma fiction has historically been produced and understood I construct a framework within which the trauma aesthetic is seen as drawing on and adapting familiar themes and tropes.

Locating the Trauma Aesthetic

The thesis examines four novels- *Falling Man* (Don DeLillo, 2007), *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (Jonathan Safran Foer, 2005), *Man in the Dark* (Paul Auster, 2008) and *The Road* (Cormac McCarthy, 2006) - and four films: *A History of Violence* (d. David Cronenberg, 2005), *In the Valley of Elah* (d. Paul Haggis, 2007), *25th Hour* (d. Spike Lee, 2002) and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (d. Michel Gondry, 2004). Not all of the texts address the events of 9/11 directly. *The Road,* for example, never explicitly references the attacks and its depiction of a post-apocalyptic America but its evocation of a sense of national insecurity and devastation has led to a number of critics and reviewers reading the novel within a post-9/11 context.[1] Within these studies, there has been a focus on the political, economic and ecological issues that have also emerged during the post-9/11 era, specifically in relation to America's on-going War on Terror. For example, Sara Spurgeon describes *The Road* as 'an allegory of a hyperabundant Ameria,' observing how 'during the post-9/11 war on terrorism and at a time when the economy and environment face a number of compelling challenges, many Americans are struggling to redefine national identity as well as

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[1] ÖZden SöZalan, in his own post-9/11 reading of the novel alongside Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, provides a brief but useful summary of some of the most prominent analyses of *The Road* in this context. ÖZden SöZalan, *The American Nightmare: Don Delillo's Falling Man and Cormac Mccarthy's the Road* (Bloomington, IN: Author House, 2001), 65-66. See also Richard Crownshaw, "Deterritorializing the "Homeland" in American Studies and American Fiction after 9/11," *Journal of American Studies* 45, no. Special Issue 04 (2011).

redefine the country's role in the world.'[2] My discussion of the novel within this thesis addresses similar concerns of national identity but refocuses the analysis to consider more directly the experience of cultural trauma. This is not to say that the wider issues noted by scholars such as Spurgeon are not important but they are separate from the more psychological issues of traumatic stress discussed in this thesis.

This thesis makes a clear distinction between the political and economic uncertainty of the early 21st century and the specifically post-9/11. Although the events of 9/11 undoubtedly played a significant role in the development of these uncertainties, to address the continuing affects of the War on Terror and America's economic crisis would be to lose sight of the phenomenon of vicarious trauma and its resonance within post-9/11 American culture. For this reason all the texts examined in this thesis are produced between September 2001 and September 2008: that is, between 9/11 and the collapse of the Lehman Brother's which signalled the beginning of America's deepest economic crisis since the Great Depression. Although I do not see the concerns of 9/11 and the experience of cultural trauma suddenly becoming unimportant at this historical moment, they become more closely embroiled with, and influenced by broader political and economic issues. An early indication of this can be found in the *New York Times*' reporting of the 2008 Presidential Election Campaigns. On July 29, 2008 the newspaper makes the following statement:

> In the latest New York Times/CBS News poll, conducted July 7-14, more than half of the people surveyed cited an economic issue as the most important problem facing the country, compared with 7 percent before the 2006 midterm elections in which Democrats won control of Congress. The war in Iraq, which Mr. McCain has made the centerpiece of his campaign, was cited by just 13 percent of those polled as the issue of paramount concern to them.[3]

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[2] Sara Spurgeon, *Cormac Mccarthy: All the Pretty Horses, No Country for Old Men, the Road* (London and New York: Continuum, 2011), 166.
[3] Larry Rohter, "Candidates Return Focus to Economy and Jobs," *The New York Times* 2008, n. pg.

By limiting my examination to texts produced prior to the acceleration of these concerns in 2008 I am able to focus more directly on the ways in which the selected texts are structured around the experience and memory of trauma. It is this specific thematic focus which underpins the trauma aesthetic, rather than a direct concern with 9/11 and its political consequences.

Like *The Road*, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* does not immediately stand out as a post-9/11 film but has recently been included in discussions of how 9/11 has effected cinematic representations of memory, traumatic memory and psychological healing. David Martin-Jones offers perhaps the most explicit reading of *Eternal Sunshine* as a post-9/11 film in *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity: Narrative Time in National Contexts* in which he posits that the film 'uses its science fiction narrative to criticise the prevailing mood of America after 9/11.'[4] He goes on to observe that 'through the choice of name *Eternal Sunshine* self-consciously highlights how the national narrative is left unfulfilled by the rhetoric of triumphal amnesia, especially in official accounts of history like *The 9/11 Commission Report*.'[5]Like Martin-Jones, I see *Eternal Sunshine* as playing with, and subverting generic conventions, destabilising individual identity and questioning the process and ethics of collective memory. Through the examination of the film within the thesis it will be become clear that these thematic concerns are managed through the same aesthetic devices identified in texts like *Falling Man* and *25th Hour*. It is this shared mode of representation which unifies the trauma aesthetic.

The kinds of representational strategies used within the trauma aesthetic are driven by an opposition to the dominant cultural narrative of 9/11. As chapter one illustrates in detail, the broadcast media narrated the attacks through a series of crude and simplistic metaphors which evoked images of tough masculinity, national unity and American exceptionalism. A number of post-9/11 texts adopt this same approach to the representation and management of trauma with perhaps the most notable example being Oliver Stone's 2006 film *World Trade Center*. In this film, which follows the story of two Port Authority Patrol men trapped in the concourse of the one of

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[4] David Martin-Jones, *Deleuze, Cinema and National Identity: Narrative Time in National Contexts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2006), 179.
[5] Ibid., 182.

the Twin Towers when it collapses, familiar devices of heroic endeavour and traditional family values work to produce a film which uncomplicatedly transforms disaster into hope. Stone himself acknowledges this sense of catharsis in an interview with Ric Gentry for *Film Quarterly* when he states that the film's exploration of the limits of death and human vulnerability developed a kind of 'spirituality ... and later a sense of resurrection for the characters.' Significantly, however, he goes on to add that this resurrection is 'in another sense, a rebirth of a kind for the viewer, the way we look at 9/11 through the experience of *World Trade Center*. There is a regeneration out of the cataclysm.'[6] Although in the same interview Stone criticises the way in which the mass media 'pollutes and trivializes' political issues and traumatic events, his own mimetic representation of the events of 9/11 seem to fall into the same trap through its lack of critical perspective. As *Sight and Sound* reviewer Ruby Rich comments, 'the director of Platoon (1986), not JFK (1991), is in charge this time around. As a result, World Trade Center ... is a movie so determinedly circumscribed, so micro-focused, as to constitute not a historical epic but rather a classic disaster movie. Men are trapped. Families await word. Help is on the way. We are at war. Genre trumps history.'[7] The aim of the trauma aesthetic is to offer a more complex and nuanced account of the affect of 9/11 which subverts these kinds of generic conventions in order to question and critique their ideological foundations.

A broad illustration of the way in which the trauma aesthetic contrasts the simplistic and often crude representational strategies of the dominant cultural narrative of 9/11 can be made with reference to Mark Danner's article for the *New York Review of Books* titled 'After September 11: Our State of Exception.' The article offers a summary of the so-called 9/11 decade and the changes it has wrought on the American way of life. Danner begins with a description of the main events of 9/11 including such poetic descriptions as 'the perfect blue of that late summer sky stained by acrid black smoke ... that great blossoming flower of white dust, roiling and churning upward, enveloping and consuming the mighty skyscraper as it collapses into the whirlwind.'[8] This

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[6] Ric Gentry, "Another Meditation on Death: An Interview with Oliver Stone," *Film Quarterly* (2007).
[7] B. Ruby Rich, "Out of the Rubble," *Sight & Sound* XVI, no. 10 (2006).
[8] Mark Danner, "After September 11: Our State of Exception," *New York Review of Books* (2011): n. pg.

sentimental use of metaphor which attempts to literally 'paint' a picture of the attacks is, in itself, in opposition to the trauma aesthetic in which the image of trauma is simultaneously pervasive and illusive. The most striking comparison, however, can be made between the trauma aesthetic and the passage which follows Danner's description of the attacks:

> To Americans, those terrible moments stand as a brightly lit portal through which we were all compelled to step, together, into a different world. Since that day ten years ago we have lived in a subtly different country, and though we have grown accustomed to these changes and think little of them now, certain words still appear often enough in the news –Guantánamo, indefinite detention, torture - to remind us that ours remains a strange America.[9]

Here Danner very explicitly states that post-9/11 America is definitively detached from pre-9/11 America : it is both 'different' and 'strange.' However, it is important to note that the material differences listed are not ones which affect the putative victim of 9/11 - the white American male – but rather people who are ethnically and/or geographically othered. How, then, is life in America so very different? The trauma aesthetic's depiction of post-9/11 America suggests that it is not; what the dominant narrative of 9/11 sees as difference, the trauma aesthetic understands as an intensification of existing cultural concerns. There remains, however, a profound sense of strangeness and unfamiliarity within the trauma aesthetic which is articulated through themes of language, identity, and Nation. Chapters two, three and four examine these themes in detail and argue that the trauma aesthetic marks the post-9/11 not through definitive or exceptional change, but through the recognition that what was once seen as stable was, in fact, an illusion.

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[9] Ibid.

Analysing the Trauma Aesthetic

It cannot be ignored that the texts identified for examination in this thesis are, in a number of ways, very different. The most striking of these differences is the difference in medium. Although film and literature have a long standing relationship as forms of mass storytelling their contrasting formal properties and modes of consumption cannot be ignored. Although I think it is important not to fall into the trap of differentiating high culture literary fiction from low culture popular cinema it is worth noting that the trauma aesthetic is not confined to mainstream Hollywood cinema or obscure literary fiction. By acknowledging these differences we can begin to see how the trauma aesthetic responds to a set of concerns which pervade this period of American culture rather than offering personal accounts of the events of 9/11. Furthermore, the differences in production and consumption across the trauma aesthetic, alongside the varying degrees to which the texts reference 9/11 itself, opens up the potential to see of this concept beyond 9/11 and its aftermath.

That the texts examined in this thesis cover a broad spectrum of production contexts and audiences is strikingly evident amongst the films: all four of which were produced by different companies, under different directors and were visible to varying degrees within the industry during their theatrical release. The impact of the different industrial contexts in which the films were produced can be seen in the box office figures for their domestic releases. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and *A History of Violence* were released in over 1300 theatres nationwide grossing well over $30 million each. Both films received two Oscar nominations with *Eternal Sunshine* going on to win the award for best screenplay. *In the Valley of Elah* also received an Oscar nomination for best actor but its widest release only reached 978 theatres. Despite featuring well known stars Tommy Lee Jones and Charlize Theron and gaining reasonable critical acclaim, the film's domestic release only managed to gross just under $7 million, not quite a third of its reported budget of $23 million. Spike Lee's *25th Hour* had the most limited release opening

in only 5 theatres and reaching a total of 495 theatres over its run. However, it managed to fair a little better than *In the Valley of Elah* grossing just over $13 million.

Although box office figures provide only a very limited view of how a film was received, it is sufficient enough to indicate that these four films were being consumed by potentially very different audiences. However, I do not see this as a methodological weakness as it offers a different perspective on post-9/11 film than the initial academic work in this area which primarily focused on mainstream Hollywood film and the impact of 9/11 on the action and horror genres. For example, Wheeler Winston Dixon's edited collection *Film and Television After 9/11* published in 2004, contains a number of essays which are premised on the acknowledgment of a shift in industrial concerns after 9/11. In his introduction Dixon explains that 'this volume reflects the thoughts of many in the film and media community who sense a definite shift in modes of perception, production, and audience reception for films such as *Black Hawk Down* (2001), *Collateral Damage* (2002), *We Were Soldiers* (2002), and other films that demonstrate a renewed audience appetite for narratives of conflict, reminiscent of the wave of filmmaking that surrounded American involvement in World War II.'[10] Although this produces some interesting observations regarding the ways in which the film industry reacted to the events of 9/11, the focus on the reaction of a particular sector of mainstream Hollywood is rather reductive.

A similarly reductive approach can be identified in the initial reception, both academic and popular, of post-9/11 literature. In the immediate aftermath of 9/11 there was a widespread expectation that novelists would be able to provide a unique insight in to the events and their meaning. In an article for *The Guardian* Robert McCrum declares 'the need for novelists,' who 'can supply the insights that people need at a time like this.'[11] Similarly, Richard Gray claims that authors of posr-9/11 fiction 'have the chance, in short, of getting "into" history, to participate in its processes and, in a perspectival sense at least, of getting "out" of it too – and enabling us, the

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[10] Wheeler Winston Dixon, ed. *Film and Television after 9/11* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press,2004), 1.
[11] Robert McCrum, "The Need for Novelists," *The Guardian*, 23 September 2001.

readers, to begin to understand just how those processes work.'[12] This insistence that the novel is uniquely able to (re)present 9/11 and provide some kind of cultural catharsis led critics to read literary responses as attempts to mimetically reproduce that traumatic event. For example, Cheryl Miller's article "9/11 and the Novelists" sets out to examine the extent to which novels such as *Falling Man*, *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* (Ken Kalfus, 2006), *The Emperor's Children* (Clair Messud, 2006) and *Netherland* (Joseph O'Neill, 2008) 'succeed in providing a recognizable and illuminating portrait of our times.'[13] As a result these critics miss some of the most significant and interesting aspects of post-9/11 fiction, a problem which is particularly evident in the critical reception of *Falling Man*.

DeLillo's response to 9/11 was greatly anticipated. His pre-9/11 novels had dealt extensively with themes of terrorism, national apocalypse and the public spectacle of death, themes that, in the aftermath of 9/1 seemed more poignant and in urgent need of exploration than ever. As Linda Kauffman succinctly puts it, 'DeLillo has been writing 9/11 novels for thirty years'[14] and as a result seemed particularly well placed to produce the kind of effective, mimetic (re)presentation of 9/11 that journalists and literary scholars seemed to be looking for. However, when *Falling Man* was published it was met with a mixed response. Some reviewers, such as A.C. Grayling for *The Times*, praised the novel as 'a poignant and disturbing rendition of the events of 9/11 and their effects.'[15] In contrast, however, Andrew Hagan's review for the *New York Review of Books* condemns what he regards to be a lack of emotional impact within the novel and a failure to conjure up the traumatic events in any meaningful or powerful way:

> *Falling Man* is a distillation of fear and grief over real-life drama next to which the 9/11
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> Commission Report reads serenely and beautifully. Open that report at any page and you

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[12] Richard Gray, "Open Doors, Closed Minds: American Prose Writing at a Time of Crisis," *American Literary History* (2008): 147.
[13] Cheryl Miller, "9/11 and the Novelists," *Commentary* 126(2008): 32.
[14] Linda S. Kauffman, "World Trauma Center," *American Literary History* 21, no. 3 (2009).
[15] A. C. Grayling, "Falling Man (Review)," *The Sunday Times*, 12/05/07 2007, n. pg.

will find a breathtaking second-by-second account of that morning, and of the hijackers' backgrounds, that will make DeLillo's novel seem merely incapacitated.[16]

To narrow the analysis of novels like *Falling Man* to a mimetic comparison with the events of 9/11 misses the ways in which they engage with the events of 9/11 in more nuanced and complex ways. It would seem, therefore, that an approach to post-9/11 film and/or literary fiction which prioritises the nature of the medium, its production context, or the extent of its circulation in the selection of texts misses out on the interesting connections that can be made across such boundaries. It is for this reason that this thesis approaches post-9/11 film from a primarily aesthetic perspective, identifying shared structures of representation and meaning across the trauma aesthetic. One difficulty that arises when adopting this approach is that it inevitably leads to a rather large selection of examples. It is therefore necessary to construct a clear analytical framework within which these examples can be organised and explored.

In the introduction to her study of the representation of physical pain, Elaine Scarry observes how medical practitioners have developed models that allow for the more effective analysis of the subjective and widely varied ways in which patients describe pain. Citing the 'McGill Pain Questionnaire', Scarry explains how physical pain has come to be classified in terms of the specific dimensions: Temporal, covering adjectives such as throbbing, pulsing and flickering; Thermal which includes searing, burning and scalding; and Constrictive, which covers sensations such as pinching, pressing and cramping.[17] These dimensions do not comfortably transfer onto representations of the kind of psychological pain/distress that marked the vicarious experience of 9/11. However, the method of categorising an array of seemingly disparate responses to an experience under various headings provides and extremely useful model through which we can begin to understand how the trauma aesthetic responds to 9/11. I have, therefore, grouped the various metaphors that I have identified at work in the films and novels of the trauma aesthetic

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[16] Andrew O'Hagan, "Racing against Reality," *The New York Review of Books*: n. pg.
[17] Elaine Scarry, *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985), 7-8.

into three categories which form the focus of chapters two, three and four. These are: Spatial, Temporal and Corporeal.

The spatial dimension of the trauma aesthetic explored in chapter two incorporates a variety of visual and linguistic metaphors which attempt to represent and manage the sense of disorientation and emptiness which marks the vicarious experience of trauma. The chapter begins with an overview of the ways in which trauma fiction has historically drawn on the relationship between space and experience as a representational device. Particularly where a trauma has been experienced indirectly - for example the secondary or trans-generational trauma of the children of Holocaust survivors - the seeking out and defining of the space of trauma has been used to establish a direct connection between the victim and the original traumatic event. Similar endeavours can be identified in the broadcast media's response to 9/11 which became preoccupied with the site of the destroyed World Trade Center as a source of meaning. The analysis in chapter two, however, reveals the ways in which the trauma aesthetic actively works to dissolve the links between individuals and the world around them.

The analysis of spatial metaphors in the trauma aesthetic is illustrated with close analyses of *Falling Man*, *25th Hour* and *In the Valley of Elah* which is structured into three main themes: the visual representation of male protagonists, the positioning of the male protagonists within urban settings and the inadequacy of language in the construction of identity. Through the detailed exploration of these themes this chapter demonstrates how the trauma aesthetic destabilises the image of the tough, masculine hero that pervaded the broadcast media's coverage of 9/11. It offers instead a construction of masculinity marked by a profound lack of agency, drawing on the anxieties around the perceived crisis in masculinity that has haunted America since the middle of the twentieth century. The failure of language as a representational system is a consistent theme explored in a number of ways throughout the thesis. The analysis in this chapter focuses on the ways in which the recognition of language as an arbitrary system undermines certain characters' sense of identity and social status. Through the trope of falling, which incorporates feelings of

separation, paralysis and the imminence of death, these themes are then linked back to the vicarious experience of trauma.

Chapter three is titled 'A (Vicarious) Witness for History' and explores the temporal dimension of the trauma aesthetic by exploring the ways in which the concept of time or, more accurately, timelessness builds on the sense of disorientation and placelessness discussed in chapter two. Again, the ways in which the trauma aesthetic approaches the concept of time is positioned in contrast to the broadcast media's narration of the events of 9/11 which insisted on emphasising the precise timings of the attacks and how the events of that day unfolded. With this in mind, the chapter begins by outlining in detail the ways in which the concept and movement of time influenced the construction of 9/11 as a cultural trauma. A crucial aspect of this is the examination of the ways in which 9/11 was declared as an historical rupture; an event so unprecedented and unique as to detach it from any kind of historical context. However, I will also highlight how 9/11 was consistently remediated through the referential frameworks of particular historical events such as the attack on Pearl Harbour in December, 1941. Drawing on the work of scholars such as Emily Rosenberg and Kevin Rozario I demonstrate how the temporal dimension of 9/11's narration within the broadcast media worked to project particular ideas about national identity and victimhood.

Chapter four examines how the qualities of absence, disorientation, timelessness and culpability are brought together to examine the profound but paradoxical corporeality of vicarious trauma. Beginning with an overview of some of the ways in which the body has traditionally been depicted within trauma fiction as both a site of, and witness to trauma this chapter highlights how part of 9/11's specificity was the absence of bodies: the body of the victim was lost in the destruction of the towers, or erased through the process of censorship and the body of the witness was absent from the physical site of the traumatic event. In order to negotiate these tensions between the presence (corporeality) and absence of the body the trauma aesthetic constructs what I have termed 'the body suspended in sensation.' Revisiting the concept of falling addressed in chapter two the body suspended in sensation breaks down the boundaries between

the victim and the witness, becoming the site of both the transmission and experience of traumatic affect. As such, this corporeal dimension of the trauma aesthetic also begins to address the complex phenomenon of collective trauma, exploring the ways in which emotions and sensations are communicated between individuals and groups.

It is through the examination of the corporeal dimension that we begin to see the representational limits of the trauma aesthetic. Significantly, however, I argue that the texts are acutely aware of these limitations and are content to explore and experiment with them rather than try to resolve them. It is this resistance of resolution and simple answers which most effectively summarises the trauma aesthetic's opposition to the dominant cultural narrative of 9/11. Each of the structuring metaphors explored throughout the thesis works to develop an overwhelming sense of meaninglessness and hopelessness and, even though these conditions are not brought about by the singular event of 9/11, they are highlighted and intensified by the vicarious experience of that particular trauma.

1. Finding the Right Words: Developing an Approach to 9/11 and the Trauma Aesthetic

Trauma, Theory, Culture

During the twentieth century, the conceptual ground of trauma became increasingly well trodden in both clinical and cultural arenas. Beginning in the late nineteenth century with studies of traumatised passengers involved in accidents on the newly invented railways, the clinical study of trauma gained significant momentum through the work of Sigmund Freud and the examination of traumatised soldiers in the wake of the First World War. It was not until the Vietnam War, however, that the lasting effects of trauma were officially recognised in the United States as a medical condition; a recognition marked by the inclusion of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) in the 1980 edition of the American Psychiatric Association's *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders.* It was this landmark in the study of trauma that initiated what Cathy Caruth describes as 'a renewed interest in the problem of trauma' and the emergence of a large body of work, across disciplines, examining both the social and cultural implications of trauma.[18] This academic interest is mirrored by the increased visibility and discussion of trauma within forms of popular culture such as television crime dramas and talk shows, the proliferation and popularity of which evidence a growing preoccupation in American culture with the identification and healing of trauma.

It was in the midst of this cultural preoccupation that the events of 9/11 occurred, giving renewed resonance to the need for therapeutic intervention and demanding a rigorous examination of the ways in which trauma is represented and managed within contemporary culture. This chapter outlines how the impact of 9/11 can be most usefully understood as a

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[18] Cathy Caruth, "Trauma and Experience: Introduction," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 3.

diversion within the relationship between trauma, theory and culture; a change in direction which does not erase the path which came before it but which nonetheless requires an adjustment. The development of new critical tools begins with an overview of how the proliferation of trauma in American culture is currently understood, with particular emphasis on the role of language, spectacle and post-modern ideas of reality. Building on this, the section "History, Memory, Nostalgia" employs established trauma theory to demonstrate the relationship between 9/11 and the history of trauma in the United States. This section also identifies the kinds of familiar narrative devices and ideological tropes that were used within the broadcast media's narrative of the attacks; a narrative which the trauma aesthetic works to make more complex and nuanced. The final sections outline the specificity of 9/11 as an intensely mediated cultural trauma. With particular emphasis on the phenomenon of vicarious traumatisation, these sections identify how the experience of 9/11 was characterised by conditions of absence, isolation, and emptiness which are reflected in the structuring metaphors of the trauma aesthetic.

The understanding of 'post-9/11' which underpins this thesis draws on three distinct conceptualisations of trauma in contemporary culture: Frank Furedi's 'Therapy Culture', Mark Seltzer's 'Wound Culture' and Kirby Farrell's 'Post-Traumatic Culture'. In isolation these concepts lack the detail and flexibility which is required to fully understand a cultural atmosphere which is both exceptional and historiographical. However, different aspects of each perspective can be used to construct a solid framework for the analysis of post-9/11 representations of trauma. All three scholars observe that trauma has become pervasive within contemporary culture. For Seltzer this pervasiveness is explicit and is evidenced in the 'convening of the public around scenes of violence – the rushing to the scene of the accident, the milling around the point of impact ... the public fascination with torn and opened bodies, torn and opened persons, a collective gathering around shock, trauma and the wound.'[19] This fascination with the spectacle of trauma clearly played an important role in the widespread affect of 9/11 and is evidenced by the huge body of amateur video footage and photography that people felt compelled to record and

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[19] Mark Seltzer, *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture* (New York and London: Routledge, 1998), 1.

subsequently archive, and the many accounts of people becoming transfixed to the continuous television coverage of the attacks. However, Seltzer places considerable emphasis on physical violence and bodily wounds, which are not key components of the spectacle of 9/11. Or, at least they are key only in their absence. For this reason it is instructive to consider how Furedi and Farrell posit a more implicit, less visible condition of trauma in contemporary culture.

Discussing specifically the ways in which popular culture has placed increasing emphasis on the identification and healing of trauma Furedi writes,

> The therapeutic imperative is not so much towards the realisation of self-fulfilment as the promotion of self-limitation. It posits the self in distinctly fragile and feeble form and insists that the management of life requires the continuous intervention of therapeutic expertise. The elevated concern with the self is underpinned by anxiety and apprehension, rather than a positive vision realising human potential. Therapeutic culture has helped construct a diminished sense of self that characteristically suffers from an emotional deficit and possesses a permanent consciousness of vulnerability.[20]

The extreme sense of vulnerability which characterises therapy culture is certainly evident throughout the trauma aesthetic, particularly in the depictions of isolated male figures discussed in chapter two. It is important to highlight, however, that the trauma aesthetic is not exclusively concerned with personal trauma. Indeed trauma post-9/11 is marked by a tension between the individual and the collective. Although not unique to the representation of 9/11, the nature of the attacks as a mediated event directly experienced by relatively few but watched by many gives this opposition particular significance within this context.

Furedi points towards the tension between the individual and the collective when he comments that 'the rise of the confessional mode, blur[s] ... the line between the private and the public.'[21] The kinds of examples discussed by Furedi, including a number of high-profile television talk shows returns us to the notion of spectacle foregrounded by Seltzer. While this clearly resonates with the events of 9/11 which have repeatedly been discussed in terms of spectacle, I argue that the trauma aesthetic does not respond to 9/11 as a spectacle in the way it is defined by these scholars. Both Furedi and Seltzer implicitly draw on Guy Debord's theory of the spectacle

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[20] Frank Furedi, *Therapy Cluture: Cultivating Vulnerability in an Uncertain Age* (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 21.
[21] Ibid., 17.

which he posits is characterised by the unilateral communication of meaning, received by a passive spectator.[22] However, novels such as Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* and Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* present a more complex model for the transference of traumatic affect where the spectator plays , or is at least invited to play, an active role in the interpretation and communication of trauma.

The model for the communication of trauma across a cultural group is perhaps best illustrated in Farrell's discussion of post-traumatic culture. In a voice similar to Furedi, Farrell emphasises the proliferation of trauma within contemporary culture, framing it as 'a strategic fiction that a complex, stressful society is using to account for a world that seems threateningly out of control.'[23] Within this definition trauma is not only the latent subject of communication but also the vehicle of communication. To this extent trauma is not merely a concept which has become embedded in contemporary culture, but an inevitable product of it, a phenomenon which Jean Baudrillard believed was epitomised by 9/11. Discussing the extent of 9/11's traumatic impact Baudrillard describes the terrorists' achievement thus:

> A victory that is visible in the subterranean ramifications and infiltrations of the event – not just in the direct economic, political, financial slump in the whole system – and the resulting moral and psychological downturn – but in the slump of the value system, in the whole ideology of freedom, of free circulation, and so on, on which the Western World prided itself, and on which it drew to exert its hold over the rest of the world.[24]

Baudrillard's description of the 'subterranean ramifications' of 9/11, and the way in which it has destabilised the security of everyday life in America illustrates how the post-9/11 era is characterised by the latent and, to borrow again from Baudrillard, 'virulent' presence of trauma.[25] This echoes Farrell's description of post-traumatic culture in which he posits that 'even when the symptoms are latent, we unconsciously communicate emotions such as anger and sorrow. Because of our capacity for suggestibility post-traumatic stress can be seen as a category of

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[22] SeeGuy Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 9, 12-13.

[23] Kirby Farrell, *Post-Traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1998), 2.

[24] Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, trans. Chris Turner (London and New York: Verso, 2003), 31-32.

[25] Later in *The Spirit of Terrorism* Baudrillard comments that 'more than violence ... we should speak of virulence. This violence is viral: it operates by contagion, by chain reaction and it gradually destroys all our immunities and our power to resist.' ibid., 94.

experience that mediates between a specific individual's injury and a group or even a culture.'[26]

We begin to see, from this illustration of trauma's pervasiveness within a post-traumatic society

how the post-9/11 era involved the continuing (re)mediation of trauma rather than its

emergence.

This (re)mediation occurred in a number of ways and the trauma aesthetic has its own

role to play in the process. In the initial aftermath, however, one of the central ways in which the

trauma of 9/11 was mediated within American culture was through a quite particular language of

trauma and therapy: America was seen as *wounded* and in need of *healing* and *closure*.[27]

Examining how particular events come to be understood as instances of cultural trauma, Jeffrey

Alexander observes that the extent of trauma's presence within contemporary culture has

produced what he terms 'lay trauma theory': an understanding of trauma where particular

terminology and tropes have become so familiar within popular culture that they have become

detached from their clinical and academic roots.[28] The same process is observed by Seltzer who

discusses the use of 'dime-store psychology' and 'pop psychology' as characteristic of media

interpretations of trauma. While I agree that the familiarity of the language of trauma and

therapy may have undermined its original force, it is nonetheless important to take account of the

continuing influence of this language. On the contrary, as Farrell asserts, 'when the idea of trauma

moves out of the psychiatrist's office and into the surrounding culture, its clinical definition

recedes and its explanatory powers come to the fore ...The interplay of publishers, and audiences

determines the meaning of an injury and the nature of our involvement.'[29] As the following

chapters will demonstrate, the trauma aesthetic is acutely aware of the role of language in the

representation of trauma and the ways in which representation is influenced by values and

ideologies. Furthermore, the texts explored here which explicitly address both the power and

redundancy of language as a form of representation – for example, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly*

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[26] Farrell, *Post-Traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties*, 12.
[27] For a summary of this use of language in the broadcast media see Furedi, *Therapy Cluture: Cultivating Vulnerability in an Uncertain Age*, 2.
[28] Jeffrey C. Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander, et al. (Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2004), 2-10.
[29] Farrell, *Post-Traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties*, 16.

Close, *Falling Man* and *Man in the Dark* – are self-reflexive in that they display an awareness of their own role within the cultural interpretation of 9/11, a quality which is outlined in more detail later in this chapter.

A key event in the development of a language for the cultural mediation of trauma was the 1995 Oklahoma City Bombings. The bombing, which destroyed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal building and killed 168 people was the most devastating act of domestic terrorism in American history and was extensively covered by the broadcast media. Edward T. Linenthal observes how, in the aftermath of the bombing, 'the language of psychology [which] provided a traumatic vision for treatment of the impact of violence.'[30] Linenthal observes how the driving force of this language was 'the language of healing and closure revealed a need to systematize and regulate mourning after violent mass death.'[31] However, while this was 'alluring because it promised healing and resolution,' Linenthal outlines how 'the need to regulate mourning led not only to pathologizing any condition of mourning that violated term limits but also to labelling as "normal" expressions of grief that were emotionally contained. By contrast, explosive manifestations of grief that violated behavioural protocols of public culture were labelled as abnormal.'[32]

Furedi observes a similar emphasis on the diagnosis of PTSD and the language of healing in the broadcast media covering the aftermath of 9/11. Indeed, he highlights how the Oklahoma City bombing became a template for the reaction to 9/11.[33] 'Within hours of this terrible event, the potential for great psychological damage to a population represented as traumatised was circulated as a matter of incontrovertible fact. From the outset, therapeutic activists and health professionals predicted that millions of Americans would suffer trauma and long-term emotional injury.'[34] Although the trauma aesthetic invests in the notion that 9/11 instigated a period of prolonged traumatisation, it displays an ambivalent attitude towards the kind of pop-psychology

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[30] Edward Linenthal, *The Unfinished Bombings: Oklahoma City in American Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 90.
[31] Ibid., 95.
[32] Ibid., 96.
[33] Furedi, *Therapy Cluture: Cultivating Vulnerability in an Uncertain Age*, 13.
[34] Ibid., 12.

and language of closure which typically accompany this kind of cultural atmosphere. For example, in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* the young protagonist Oskar Schnell is confused by his mother's insistence that he see a doctor to help him deal with the loss of his father: 'On Tuesday afternoon I had to go to Dr. Fein. I didn't understand why I needed help, because it seemed to me that you *should* wear heavy boots when your dad dies, and if you *aren't* wearing heavy boots, *then* you need help.'[35] Oskar is also horrified when Dr. Fein attempts to guide him to bring his feelings of loss to some kind of closure by asking if he thinks there is anything positive that can be drawn from his father's death.[36]

Of course, not all literary and filmic responses to 9/11 displayed such ambivalence. For example, *World Trade Center* (d. Oliver Stone, 2006) and *United 93* (d. Paul Greengrass, 2006), both employ particular narratives of heroism discussed later in this chapter to engender a sense of hope and resolution for the spectator. In an interview with Gavin Smith for *Film Comment* Paul Greengrass describes his depiction of the events which took place on the hijacked plane which crashed in Pennsylvania on 9/11 as 'a catharsis.'[37] This quality was not missed by viewers and critics. Nick Muntean, for example claims that both 2006 films evidence 'the power of filmic narrative as one potential form of trauma therapy.'[38] Even in texts which are less explicitly driven towards bringing about some kind of closure to the trauma of 9/11, such as Jay McInerney's *The Good Life* and Ken Kalfus's *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* there is a strong reliance on the familiar language of therapy and healing as a means of making sense of personal and collective trauma.

The New York of both these novels is populated by individuals for whom therapy is normalised. In *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* the central protagonists Joyce and Marshall see a marriage counsellor before deciding to divorce and have been sending their two children to therapy from an early age. In *The Good Life*, Sasha, a socialite who lives on the upper-East side

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[35] Jonathan Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (London and New York: Penguin, 2006 (2005)), 200.
[36] Ibid., 203.
[37] Gavin Smith, "Mission Statement," (Film Society of Lincoln Center, 2006), 26.
[38] Nick Muntean, ""It Was Just Like a Movie"," *Journal of Popular Film & Television* 37, no. 2 (2009): 53.

and organises charity galas for a living discusses her daughter's drug problem with her therapist, revealing how the familiarity of trauma has become the dominant way of making sense of particular events and behaviours.

> I think this was more in the nature of a dramatic gesture than a function of any long-term drug abuse or addiction. I mean, let's face it, we're all traumatized by what happened in September. I think it's important to bear that in mind. One of Ashley's schoolmates lost her father and her own father was down there that morning and has been volunteering at Ground Zero ever since. She's scared. Hell, I'm scared. Everyone I know is rattled. We're all drinking too much. I've started going back to my own therapist after a year's hiatus. These are scary times.[39]

Both novels suggest that there is something inadequate and empty about this kind of language - the above passage is followed by an 'uncomfortable silence' – but they do not attempt to construct an alternative linguistic framework for the understanding of trauma. Instead, they appear to resign themselves to the familiar language of pop-psychology that offers no realistic hope of recovery. This is expressed by Joyce when she discovers that her lawyer is seeing a therapist for depression: 'Another loser, another broken personality, another midlife nutjob ... This confirmed what she had heard, that the only men she'd meet now would have something wrong with them – just like she did of course.'[40]

Texts which uncritically adopt the language of trauma are not necessarily 'bad' texts but they do not offer the kind of complex, and in my view more effective, representation of trauma that characterises the trauma aesthetic. It is useful in this context to consider Alexander's summary of the effect of pop-psychology on the narration of trauma: 'In [the] task of making trauma strange, its imbededness in everyday life and language, so important for providing an initial intuitive understanding, now presents itself as a challenge to overcome.'[41] This linguistic challenge is an intensification of the inherent paradox of trauma fiction which, as I shall discuss in more detail presently, must attempt to represent what is effectively unrepresentable. As the following chapters will demonstrate, this challenge is a constant theme within the trauma aesthetic which repeatedly breaks down the relationship between language and meaning.

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[39] Jay McInerney, *The Good Life* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), 195.
[40] Ken Kalfus, *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* (London and New York: Pocket Books, 2007), 197.
[41] Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," 2.

The contrast between the kind of language used in the broadcast media's narration of the attacks and that used in the trauma aesthetic can be usefully illustrated through the example of ground zero. In the aftermath of the attacks the space left by the Twin Towers was widely discussed in terms of a 'wound' on the American landscape, echoing the analogies used in the wake of the Oklahoma City bombing. A particularly striking example of this is Diane Taylor's description of the now absent towers as like a 'phantom limb,' directly aligning the architectural with the corporeal.[42] This type of analogy is used to articulate the profound sense of loss in the wake of a traumatic event but it only achieves this momentarily for as soon as the space of the wound is established it is filled with cultural and ideological meaning. E. Ann Kaplan observes this process in the treatment of Ground Zero, commenting that 'the gap where the Twin Towers had stood in the weeks that followed became a space full of horror but also of heroism.'[43] This ideological "filling in" of the space of trauma is also discussed by Marita Sturken who observes the various ways in which Ground Zero was reproduced as a tourist commodity and used to validate America's victim status.[44] Within the trauma aesthetic, the image of the wound offers a more complex interpretation of trauma, marking the blurring of the boundaries between the victim and the perpetrator of violence. In this way the trauma aesthetic embraces the traumatic wound as a space for the re-evaluation of the self and the society within which the self functions.

It is important to emphasise, however, that the trauma aesthetic does not construct a simple alternative narrative of 9/11 that is able to remedy the representational issues associated with the familiar language of trauma and provide an effective form of catharsis. Instead it employs a language of emptiness and absence to reflect 9/11, to use the words of Jean Baudrillard, as 'an act which has, in the very moment of its perpetration, neither true meaning nor reference in another world.'[45] This is a quality which Mark Redfield observes in the terms "9/11" and "September 11" which simultaneously name an event without the detail of a specific year,

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[42] Cited in Marita Sturken, *Tourists of History: Memory, Kitsch, and Consumerism from Oklahoma City to Ground Zero* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2007), 225.
[43] E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature* (New Brunswick and London: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 12.
[44] See chapter 4, 'Tourism and Sacred Ground' in Sturken, *Tourists of History*, 165-218.
[45] Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, 73.

and erase the significance of all other September 11s. According to Redfield the rhetorical power

of these terms 'stems from [their] blankness, [their] empty formality as inscription.'[46] This

blankness points towards the problem of historical exceptionalism which is discussed in detail in

the next section of this chapter; what is most poignant here is that this specific naming a cultural

trauma functions as 'a stutter, a gasp of incomprehension.'[47] We begin to see, therefore, that the

absence which marked the original events of 9/11 is continually, if unconsciously repeated

through the very terms used to give them meaning and definition: absence itself becomes a

structure of representation and this is reflected throughout the trauma aesthetic through themes

of language (chapter two), landscape (chapter three) and the body (chapter four).

History, Memory, Nostalgia

In 1999 historian Peter Novick observed that the Holocaust still 'loomed large' in American

culture, remaining 'the archetype and yardstick of evil.'[48] Although the atrocity of the Holocaust

has not been diminished in any way, it is 9/11 that now provides the primary reference point for

other traumatic events. This is, of course, a reductive way of looking at trauma, as Arundhati Roy

highlights in her commentary on the 2008 terrorist attack in Mumbai which was described as

"India's 9/11".[49] For Roy, and other commentators such as Priyamvada Gopal such a comparison

'diminishes both that carnage [in Mumbai] and the atrocity in New York,' limiting personal and

political responses to subsequent events and advancing an exceptionalist narrative in which '9/11

become[s] a badge of honour, a tragic status symbol signalling the arrival of a nation in the

fraternity of wounded super powers.'[50] This coding of 9/11 as both exceptional and exemplary not

only influences the way in which other traumatic events are represented and understood but it

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[46] Marc Redfield, "Virtual Trauma: The Idiom of 9/11," *diacritics* 37, no. 1 (2007): 58.

[47] Ibid., 59. The other September 11s Redfield is referring to are the annual emergency day established by President Reagan in 1987 and the military coup in Chile on September 11. 1973.

[48] Peter Novick, *The Holocaust in American Culture* (New York: First Mariner Books, 1999), 1 and 197.

[49] Arundhati Roy, "The Monster in the Mirror," *The Guardian* 2008, n. pg.

[50] Priyamvada Gopal, "Comparing Mumbai to 9/11 Diminishes Both Tragedies," *The Guardian*, 4 December 2008, 42.

also has significant political consequences. As Naomi Klein observes in her provocative commentary on America's use of what she terms disaster capitalism, 'September 11 appeared to have provided Washington with the green light to stop asking countries if they wanted the U.S. version of "free trade and democracy" and to start imposing it with Shock and Awe military force.'[51]

While 9/11 remains central to the trauma aesthetic, all the texts examined in this thesis begin to question the historical significance of this particular event and the military campaigns it was used to justify. This is made explicit in *Man in the Dark* in which August Brill invents an America in which 9/11 never happened and is now in a state of civil war.

> Now if I say the words September Eleventh to you, would they have any special meaning?
>
> Not particularly.
>
> And the World Trade Center?
>
> The Twin Towers? Those tall buildings in New York?
>
> Exactly.
>
> What about them?
>
> They're still standing?
>
> Of course they are. What's wrong with you?
>
> Nothing, Brick says, muttering to himself in a barely audible voice. Then, looking down at his half-eaten eggs, he whispers: One nightmare replaces another.[52]

Auster achieves several things here. Firstly, by imagining a world where the alternative to 9/11 is a civil war which has killed thousands, ravaged the landscape and sent inflation spiralling out of control, the novel suggests that there are potentially worse situations than that of 'post-9/11' America. In this process the novel questions the extent to which America can construct itself as a victim in the wake of 9/11. Although 9/11 was widely declared "an act of war" by politicians and media pundits, *Man in the Dark* suggests the relative safety of post-9/11 America in comparison to an actual war zone. Finally, this construction of an alternative America raises the question of America's culpability in its own experience of trauma: it draws attention to the kinds of violence

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[51] Naomi Klein, *The Shock Doctrine* (London and New York: Penguin, 2007), 9.
[52] Paul Auster, *Man in the Dark* (London: Faber, 2008 (2005)), 31.

that America inflicts on other nations and suggests that even without 9/11, America would still be traumatised.

The suggestion of the inevitability of trauma in *Man in the Dark* echoes what Kevin Rozario calls the 'culture of calamity' which he uses to describe how American culture has been shaped, from its earliest origins, by the material effects of traumatic events. Focusing on how events such as the San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906 and the Mississippi flood of 1927 have been mobilised by institutions of authority, Rozario identifies a 'strange and intimate relationship between calamity and capitalism ... how belief in the blessings of disaster came to frame and energise (ambivalent) modern commitments to economic expansion and unending urban renewal.'[53] The economic impact of this use of trauma in American culture, highlighted by Klein and Rozario, is not directly addressed in the trauma aesthetic but a similar understanding of 9/11's relationship to historical events and the construction of its symbolic meaning is used to critically explore America's culpability in the wake of 9/11.

In order to fully understand how the trauma aesthetic uses the theme of history to deconstruct the dominant narrative of 9/11 it is necessary to examine in more detail precisely how cultural memories were employed by the broadcast media. Scholars such as Rozario and Faludi have examined in some detail how the cultural script of 9/11 employed specific national memories and traditional ideologies in order to shape peoples' responses to the attack:

> Many commentators insisted on the singularity of 9/11, arguing that the attacks had hurled Americans into a new world, a new era. The mantra was "this changes everything." The implication was that the past had little or nothing to teach us about this latest crisis. To a remarkable degree however, responses to September 11 were assembled out of habits expectations, beliefs, laws, and institutional routines established in encounters with disasters (wars, famines, earthquakes, fires, hurricanes, technological accidents, and so forth) over centuries, and certainly over the past fifty years.[54]

One event which was referenced repeatedly in the immediate post-9/11 rhetoric was the attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941. The comparison being drawn between the two events was most notable in the many newspaper headlines which declared September 11 as a "New Day of

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[53] Kevin Rozario, *The Culture of Calamity: Disaster and the Making of Modern America* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 24.
[54] Ibid., 180.

Infamy," directly echoing the rhetoric of President Franklin Roosevelt's response to Pearl Harbour. Comparisons arose from the similarities between the surprise nature of the attacks, committed on American soil by an outside enemy. However, even where Pearl Harbour was being used as a template for drawing meaning out of the events of 9/11, there remained an almost desperate need to assert the singularity of the present trauma. Writing for the Boston Globe on September 12, 2001, David Shribman opens his account of the attacks with the claim 'It was a day of Infamy, but Sept. 11, 2001, was a day of infamy unlike any other.'[55]

The evocation of Pearl Harbour, then, does not function to frame 9/11 within a broader historical narrative but instead positions it within the same narrative of American exceptionalism outlined above. This process is illustrated by the way in which the comparisons between the two traumatic events did not rely so much on the nature of the attacks as on the symbolism which surrounded them. One notable example of this kind of symbolic evocation can be identified in President Bush's address to the Crew of the U.S.S Enterprise in honour of Pearl Harbour's 60th anniversary on 7 December, 2001.

> On December the 8th, as the details became known, the nation's grief turned to resolution. During four years of war, no one doubted the rightness of our cause, no one wavered in the quest of victory.
>
> As a result of the efforts and sacrifice of the veterans who are with us today and millions like them, the world was saved from tyranny.
>
> Many of you in today's Navy are the children and grandchildren of the generation that fought and won the Second World War. Now your calling has come. Each one of you is commissioned by history to face freedom's enemies.[56]

By focusing on the ideological narratives of events such as Pearl Harbour, post-9/11 discourse avoids any critical confrontation with the past. Consider, for example, how the Vietnam War is rarely, if at all, mentioned explicitly in the broadcast media and political rhetoric surrounding

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[55] David M. Shribman, "In Unfathomable Way, We Now Know Terror," *The Boston Globe* 2001, n. pg. .Available at
http://www.boston.com/news/packages/underattack/globe_stories/0912/In_unfathomable_way_we_now_know_terror+.shtml, Accessed: 25/08/2011.
[56] Transcript available at http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/nation/specials/attacked/transcripts/bushtext_120701.html, accessed: 18/08/2011

9/11. This is a notable absence for its memory still haunts American culture, particularly in relation to constructions of masculine identity. Indeed, this is arguably precisely why Vietnam was not central to post-9/11 rhetoric. As Susan Jeffords notes, 'Vietnam veterans are portrayed in contemporary American culture as emblems of an unjustly discriminated masculinity.'[57] Therefore, the evocation of the memory of Vietnam would have severely undermined the image of strong, heroic masculinity that was being constructed within the cultural narration of 9/11. Furthermore, the rhetoric employed by the Bush administration in the wake of 9/11 parallels the justifications used in the instigation of American involvement in Vietnam. This is explored by William Spanos who observes the lingering presence of Vietnam in the polarising 'them' and 'us' which projected the face of Osama Bin Laden and the image of the Middle East onto the 'faceless cowards' who hijacked the planes.[58] These issues of masculinity and culpability, largely ignored by the broadcast media coverage of 9/11, are taken up as central themes within the trauma aesthetic and are examined in detail in chapters two and three.

The power of the investment in the ideological resonance of Pearl Harbour was such that any attempt to suggest that America was anything other than an innocent victim was labelled un-patriotic or anti –American. Consider, for example, the violent reaction towards Susan Sontag's response to the attacks in *The New Yorker* in which she wrote:

> Our leaders are bent on convincing us that everything is OK. America is not afraid. Our spirit is unbroken, although this was a day that will live in infamy and America is now at war. But everything is not OK. And this was not Pearl Harbour ... The unanimity of the sanctimonious, reality-concealing rhetoric spouted by American officials and media commentators in recent days seems, well, unworthy of a mature democracy ... A few shreds of historical awareness might help us understand what just happened, and what may continue to happen. "Our country is strong," we are told again and 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.[59]

In a panel discussion at the Open Society Institute in New York a few weeks after her commentary was published Sontag described how 'these rather banal observations won me responses that, in

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[57] Susan Jeffords, *The Remasculinization of America: Gender and the Vietnam War* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1989), 116.

[58] William V. Spanos, "*A Rumour of War*: 9/11 and the Forgetting of the Vietnam War," *boundary 2* 30, no. 3 (2003): 32-34.

[59] Susan Sontag et al., "The Talk of the Town," *The New Yorker*, 24 September 2001, n. pg.

a lifetime of taking public positions, I've never experienced. They included death threats, calls for me being stripped of my citizenship and deported, indignation that I was "censored." In newspapers and magazines I was labelled a "traitor."'[60] This reinvigorated and rather aggressive sense of patriotism was also registered in the film industry with films such as Philip Noyce's adaptation of *The Quiet American* (d. Phillip Noyce, 2002), initially previewed on September 10, 2001, being shelved. The film was eventually released in November 2002 and the dominant explanation for the delay was that the scene of a terrorist bombing in the streets of Saigon was deemed too sensitive in the wake of 9/11. While this seems plausible, it is difficult to ignore that it is an American who is responsible for the terrorist attack and that the film's source novel, written by Graham Greene in 1955, is deeply critical of the war in Vietnam. Indeed, the unease regarding the film's political perspective is expressed by Harry Weinstein, co-chairman of the film's distributor Mirimax, who commented that the post-9/11 atmosphere did not allow for 'films about bad Americans.'[61]

Slavoj Žižek describes this reluctance to confront American culpability in the events of 9/11 as 'taking refuge in a firm ideological identification.'[62] The avoidance suggested by Žižek can be understood as a kind of traumatic dissociation which functioned as a defence mechanism against the profound sense of vulnerability 9/11 brought to the image of National identity. Faludi also highlights this process of dissociation and illustrates the way in which its effectiveness was due to a strong to nostalgic impulse which drew on traditional images of American identity.

> In the aftermath of the attacks, 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 … We reacted to our trauma, in other words, not by interrogating it but by cocooning ourselves in the celluloid chrysalis of the baby boom childhood.[63]

This polemic critique of the use of nostalgia in the mediation of 9/11 echoes Frederic Jameson's theorisation of nostalgia as inherently sanitising and reductive. The trauma aesthetic presents an

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[60] Cited in April Eisman, "The Media of Manipulation: Patriotism and Propaganda – Mainstream News in the United States in the Weeks Following September 11," *Critical Quarterly* 45, no. 1-2 (2003): 70 n. 40.
[61] Quoted in Anne Thompson, "Films with War Themes Are Victims of Bad Timing," *The New York Times*, 17 October 2002, n. pg. .Available at www.nytimes.com, accessed: 27/01/2009.
[62] Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real* (London and New York: Verso, 2002), 45.
[63] Susan Faludi, *The Terror Dream: What 9/11 Revealed About America* (London: Atlantic Books, 2007), 3-4.

alternative use of nostalgia in the aftermath of 9/11, one more closely aligned with Kathleen Stewart's definition of nostalgia as 'characterised by an acute sense of loss.'[64] The trauma aesthetic achieves this in part by focusing on the illusory nature of the nostalgic narratives identified by Faludi, revealing them to be far removed from historical fact. The disruption this demystification causes to perceived notions of reality and linear time are explored in more detail later in this chapter. What is important to note at this juncture is the way in which the trauma aesthetic takes up the same objects of nostalgia and uses them to reflect critically on America's narration of history and the construction of national identity.

Although the nostalgic impulse of the broadcast media in the wake of 9/11 offers a rather crude narration of 9/11, it is nonetheless significant as the explicit and repeated references to traditional American values are central to the establishment of 9/11 as a cultural trauma. Jeffrey Alexander posits that the grand narrative of cultural trauma is based upon a particular kind of claim: 'It is a claim to some fundamental injury, an exclamation of the terrifying profanation of some sacred value, a narrative about a horrible destructive social process, and a demand for emotional, institutional, and symbolic reparation and reconstitution.'[65] Such a claim is latent within the references to historical traumas and the nostalgia narratives discussed above and it was powerfully expressed in the political rhetoric of 'America under attack'. President Bush elaborated such a claim in his address to the joint session of congress on September 20, 2001, in which he stated: 'On September the 11th, enemies of freedom committed an act of war against our country ... They hate our freedoms – our freedom of religion, our freedom of speech, our freedom to vote and assemble and disagree with each other ... These terrorists kill not merely to end lives, but to disrupt and end a way of life.'[66] We can begin to see, therefore, how the broadcast media and politicians drew on dominant ideologies to shape not only the cultural understanding of the attacks but also the way in which people responded to them politically. This

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[64] Kathleen Stewart, "Nostalgia—a Polemic," *Cultural Anthropology* 3, no. 3 (1988): 227.
[65] Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," 10.
[66] Transcript available at "Address to Joint Session of Congress 20 September, 2001," http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gwbush911jointsessionspeech.htm.

rhetoric produces a rather crude and simplistic trauma narrative which is rejected by the trauma aesthetic in favour of more complex and nuanced alternatives.

Exclusively using the evocations of shared history and values to explore the cultural ramifications of a particular trauma does not account for the profound psychological trauma experienced by individuals as a result of witnessing an event like 9/11. The pitfalls of this methodology are evident throughout the edited collection *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity* which uses the notion of shared values and ideology as the basis for its definition of cultural trauma. For example, Ron Eyerman's contribution to the collection argues the following:

> As opposed to psychological or physical trauma, which involves a wound and the experience of great emotional anguish by an individual, cultural trauma refers to a dramatic loss of identity, and meaning, a tear in the social fabric, affecting a group that has achieved some degree of cohesion. In this sense, the trauma need not necessarily be felt by everyone in a community or experienced directly by any or all. While some event may be necessary to establish as the significant cause, its meaning as traumatic must be established and accepted, and this requires time to occur, as well as mediation and representation.[67]

I agree that cultural trauma is, fundamentally, a disruption to the order of social cohesion and identity, but to completely detach this from the notion of a personal, psychological trauma is reductive and glosses over the complexity of how traumatic affect is transmitted to people with no direct experience of the original event. Furthermore, while the emphasis on the delayed and gradual establishment of cultural trauma is clearly relevant to studies of the Holocaust and slavery, it is less appropriate to the instantaneous mediation of an event such as 9/11.

Neil Smelser's analysis of 9/11 as a cultural trauma exemplifies the limitations of this definition. Indeed, he goes so far as to describe 9/11 as 'a simple trauma.'[68] Smelser's reasoning behind this categorisation is based on the fact that, on September 11, 'the traumatic process was truncated,' with the events occurring over a limited period of time, such that 'the scope of the

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[67] Ron Eyerman, "Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the Formation of African American Identity," in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander, et al. (Berkeley and London: University of California Press, 2004), 61.

[68] Neil J. Smelser, "September 11, 2001, as Cultural Trauma," in *Cultural Trauma and Collective Identity*, ed. Jeffrey C. Alexander, et al. (Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2004), 280.

trauma and the identity of the victims [were] ... established immediately.'[69] While this immediacy clearly sets 9/11 outside the models used to understand other traumas, this does not mean it should be understood as less complex. Indeed, there is a strong emphasis throughout the collection on the importance of mediation in the interpretation of an event as cultural trauma; a theoretical focus which is evident in Smelser's definition cited above and Alexander's introductory assertion that 'events are not inherently traumatic. Trauma is a socially mediated attribution.'[70] It would seem that Smelser's interpretation of cultural trauma leads him to dismiss the event of 9/11 and focus only on the *mediation* of the attacks in their immediate aftermath. In so doing, Smelser ignores the significance of 9/11 as an event which was already mediated in the moment of its occurrence. By contrast, the trauma aesthetic foregrounds the mediation of 9/11 and its arresting immediacy through themes of technology and communication in texts such as *Falling Man*, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and *In the Valley of Elah*. Within these texts it is the very immediacy, dismissed by Smelser, which underpins the phenomenon of vicarious trauma that resulted in 9/11 being experienced as a culturally traumatic event.

Media, Witnessing, Affect

There is an increasingly widespread acknowledgement that the media has the power to traumatise individuals through representations of violence and suffering. For example, Mark Seltzer suggests that 'the popular notion of trauma is premised on a failure of distinction between the figurative and the literal, between the virtual and the real. Representations, it seems have the same power to wound as acts.'[71] 9/11 has quite clearly drawn significant attention to these concerns within trauma and media studies. Scholars such as E. Ann Kaplan have claimed that 'studying vicarious trauma is especially important in an era when global media projects images of catastrophes all over the world as they are happening. Most of us generally encounter trauma vicariously through the media rather than directly. Since such exposure may result in symptoms of

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[69] Ibid., 280.
[70] Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," 8.
[71] Seltzer, *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture*, 7.

secondary trauma, we need to know as much as possible about the process.'[72] Despite this

intensified interest in the phenomenon of vicarious trauma, there is relatively little work which

explores the precise nature of how an image of trauma becomes a traumatising image and the

point at which seeing is transformed in to an act of witnessing.

In order to better illustrate my own approach to the subject of vicarious trauma it is

worth outlining at this point how several existing studies have approached the role of the media

in the transmission of traumatic affect of 9/11.Brian Monahan's *The Shock of the News* offers a

detailed analysis of NBC's first week of televised coverage of 9/11, and a full year's worth of print

coverage from *The New York Times*. Monahan argues that the broadcast media's coverage of 9/11

presented the attacks as 'public drama' and uses this model to 'better understand some of the

social, cultural, and political consequences of the attacks while also gaining a greater insight into

the role of mediated public drama in modern life.'[73] Alan Meek is also concerned with how the

coverage of 9/11 was narrated by the media, emphasising the way in which 'corporate media do

not respond to public trauma as much as they define public trauma.'[74] Situating 9/11 within a

longer history of the mediation of trauma Meek argues that the broadcast media's use 'of a

therapeutic model of social analysis,' contributed to 'the rapid mobilization of public opinion in

support of the subsequent American invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq.'[75] While both these works

offer valuable contributions, they retain a primary focus on the ways in which the broadcast

media generated support for America's political response to the attacks. Although the political

response to 9/11 is undeniably related to the experience of the attacks as a cultural trauma,

political action is distinct from traumatisation and involves a different kind of active spectatorship.

In addition, the terminology used by both scholars is problematic. Monahan's use of the term

'public drama' is imbued with connotations of fictionalised story-telling and this is echoed in

Meek's use of 'virtual trauma' which is suggestive of an emotional or psychological response to

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[72] Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*, 87.

[73] Brian Monahan, *The Shock of the News: Media Coverage and the Making of 9/11* (London and New York: New York University Press, 2010), 9.

[74] Allen Meek, *Trauma and Media: Theories, Histories and Images* (London and New York: Routledge, 2010), 180.

[75] Ibid., 172.

9/11 that is somehow inauthentic. To summarise, both studies illustrate a cognitive recognition of an event as traumatic which is then interpreted as traumatising, rather than a vicarious experience of trauma itself.

The process of vicarious trauma involves a clear distinction between the image of trauma and the traumatising image, and also transforms the passive spectator into an active witness. To begin to understand how these distinctions are made it is useful to consider Lillie Chouliariki's examination of how western spectators related to media images of suffering in foreign countries. For Chouliaraki, a psychological connection with the images, typically manifested as empathy, is reliant on an illusion of spatial immediacy between the spectator and the trauma subject. Exploring this she writes: 'mediated immediacy is about constructing proximity – a sense of "being there" that, albeit different from face-to-face contact, evokes feelings and dispositions to act "as if" the spectator were on location.'[76] Within this spectator-victim relationship, however, there remains a clear distinction between the trauma that happens to "them" over "there" and the safe, domesticated viewing space of the spectator. For vicarious traumatisation to take place I posit that there are three key modes of identification that occur between the spectator and the trauma subject that intensifies the sense of proximity identified by Chouliaraki: temporal identification achieved through the simultaneity of experience and spectatorship; spatial identification in which the site of the trauma is directly aligned with and even enters into the space of spectatorship; and ideological identification which creates cultural links between victim and spectator to the extent that they are no longer a distant other but a member of the same community of shared values. It is quite obvious how temporal identification was enabled by the live coverage of 9/11 which showed the events in real time but the process of ideological and spatial identification are more complex and require a more detailed analysis.

The process of ideological identification is based on a sense of community that is inherent in the experience of mediating technologies. It is well established within media studies that different forms of media are able to foster a sense of community amongst individuals which can

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[76]Lillie Chouliaraki, *The Spectatorship of Suffering* (London: SAGE Publications, 2006), 21.

transgress social, cultural and geographical boundaries. Benedict Anderson, for example, traces

this back to the morning ritual of reading newspapers which, he writes, were consumed as part of

an 'extraordinary mass ceremony.'[77] This inherent sense of community was intensified with the

advent of radio which allowed people to tune into what Bruce Lenthall terms an 'ethereal

community.'[78] It is since the introduction of television, however, that this notion of a community

of media users has gained widespread academic interest and, with additional developments in

new media technologies such as the internet, has become a central concern of trauma studies.

Daniel Dayan, for example, argues the television produces its own 'peculiar public,' explaining

that 'watching television is always a collective exercise, even when one is alone in front of the set,

watching television means being part of a "reverse-angle shot" consisting of everyone watching

the same image at the same time or, more exactly, of all those believed to be watching.'[79] Similar

arguments are now being made with regards online media usage. For example, June Deery

examines the convergence of television and online media, noting how 'the computer has

engendered a new TV audience whose members communicate in a public, many-to-many, online

environment that enables them to be more active and participatory than audiences of the past.'[80]

In order to fully understand how this sense of community contributes to the process of

vicarious traumatisation it is useful to examine the mediation of 9/11 as what Dayan and Elihu

Katz term a 'media event.' I acknowledge that the coverage of the attacks does not, initially, fit

the model of the media event, defined by Dayan and Katz as an event which is rigorously planned

by broadcasters and eagerly anticipated by viewers. Considering the abruptness of 9/11's

domination of the television schedule, and the confusion which accompanied early reports, it is

perhaps more appropriate to interpret the initial coverage of the attacks as what James Friedman

terms an 'unstructured event.' However, Friedman observes that, via the process of

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[77] Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London and New York: Verso, 1999 (1983)), 35.
[78] Bruce Lenthall, *Radio's America: The Great Depression and the Rise of Modern Mass Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007), 84.
[79] Daniel Dayan, "The Peculiar Public of Television," *Media, Culture and Society* 23, no. 6.
[80] June Deery, "Tv.Com: Participatory Viewing on the Web," *The Journal of Popular Culture* 37, no. 2 (2003): 162.

narrativization, the unstructured event 'develops into one of the more structured and contained narrative forms as the event itself progresses – becoming predictable and (re)presentable.'[81] The coverage of 9/11 quite quickly underwent this transformation providing many of the familiar aspects of media events including liveness, heroic figures, rich symbolism and key personalities. However, in a later collaboration with Tamar Liebes, Katz highlights how it is 'because of their ceremonial aspect,' that events such as 9/11 'approach the category of media event.'[82] This is an important acknowledgement for it is through ceremonial framing that events such as 9/11 engage the spectator as an active witness and thus create the potential for vicarious traumatisation.

'Ceremonial reverence' is clearly identifiable in the coverage of 9/11 through the impromptu memorial services, makeshift shrines, and the recovery of bodies shrouded in US flags being passed down lines of rescue workers giving the coverage the appearance of a mass funeral. By adopting the familiar conventions of ceremonial television, broadcast media invited viewers to engage with the coverage of 9/11 in a particular way, 'reinforcing the sense of a virtual community,' and reminding them 'to renew their commitments to established values, offices and persons.'[83] This particular use of ideology in the framing of 9/11 signals an active mode of spectatorship, and a responsibility towards the perceived community. In this way the experience of watching the mediation of 9/11 mirrors the conditions of witnessing as it is defined by scholars such as Dori Laub, Shoshana Felman who claim that 'to bear witness is to *bear the solitude* of a responsibility, and to *bear the responsibility*, precisely, of that solitude.'[84] Similarly, John Durham Peters asserts that 'to witness an event is to be responsible in some way to it.'[85] As a witness to trauma, rather than just a spectator of suffering, individuals are exposed to the potential for vicarious traumatisation.

[81] James Friedman, "Attraction to Distraction: Live Television and the Public Sphere," in *Reality Squared: Televisual Discourse on the Real*, ed. James Friedman (New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 145.

[82] Elihu Katz and Tamar Liebes, ""No More Peace!" How Disaster, Terror and War Have Upstaged Media Events," in *Media Events in a Global Age*, ed. Nick Couldry (Abingdon and New York: Routledge, 2010), 37.

[83] Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (Cambridge, Mass. London: Harvard University Press, 1994), 147.

[84] Shoshana Felman, "Education and Crisis, or the Viccissitudes of Teaching," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*, ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1995), 15.

[85] John Durham Peters, "Witnessing," *Media, Culture and Society* 23, no. 6 (2001): 708.

Significantly however, the responsibility of the witness requires a certain amount of agency which is unavailable in the context of 9/11. Both Felman and Durham Peters expand their definition of the witness, emphasising the necessity of testimony in the aftermath of a traumatic event. For Felman, to bear witness is 'an appointment to transgress the confines of that isolated stance, to speak *for* others and *to* others.'[86] This is echoed in Durham Peters' claim that ' to witness [thus] has two faces: the passive one of *seeing* and the active one of *saying* ... in active witnessing one is a privileged possessor and *producer* of knowledge.'[87] The dominant response to this appointment was the outward display of patriotism and an uncritical investment in the nostalgic rhetoric of the Bush administration. However, as I have already pointed out, this did not produce an accurate, or effective, testimony of the trauma of 9/11. Moreover, the trauma aesthetic specifically works to highlight this and reveal the inherent powerlessness of the vicarious witness. In so doing the trauma aesthetic illustrates how the vicarious witness is placed in a position which denies the possibility of cathartic representation and perpetuates the original traumatic experience.

Of course, not everyone who saw the events through the broadcast media felt that they were part of a traumatised collective, or were compelled to respond in the ways outlined above. This is in part a result of the inherent subjectivity of traumatic experience. John Durham Peters, for example, cautions that 'witnesses, human or mechanical, are notoriously contradictory and inarticulate. Different people who witness the "same" event can produce remarkably different accounts.'[88] However, the vicarious experience of 9/11 is not so much reliant on an accurate interpretation of the events, as Peters' argument would seem to suggest, as on the witness's cultural status. This is suggested by Jill Bennett in her short essay 'The Limits of Empathy and the Global Politics of Belonging' in which she observes, 'after September 11, a very clear image of the

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[86] Felman, "Education and Crisis, or the Viccissitudes of Teaching," 15.
[87] Durham Peters, "Witnessing," 709.
[88] Ibid., 710.

victim of terror – exemplified by the employee of the World Trade Center, had solidified.'[89]

Bennett goes on to question how this identity was racially and economically coded.

> Is it fair to say ... that transnational identification was, in this instance, founded on a (racist) preference for a notional American victim, that is, on the privileging of a particular cultural identity? ... We, the other beneficiaries of capitalism – the employed subjects of First World nations, looking on from various points on the globe – knew through its [the World Trade Center] destruction that we had ourselves been attacked; our sense of self was threatened.[90]

It is worth adding to this that the identity of the 9/11 victim, as it was represented by the broadcast media at least, was intensely gendered. Fauldi observes that, despite representations which foregrounded female victims (such as images of injured women being carried from ground zero by male rescue workers), the cultural narration of 9/11 revealed a rather different victim: 'The tragedy had yielded no victorious heroes, so the culture wound up anointing a set of victimized men instead.'[91] Thus, the putative victim who emerged from this ideological interpretation of the events was predominantly white, middle class and male.

The centrality of this particular identity to the mediation of 9/11 built on powerful feelings of victimisation that had been building throughout the second half of the twentieth century. Concerns regarding the cultural and political agency of American masculinity reached a crescendo in the late 1980s which was sustained throughout the 1990s and, as a number of scholars have explored in detail, this was reflected in the cinema and literature of the era. For example, Henry Giroux discusses how *Fight Club* (d. David Fincher, 1999) 'offers up particular notions of agency in which white working-class and middle-class men are allowed to see themselves as oppressed and lacking because their masculinity has been compromised by and subordinated to [those] social and economic spheres and needs that constitute the realm of the feminine.'[92] That this reduction of 'the crisis of capitalism ... to the crisis of masculinity,'[93] should

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[89] Jill Bennett, "The Limits of Empathy and the Global Politics of Belonging," in *Trauma at Home*, ed. Judith Greenberg (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2002), 133.

[90] Ibid., 137.

[91] Faludi, *The Terror Dream*, 87.

[92] Henry A. Giroux, "Private Satisfactions and Public Disorders: *Fight Club*, Patriachy, and the Politics of Masculine Violence," in *Public Spaces, Private Lives: Beyond the Culture of Cynicism* (Lanham and Oxford: Rowman and Littleford, 2001), 60.

[93] Ibid., 59.

become a part of the interpretation of 9/11 is a result of the intense symbolism of the attacks. Jean Baudrillard's commentary on the symbolism of 9/11 in *The Spirit of Terrorism* highlights how the attack on the World Trade Center was simultaneously an attack on 'the orgy of power, liberation, flows and calculation which the Twin Tower embodied.'[94] The figure of white masculinity in crisis, which had featured so prominently in popular culture prior to 9/11, usefully personified this symbolic trauma and allowed vicarious witnesses to identify with the trauma on a more personal level.

We begin to see, therefore, that the emphasis on the victimisation of white middle-class masculinity meant the mediation of 9/11 was as exclusive as it was inclusive; a quality which is explored throughout *The Paradox of Loyalty*, a collection of responses to 9/11 and the war on terror from the African-American Community. One contribution to the collection describes an interview with two Black American women, Lillie and Rabiah, conducted by Tamara A. Masters Wild which pays particular attention to this feeling of exclusion: 'For months, Lillie watched television and saw few faces that looked like hers analyzing what happened. Furthermore, everyone seemed to have the same script and it didn't sound like hers at all. Likewise, Rabiah began to realize in the months following September 11th that her opinion was the exception, not the rule.'[95] The trauma aesthetic does not counter this by providing an alternative ethnic perspective to the trauma of 9/11. However, it does work to highlight and question the centrality of white masculinity to the narrative of 9/11, particularly through the figure of the isolated male and the theme of historical culpability discussed in chapters two and three. Furthermore, the acknowledgement of the ethnic and economic coding of the victim of 9/11 adds to the challenge of the familiarity of trauma and its associated language discussed at the beginning of this chapter. As literary scholars have repeatedly observed, trauma fiction typically emerges from groups or individuals who have been politically oppressed or culturally marginalised in some way. African-

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[94] Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, 59.
[95] Tamara A. Masters Wilds, "Do You See What I See? Do You Hear What I Hear?: Two Black Women Share Their Candid Thoughts on September 11 and the War on Terrorism," in *The Paradox of Loyalty: An African American Response to the War on Terrorism*, ed. Juliane and Reginna A. Green Malveaux (Chicago: Third World Press, 2002), 93.

American trauma fiction in particular draws on 'an intergenerational model of trauma and memory,'[96] in its construction of victimhood. This history of oppression and marginalisation is not available to the victim of 9/11 as it is defined in the broadcast media, requiring the trauma aesthetic to develop its own approach to victimised identity. The mechanics of this will be explored in more detail in the final section of this chapter. What I want to continue to illustrate here is the way in which the broadcast media's coverage of the attacks engaged the spectator in the process of ideological identification.

In contrast to the 'radical asymmetry' between the spectator and the sufferer identified by Chouliarki, the coverage of 9/11 worked to align the spectator with the direct victim of the attacks. One of the ways this was achieved was through the foregrounding of citizen journalism within the coverage of the attacks. Many television channels relied on amateur footage received from people on the ground to supplement what they could obtain from their own reporters. In addition, as television coverage became increasingly repetitive, many individuals turned to non-traditional sources of information such as blogs which provided eye-witness accounts and intimate details of the attacks. The citizen journalist at the scene of the trauma is quite literally a convergence of the sufferer/spectator: simultaneously having direct experience of the events and standing by viewing and recording. As such, they increase the potential for ideological identification by allowing the vicarious witness to project themselves onto the direct experience of trauma. In addition to its unique content, the aesthetic qualities of amateur journalism do not incorporate the 'visual editing, soundtrack, repetition or fast tracking [that] help spectators create a sense of distance from the spectacle.'[97] As Guy Westwell suggests, the kinds of technologies used by citizen journalists offer a more intimate, or 'domesticating' perspective on trauma. Examining the use of Super 8 film stock in the production of the *Vietnam Home Movies* collection, which documented the personal experiences of soldiers who had fought in the war, Westwell states that the film's association with domestic video cameras 'cues the viewer to read the event

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[96] Michelle Balaev, "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory," *Mosaic* 41, no. 2: 158.
[97] Chouliaraki, *The Spectatorship of Suffering*, 25.

as already known, made safe, domesticated.'[98] The domesticating function of amateur footage provides one example of the way in which the mediation of 9/11 blurred the boundaries between spaces of safety and danger. This contrasts the way in which suffering is typically represented as something which is both distant and detached from the space of spectatorship, [99] thus allowing the vicarious witness to make a spatial, as well as ideological, identification with the trauma on screen.

Throughout the broadcast media's coverage of the attacks, there was an emphasis on *America* under attack, not just the locales of New York City and Washington DC which were directly effected. This was accompanied by speculations regarding the safety and security of other areas of the United States featuring prominently within the broadcast media.[100] The cumulative effect of the emphasis on America under attack was the direct alignment of a country, previously perceived as a safe 'centre' of the Western world, with the distant landscapes typically associated with war and trauma. British journalist Blake Morrison offers a rather poetic illustration of this effect in his description of the scene of lower Manhattan shrouded in a thick layer of dust: 'Thick as snow, it hoods the survivors and rescue workers in all the footage, overlaying them like an extra skin making a desert of the place, so that the cars abandoned in the streets look like marooned buggies in the Sahara.'[101] According to Chouliaraki this collapse of geographical and symbolic boundaries introduces 'a new dimension of proximity –proximity as vulnerability.'[102]

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[98] Guy Westwell, "The Domestic Vision of *Vietnam Home Movies*," in *The Image and the Witness: Trauma, Memory and Visual Culture*, ed. Frances Guerin and Roger Hallas (London and New York: Wallflower Press), 146.

[99] Chouliaraki, *The Spectatorship of Suffering*, 11.

[100] Xigen Li and Ralph Izard, "9/11 Attack Coverage Reveals Similarities, Differences," *Newspaper Research Journal* 24, no. 1 (2003).Xigen Li and Ralph Izard's analysis of the coverage of 9/11 reveals that 18% of NBC's news stories related to the attacks made direct reference to issues of safety and security. See also Julie L. Masters, "A Midwestern Response to the Events of September 11, 2001," *Journal of Loss and Trauma* 10, no. 4 (2005). Masters' study reveals that the perception of proximity is central to individual and collective feelings of vulnerability. She notes in particular how American citizen's in the Midwest reported an increase in their feeling of vulnerabliity post-9/11 when Air Force One landed at Offutt Air Force Base 'increas[ing] the potential of the Midwest becoming yet another key location' for a terrorist attack, 377.

[101] Blake Morrison, "We Weren't There for Troy or the Burning of Rome. This Time There Were Cameras.," *The Guardian* 2001, n.pg.

[102] Chouliaraki, *The Spectatorship of Suffering*, 174.

The broadcast coverage of 9/11, and the continuing process of remediation of the attacks between individuals simultaneous demonstrates and perpetuates this process of engendering vulnerability through proximity. Images and footage from Manhattan contained familiar markers, such as famous landmarks, that reminded spectators that this had previously been a space that connoted safety. Particularly notable are images shot from across the Hudson River that capture the city's skyline and the Brooklyn Bridge. Prior to the attacks this would have been a standard tourist image and now it was a scene of total devastation. It is interesting to observe how online digital archives such as 'September 11 Digital Archive' and 'Here is New York' contain just such images taken in the midst of the attacks alongside identically framed shots from before 9/11 (see figures 1 and 2). The compositional similarity of the pre-9/11 holiday pictures and the images taken on 9/11 are striking. Through their display within the same archival spaces, tourism (safety) is violently juxtaposed with destruction (danger), making explicit the sudden convergence of New York City and the danger zones associated with distant suffering: an anatopism that is perhaps most succinctly summarised in the title of Judith Greenberg's edited collection *Trauma at Home*.

(Figure 1)

Figure 1. Two photos from digital archives depicting young girls standing infront of the twin towers.

(Figure 2)

Figure 2. Onlookers mimic the tourists who took photographs of the Twin Towers as souvenirs.

The use of touristic practices to create an identification between the space of the spectator and the space of trauma can also be identified in other, more material forms of witnessing 9/11. Marita Sturken documents numerous examples of how rituals of tourism, such as visiting the site of Ground Zero and purchasing souvenirs of the Twin Towers, and argues that these demonstrate a need for the vicarious witness to establish some kind of physical connection with their traumatic experience: 'As an object purchased at the site, a souvenir offers a trace of that place, a veneer of authenticity … The souvenirs sold at Ground Zero, and to an only slightly lesser extent around Manhattan, are thus a means of marking place, of creating connections to this highly over-determined and intensely symbolic site.'[103] Chapters two and three will explore how the trauma aesthetic constructs space very differently through concepts of placelessness and timelessness, deconstructing this spatial identification and revealing the qualities of distance and emptiness which are inherent in the vicarious experience of trauma.

In arguing that the combination of these temporal, ideological and spatial identifications opens up the potential for vicarious traumatisation I draw on Dominick LaCapra's distinction between empathy and identification which is usefully summarised by Whitehead: 'Empathy combines a rapport or bond with the other person with an affirmation of otherness ... identification fails to recognise such limits and the receiver of testimony succumbs to a secondary

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[103] Sturken, *Tourists of History*, 217-18.

trauma.'[104] This distinction raises questions of the authenticity and 'ownership' of trauma which are explored in more detail in chapter four. Despite this, the vicarious experience of 9/11 produces a very profound sense of traumatisation, one which is marked by tensions between the past and the present, presence and absence and the individual and the community. It is these qualities which underpin the (re)mediation of 9/11 in the trauma aesthetic. The nature of the vicarious experience of 9/11, its perception as a collective trauma, and the ideological codification of that collective present significant challenges to the (re)presentation and analysis of trauma in fiction. The final section of this chapter will outline these challenges in more detail.

Fiction, Reality, Metaphor

The relationship between trauma and narrative has a long history and can be traced back at least as far as Pierre Janet's studies of clinical trauma in the late nineteenth century. According to Janet, certain psychological disorders could be cured by transforming the fragmented memory of trauma into a linear narrative memory.[105] Throughout the twentieth century this cathartic use of narrative gained increasing cultural prominence with the emergence of literary subgenres such as Holocaust narratives and slave narratives. As Kali Tal asserts in his foundational study of trauma literature 'such writing serves both as validation and cathartic vehicle for the traumatised author.'[106] There are three key problems with this current understanding of the cathartic power of narrative when considering post-9/11 trauma fiction. Firstly, there is an assumption of a direct experience of trauma. Secondly, the theory of narrative catharsis posits that the author will reveal, through their narrative testimony, something which was previously hidden or obscured. This produces an understanding of trauma as a very personal and private experience. Even in trauma fiction which deals with collective and/or transhistorical trauma – for example, fiction

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[104] Anne Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2004), 8-9.
[105] For a useful summary of Janet's use of narration in psychotherapy see Chapter 3, 'Traumatic Cures: Shell Shock, Janet, and the Question of Memory' in Ruth Leys, *Trauma: A Genealogy* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 83-119.
[106] Kali Tal, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literature of Trauma* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

produced by second generation Holocaust survivors – there is a strong emphasis on the 'private' and the 'unspoken.'[107] The vicarious experience of 9/11 however, has resulted in the production of trauma narratives by authors with no direct experience of that trauma, and which attempt to manage and interpret an event which gained almost immediate global recognition. In short, there is very little which could be said to be direct or private about the vicarious experience of trauma.

Despite the extent to which 9/11 was made public, and continually (re)presented in the broadcast media, there remained a conviction that fiction would be able to make sense of the events. The kinds of traditional narratives and nostalgic images discussed earlier in this chapter demonstrate how, as Alexander outlines, 'in so far as meaning work takes place in the aesthetic realm, it will be channelled by specific genres and narratives that aim to produce imaginative identification and emotional catharsis.'[108] There was also a sense within the literary world that fiction would be able to provide something which the journalistic coverage of the attacks could not. For example, Robert McCrum, a journalist for *The Guardian* published an article on 23 September, 2001 declaring the 'need for novelists' who are uniquely positioned to 'supply the insights that people need at a time like this.'[109] These calls for the literary narration of the events glossed over the problems of proximity and intimacy specific to the vicarious experience of the attacks but there remains a latent uneasiness regarding the potential for aesthetic representation. Consider for example the following comments from McCrum:

> Of course, unlike Owen or Sassoon, it is much harder for the contemporary poet to be personally involved in this new "war". That absence of front line involvement is one of the characteristics of this crisis. As helpless spectators and involuntary witnesses, we have been brought face to face with an act of such pure evil we are still trying to find the words to respond to it.[110]

Here, McCrum expresses, if only hesitantly, a concern over the ability of novelists, as vicarious witnesses, to produce effective (and affective) representations of the attacks. This leads us to the third problem posed by current understandings of trauma fiction: that is, the notion of narrative

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[107] See Tina Wasserman, "Constructing the Image of Postmemory," in *The Image and the Witness: Trauma Memory and Visual Culture*, ed. Frances; Hallas Guerin, Roger (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2007), 166.
[108] Alexander, "Toward a Theory of Cultural Trauma," 15.
[109] McCrum, "The Need for Novelists," n. pg.
[110] Ibid.

catharsis promises a positive outcome, or healing of the trauma in question. As this chapter has already begun to demonstrate however, the trauma aesthetic rejects this kind of narrative closure, developing instead a sense of perpetual meaninglessness. In order to develop an approach to trauma fiction which is able to account for the specificity of 9/11 as an intensely mediated and vicariously experienced event, it is necessary to consider in more detail the relationship between the witness, the event and its (re)mediation in the trauma aesthetic.

Tal asserts that 'the literature of trauma is defined by the identity of its author,'[111] and as I have already outlined above, the putative victim of 9/11 does not reflect the kinds of oppressed or marginalised identity typically associated with the production of trauma fiction. This clear division between the victim and the witness creates a space in which the meaning and power of a trauma can get lost in translation. This is explained by Tal who draws on the work of Émile Benveniste's to illustrate the linguistic challenge of trauma fiction: 'Like the survivor, the non-traumatized reader has at his or her disposal the entire cultural "library" of symbol, myth, and metaphor, but he or she does not have access to the meaning of the sign that invoke traumatic memory. The profusion of available images allows for a variety of readings which are accessible in different ways to different audiences.'[112] This understanding of trauma fiction does not account for (re)presentations of 9/11 which communicate a trauma already shared by a much wider collective and, aided by the quotidian quality of trauma and its associated language in contemporary culture, already represented.

Defining cultural trauma, Smelser stipulates that 'representations, in order to be collective, must be mutually understood and shared,'[113] a criteria which is clearly fulfilled by the broadcast media's use of familiar images and narratives in its narration of the attacks. However, if trauma is an event which is precisely not known in the moment of its occurrence how then does trauma fiction begin to effectively (and affectively) (re)present 9/11? If trauma fiction already presents itself as a paradox, as Anne Whitehead suggests, as a genre which seeks to represent

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[111] Tal, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literature of Trauma*, 17.
[112] Ibid., 16-17.
[113] Smelser, "September 11, 2001, as Cultural Trauma," 47.

that which, by its definition, is unrepresentable, then the notion of 9/11 as a collective trauma compounds this paradox by adding to this the challenge of making unknowable that which is already known. One of the ways in which this challenge is most apparent is in the tension which arises between individual and collective trauma. For example, Marita Sturken observes how the absence of human remains following the collapse of the Twin Towers added to the difficulty of extracting individual narratives from the collective trauma. In the hours and days after the towers fell, families began to display missing-persons posters in the streets surrounding Ground Zero in a very literal attempt to find individuals amongst the chaos. However, the sheer number of these posters meant that the walls they covered became a spectacle in their own right and, collectively, became part of the iconography of 9/11. Through the process of (re)mediation the significance of the posters symbolising the loss of individuals developed a new collective meaning. This tension between individual and collective experience is a key concern of the trauma aesthetic and chapter 4 explores in detail how this is addressed through the body of the vicarious witness which is at once present and absent at the scene of trauma. What is important to emphasise here is how the unknowable quality of trauma becomes masked by the familiar, shared narratives of a collective.

The trauma aesthetic is, then, faced with a double challenge. Not only must it represent something which is by definition unrepresentable, but it must re-present something deeply ingrained in American experience as strange and unfamiliar. In response to this challenge, these texts adopt an understanding of the post-9/11 era which echoes Farrell's definition of post-traumatic culture which, he argues, is initiated by an event which brings about 'a meeting [of a culture] with long denied realities.'[114] This is perhaps most usefully illustrated by *Man in the Dark* which explores the boundaries between fantasy and reality and the dangerous and traumatic consequences which they can produce. The result is a narrative which reveals the fragility of our perceptions of reality and, to draw again on Farrell 'expos[es] not only the ultimate nothingness of the self, but also the sickening falseness of the social world.'[115] The profound sense of emptiness which emerges from the blurring of the boundaries between fantasy and reality also

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[114] Farrell, *Post-Traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties*, 15.
[115] Ibid., 185.

resonates within the broader themes of language, space, time and the body which form the focus of the following chapters of this thesis. In addition, the realisation of the falseness of the known world also raises further questions regarding individual and collective culpability: why have we allowed ourselves to be seduced by particular fantasies and what role should be play in ensuring that this is not allowed to happen again?

By destabilising notions of known reality the trauma aesthetic develops a perspective of 9/11 which sits amidst the varying views offered by conservative commentators, novelists and postmodern theorists. On the one hand journalists such as Roger Rosenblatt declared that 9/11 marked the end of irony and put paid to postmodern notions that 'nothing was real.' Describing the attacks in an article for *Time* magazine, Rosenblatt emphasises their intense and corporeal reality: 'the planes that ploughed into the World Trade Center and the Pentagon were real. The flames, smoke, sirens – real. The chalky landscape, the silence of the streets – all real. I feel your pain – really.'[116] By contrast, academics such as Baudrillard and Žižek boldly argued that 9/11 had intensified postmodern anxieties regarding the perception and experience of reality. For example, Baudrillard describes 9/11 as a 'fiction surpassing fiction.' Expanding on this idea he writes 'the terrorist violence here is not, then, a blowback of reality, any more than it is a blowback of history. It is not 'real'. In a sense, it is worse: it is symbolic.'[117] Martin Amis even goes so far as to describe the moment the Twin Towers collapsed as 'the apotheosis of the postmodern era – the era of images and perceptions.'[118]

The postmodern notion that the collapse of the Twin Towers should not be understood as a moment where 'reality entered our image,' but when 'the image entered and shattered our reality,' builds on the kinds of paranoid fantasies that had emerged in filmic and literary fiction throughout the second half of the twentieth century.[119] However, the disruption of perceptions of reality in the trauma aesthetic are not marked by the same kind of paranoia that characterises

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[116] Roger Rosenblatt, "The Age of Irony Comes to an End," *Time*, 24 September 2001, n. pg.
[117] Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism*, 29.
[118] Martin Amis, "Fear and Loathing," *The Guardian*, 18/09/2001 2008, n. pg.
[119] Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, 16, see also 12.

texts such as Phillip K. Dick's *Time out of Joint* (1959) or Peter Weir's 1998 film *The Truman Show*. These kinds of narrative position their protagonists as unsuspecting victims of corporate of government organisations where, as I have already suggested in the discussion of culpability above, the trauma aesthetic reveals its protagonists as complicit in their own construction of reality. This demands a more critical examination of the ways in which reality is constructed, and indeed narrated, particularly in the wake of a culturally traumatic event such as 9/11.

The more critical position from which the trauma aesthetic explores the boundaries between reality and fantasy is expressed by Don DeLillo in his essay 'In the Ruins of the Future' which illustrates a tension between the real and the simulated rather than definitively categorising the events of 9/11 as either one or the other: 'When we say a thing is unreal, we mean that it is too real, a phenomenon so unaccountable and yet so bound to the power of objective fact that we can't tilt it to the slant of our perceptions.'[120] This perspective is more closely aligned with the sense of perpetual uncertainty and meaningless which characterises the trauma aesthetic. Furthermore, by recognising the paradoxical relationship between the real and the unreal in an event like 9/11 it reflects the blurring of boundaries discussed above. Because previous perceptions of reality, and by extension the certainty of communication, fall away in this experience of trauma, film and literature must turn away from the familiar metaphors used in everyday modes of representation, and in the cultural narration of trauma, which work to sustain an illusion of a safe and stable reality. The trauma aesthetic, then, works to expose the metaphorical foundations of our everyday experience, for example through the deconstruction of language, and constructs a new set of metaphors which more effectively account for the absence, emptiness and national uncertainty which marked the vicarious experience of 9/11

Metaphor is the primary tool available in the articulation of trauma as it is able to represent while maintaining a certain aesthetic and cognitive distance from the event itself. This is observed by Tal who notes that 'as it is spoken by survivors, the traumatic experience is re-

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[120] Don DeLillo, "In the Ruins of the Future," *The Guardian* 2001, n. pg.

inscribed as metaphor.'[121] In the immediate aftermath of 9/11 it was cinematic metaphors which seemed to provide the most effective description of people's experience of the attacks with many initial responses claiming that the spectacle was "like a movie." This kind of metaphor functioned to compensate for the apparent meaninglessness and unprecedented nature of the attacks. For a number of scholars this was an almost inevitable turn in the representation of 9/11. For example, Žižek –whose own response to the attacks makes reference to the 1999 film *The Matrix* (d. Andy and Larry Wachowiski) in its title – remarks that 'the landscape and the shots of the collapsing towers could not but be reminiscent of the most breathtaking scenes in big catastrophe productions.'[122] Similarly, Mehdi Semati comments that 'the image of New York City buildings imploding has enough fictional credibility to have framed the reality of September 11 for many of us.'[123]

Although the need to find meaning, and make sense of the events of 9/11 makes this turn to metaphor understandable, it is important to consider the ways in which these kinds of metaphors are ideologically and politically coded. As Mehdi Semati explores in some detail, the cinematic references made in the immediate aftermath of 9/11 drew on the 'resurgent America' of the late 1980s and 1990s which responded to Ronald Reagan's 'call for the projection of American power around the globe.'[124] This contributed to the kinds of binary oppositions of good and evil that also characterised the nostalgic impulse of the broadcast media discussed above. The nostalgic drive to produce a narrative of a powerful and just America was also evident in the post-9/11 film industry with films such as *Collateral Damage* (d. Andrew Davis, 2002) and Phillip Noyce's re-adaptation of *The Quiet American* being temporally shelved because their depictions of 'bad Americans' were considered insensitive.[125] By contrast films which echoed the negative depictions of Arabs and Muslims that had featured prominently in films of the 1990s, such as

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[121] Tal, *Worlds of Hurt: Reading the Literature of Trauma*, 16.

[122] Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real*, 15.

[123] Mehdi Semati, "Imagine the Terror," *Television and New Media* 3, no. 2 (2002): 213.

[124] Ibid., 214.

[125] Mirimax Executive Harvey Weinstein cited the film's portrayal of 'bad Americans' as the key reason *The Quiet American* had its release date postponed. Cited in Richard Corliss, "A Sigh for Old Saigon," *Time*, 21 October 2002, n. pg.

Ridley Scott's *Black Hawk Down* had their release dates moved forward; a move which Jonathan Markowitz argues 'reflect[s] the fact that highly militaristic displays of patriotism, never entirely out of vogue, had newfound cachet,' in the wake of 9/11.[126]

These kinds of ideologically loaded metaphors are rejected as too simplistic by the trauma aesthetic which instead develops a series of metaphors that are more able to reflect the sense of absence and emptiness that marked the vicarious experience of 9/11, and the sense of vulnerability it inflicted on the image of American national identity. These metaphors – distance, timelessness and the body - form the basis for the chapters which follow.

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[126] Jonathan Markovitz, "Reel Terror Post 9/11," in *Film and Television after 9/11*, ed. Wheeler Winston Dixon (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2004), 201.

2. A World of Falling: Distance and Emptiness in the Trauma Aesthetic

The focus of this chapter is the way in which the trauma aesthetic develops a profound sense of absence and emptiness through the use of spatial metaphors which emphasise distance categorised by themes of isolation, environment and communication. Distance (both figurative and literal) can appear in the experience and representation of trauma in three key ways: geographical, temporal and cognitive. One of the factors which complicates an examination of distance in the representation of trauma is that distance can function as both an obstacle and a therapeutic necessity. For example, in the films of Daniel Eisenberg, a child of Holocaust survivors, the geographical distance that separates him from the space of the original trauma intensifies the psychological impact of his role as secondary witness to the Holocaust. In an effort to overcome this sense of detachment Eisenberg travels to Europe and his 'encounters with the real landscapes and sites of the past…connect his 'memory without experience' to some sort of lived experience.'[127] In this example distance functions as part of the trauma itself but it can also be (consciously or subconsciously) created and maintained in order to position the victim in a place of safety or control (i.e. the distance is a symptom of the trauma). For example, Erika Scheidegger draws on Dominick LaCapra's reading of *To the Lighthouse* to observe how narrative strategies in the novel serve to 'keep trauma in check, to maintain it at a distance so that life, as it unravels uneventfully … can go on.'[128] Of course, as a semi-autobiographical novel, Woolfe's fictionalisation of her own lived traumatic experiences is, in itself, an example of keeping trauma at an aesthetic distance.[129]

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[127] Wasserman, "Constructing the Image of Postmemory," 166.
[128] Erika Scheidegger, "Poetry as Mother Tongue? Lorna Dee Cervantes' *Emplumada*," in *American Poetry: From Whitman to the Present*, ed. Robert; Vincent Rehder, Patrick (Switzerland: Tubingen Narr, 2006), 195.
[129] It is also interesting to note here that the same notion of aesthetic distance as cathartic underpins practices such as Art Therapy. For a discussion of this see Dalia Avraharni, "Visual Art Therapy's Unique

As it is presented in these examples the distinction between distance as symptom and distance as therapy seems clear and somewhat straightforward. However, as I mentioned previously, distance can function in a variety of ways, even sometimes conflicting within a single narrative. For example, Michelle Balaev demonstrates how the narrative strategy of Harriet Jacob's memoir *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* simultaneously gives voice to culturally muted issues and employs silence in order to 'maintain agency, authorship, and control over the experience.'[130] It must be acknowledged here that this tension between the establishing and bridging of distance is not always deliberate within trauma narratives. Indeed, from a post-structuralist or Lacanian perspective this problem of distance is inherent in any representation due to the semantic difference between the sign (representation) and that to which it refers (trauma). As Caruth eloquently summarises, the language of trauma 'is always somehow literary: a language that defies, even as it claims, our understanding.'[131]

The complexities raised by the individuality of traumatic experience, and the problematic nature of representation, make the examination of distance in trauma representation fraught with difficulties. Therefore, although I do not want to suggest that this chapter presents a definitive model for the function of distance in trauma representation, the analysis that follows focuses on one factor that seems to have a significant influence on this aspect of representation and is particularly resonant in the context of this study. This factor is the way in which the original trauma was experienced. To clarify, it is often the case that distance appears as an obstacle to be overcome where the event is experienced indirectly and is typically geographical or temporal, as in the example of Eisenberg's films mentioned above. Parallel to this (although I stress that there are exceptions), distance often becomes a means of managing trauma when the experience is direct. In these instances it is more likely for distance to be presented as cognitive and inscribed in

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Contribution in the Treatment of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorders," *Journal of Trauma and Dissociation* 6, no. 4 (2006): 5-38.

[130] Balaev, "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory," 158.

[131] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 5.

the text through some kind of formal aesthetic technique, as in *To the Lighthouse*.[132] As detailed

in the previous chapter, the vicarious experience of 9/11 is markedly different from the kinds of

direct and indirect witnessing typically discussed within the field of trauma studies. It would

follow therefore, that distance and its metaphors plays a particular role in the representation of

the trauma of 9/11.

Where the aesthetic component of distance is read as imposed on or impeding the

representation of trauma, that representation can be seen to be as, in some way, removed or

separate from the 'true' content of the text. In contrast, within the trauma aesthetic, distance,

and the emptiness it creates is more integral and pervasive than this. To understand this more

fully it is useful to consider Isabelle Wallace's insightful essay 'Trauma as Representation' in which

she argues for the need to 'think differently about the relation between trauma and

representation' in order to account for the phenomenon of 'representation as trauma,' of which

9/11 is an urgent example.[133] Wallace's detailed examination of Manet's painting *Olympia*, its

critical reception in 1865, and its re-presentation in Jasper John's *Corpse and Mirror* (1974)

reveals a model of representation as trauma characterised by a 'cardaverousness'[134] and

'fundamental morbidity.'[135] In this chapter Wallace's understanding of these qualities of

representation as trauma are used to illuminate the ways in which the trauma aesthetic develops

similar qualities of distance and emptiness.

The sections of this chapter titled 'The Operative Word is Men' and 'There is a Whole

Where America Used to be' explore representations of geographical distance based around the

central metaphors of the isolated male and unfamiliar landscapes respectively. 'The Operative

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[132] In many cases this symptomatic distance can also be defined as temporal as in Freud's formulation of the concept of *Nachträglichkeit* or 'belatedness.' Caruth describes this link between the temporal and the cognitive in *Unclaimed Experience* where she writes: 'This truth [of the traumatic event], in its delayed appearance and belated address, cannot be linked only to what is known, but also to what remains unknown in our very actions and our language.' (4). Due to this intimate connection I have chosen to simply state the distance as cognitive but the temporal factor should be highlighted as evidence of the complexity of the function of distance in the experience and representation of trauma.

[133] Isabelle Wallace, "Trauma as Representation: A Meditation on Manet and Johns," in *Trauma and Visuality in Modernity*, ed. Lisa and Eric Rosenberg Salzman (Hanover: Dartmouth College Press, 2006), 4.

[134] Ibid., 4.

[135] Ibid., 20.

Word is Men' will also contextualise the representation of the isolated male within a historical narrative of 'masculinity in crisis.' To this end I focus specifically on the use of a particular *noir* visual style (in both filmic and literary texts) – a set of familiar conventions persistently used in the representation of particular political/social conditions and traumatised masculinity throughout the second half of the twentieth century – and the particular way it is used to comment on 9/11 as a cultural trauma. 'Human Still Life' draws on both trauma studies and art theory to explore the function of aesthetic distance in the relationship between trauma and the image focussing particularly on the image of the 'falling man.' The final section 'Like Leaves that Fall into a River from a Tree' explores the self-reflexive ways in which texts such as Jonathan Safran Foer's novel *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* highlight the cognitive distance which is inherent in any communication or representation of trauma. In undertaking this analysis I acknowledge and reference the poststructuralist theories of language, and their role in the understanding of trauma fiction. However, written and spoken language is a primary element of the texts being examined here and its use and impact demands to be analysed in some way or another. Therefore, I take an approach akin to that of Juliet Mitchell in her insightful article 'Trauma, Recognition and the Place of Language' in which she states that the questioning of how trauma can be cured by language 'is not the same as asking what might be the effect of trauma on language.'[136] This opens up more possibilities for the understanding of language in trauma fiction than the definitive view that language is incapable of accurately referring to the world. From this perspective I use Judith Greenberg's discussion of the trope of Echo in trauma narratives to examine the specific ways language is used in the trauma aesthetic as a response to 9/11 as a mediated trauma. Due to the immediacy of the mediation of 9/11, temporal distance, as it is defined here, does not play a role within the trauma aesthetic, instead the relationship between trauma and temporality functions in a different way which will be explored in detail in chapter three.

In addition to presenting the various ways in which distance is depicted aesthetically this chapter also addresses the impact of traumatic distance (be it physical or cognitive) on the

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[136]Juliet Mitchell, "Trauma, Recognition and the Place of Language," *Diacritics* 28, no. 4 (1998): 126.

construction of identity. This is based on an assertion drawn from established trauma theory (although not necessarily explicitly expressed by it) that the management of distance within trauma representation is simultaneously a management of the self. For example, Michelle Balaev begins her study 'Trends in Literary Trauma Theory' by stating: 'A central claim of contemporary literary trauma theory asserts that trauma creates a speechless fright that divides or destroys identity,'[137] and makes a direct link between cognitive distance ('speechless fright') and identity. The particular relationship between distance and identity that Balaev identifies in a range of twentieth century literary texts is based on a psychoanalytic, 'abreactive model of the self as a fixed identity that then fragments.'[138] However, the trauma aesthetic, as we shall see, is acutely aware of the instability of identity and representation. As a result, an alternative model appears in which loss of identity is the loss of something never possessed: Loss becomes both a perpetual and eternally immanent experience. As much of the work on the construction of identity in trauma narratives focuses on culturally marginalised, oppressed and often female identities I begin by contextualising this chapter's discussion of white masculine identity within a broader discourse of gender and trauma in Western culture.

The Operative Word is Men

In the immediate aftermath of 9/11, the broadcast and print media were characterised by persistent evocations of heroic masculinity. Articles such as 'Heavy Lifting Required: The Return of Manly Men' in *The New York Times* (20/10/2001) focused on the heroism, strength and bravery of those fire fighters and rescue workers that had worked at ground zero, many of whom had lost their lives in the process. This article, and the many others that function to a similar end, demonstrate an attempt to extract something positive, or remotely meaningful from the intensely traumatic events. As Susan Faludi observes in *The Terror Dream*, the rhetoric used in these evocations drew on familiar, nostalgic images of masculinity within the cultural imagination in

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[137] Balaev, "Trends in Literary Trauma Theory," 149.
[138] Ibid., 163.

order to construct a sense of national unity and comfort in the wake of the attacks: 'In the aftermath of the attacks, 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.'[139]

The nostalgia that characterises these images signals that this is not the first time heroic masculinity has been employed as a kind of cultural therapy. Consider, for example, the emergence of pulp-fiction superheroes such as Dick Tracy and The Shadow during the economic depression of the 1930s. In their study of heroic tales of redemption, what they term 'tales of the American Monomyth,' John Shelton Lawrence and Robert Jewett argue that these characters are written into formulaic narratives which allow them to function in a therapeutic manner. Referencing a range of examples they demonstrate how each story begins peacefully until a disruptive event occurs. This then leads to a heroic fight after which peace is ultimately restored by the superhero. It is this narrative agency which allows these superheroes to function, not only as symbols of individual power and courage, but also as symbols of hope for the healing and restoration of an entire community. Significantly, this sentiment can also be identified in a number of texts dealing explicitly with the events of 9/11. For example, the film's *World Trade Center* (Oliver Stone, 2006) and *United 93* (Paul Greengrass, 2006) both celebrate a particular kind of masculine heroism grounded in (heterosexual) family values, courage, strength, leadership.

As I indicated in the previous chapter, the trauma aesthetic resists the kind of easy resolutions that these heroic narratives inevitably provide. In addition, the trauma aesthetic takes a more complex view of the nature of masculinity and highlights the impossibility of the superhero fantasy; a view that is particularly evident in texts such as *History of Violence* and *In the Valley of Elah*. An explicit articulation of this dilemma can be found in Frederic Beigbeder's novel *Windows on the World* (2005) which imagines the story of Yorston Carthew and his two sons trapped at the top of the World Trade Center after the first plane hit on 9/11. The younger of the two boys is convinced his father is an undercover superhero who will use his super powers to save

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[139] Faludi, *The Terror Dream*, 3-4.

them. This belief in his father's heroic ability makes the situation all the more distressing for Yorston who can do nothing to save his children. While this particular text does not fall within my definition of the trauma aesthetic –due to its being a French novel- it nonetheless provides a vivid illustration of an important point that is central to my analysis: the gendering of trauma within American culture, specifically the ways in which the distinctions between physical and psychological suffering are overtly gendered within the cultural imagination.

A persistent focus within constructions of heroic masculinity in post-9/11 print and broadcast media is the physicality of their subjects: strength, brawn, physical injury. For example, Faludi cites the photo essay "War and Destiny" that appeared in a special issue of *Vanity Fair* in February 2002 as exemplary of this preoccupation. The piece included images of President Bush and national security figures that highlighted their physical attributes, 'because', according to *Vanity Fair* editor Graydon Carter, 'it's not just strength but images of strength we need in the 21st century war.'[140] Interestingly, such an insistence on the visibility of masculine strength is at odds with the way in which the broadcast media's narration of 9/11 worked to unquestioningly cast America as the victim of the attacks. Susan Faludi observes how the broadcast media attempted to negate this tension between heroic and victimised national identities by focusing its narration of the latter on female figures such as victims' widows.[141] There remained, however, a latent concern with the stability of the heroic, masculine identity being projected in media such as the *Vanity Fair* article. Indeed, the need to so explicitly assert a tough, masculine national identity in this way is, in itself, suggestive of an underlying insecurity. Through the particular representation of its male protagonists, the trauma aesthetic centralises this figure of victimised masculine which the broadcast media's narration of 9/11 attempted to erase. In so doing, it begins to question the ideological foundations on which traditional notions of individual and national identity are constructed.

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[140] Cited in ibid., 48.
[141] Faludi makes reference to this gendering of the 9/11 victim throughout the *The Terror Dream* but is explored in most detail in Chapter 4, 'Perfect Virgins of Grief.' ibid., 89-115.

In order to fully understand the significance of the way in which the trauma aesthetic represents masculinity it is first necessary to outline in more detail the relationship between masculinity, trauma and victimhood in the western imagination. Consider, for example Sally Robinson's assertion that 'white masculinity can most convincingly represent itself as victimized through displaying a wounded body;'[142] a notion that is developed by Mark Straw who states that 'it is equally possible that [victim status] can be achieved through the display of a wounded mind.'[143] The claim to victimhood through psychological wounding is clearly evident in the acceptance of the authenticity of vicarious traumatisation post-9/11: despite the absence of wounded bodies it is widely accepted that America's collective psyche has been wounded by the attacks. However, it cannot be ignored that physical and psychological wounding have very different gendered connotations which impact on the ways in which these kinds of trauma are culturally managed.

The redemptive potential of violence, specifically the wounding of the male body, in Western culture can be traced back to the Crucifixion of Christ which has become an archetypal image of physical pain and redemption. The fact that physical wounds can demonstrate weakness of the human body but resilience to pain and strength of mind is perhaps best illustrated in contemporary culture in the cinematic action hero. Using Mel Gibson as a case study Jeffrey Brown argues that Gibson's characters' persistent subjection to torture and physical pain enable him to be coded as a figure of tough, heroic masculinity. Discussing the torture scenes in *Lethal Weapon* Brown writes: 'Rather than compromising Gibson's masculinity scenes like these confirm it because his character is able to withstand the pain and in fact triumph over the torturer despite all of the disadvantages of being bound and hurt.'[144] Brown goes on to summarise this affect, stating: 'While visually the torture scene is a means to display the male body, narratively it is

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[142] Sally Robinson, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), 6.
[143] Mark Straw, "Traumatized Masculinity and American National Identity in Hollywood's Gulf War," *New Cinemas: Journal of Contemporary Film* 6, no. 2 (2008): 135.
[144] Jeffrey A. Brown, "The Tortures of Mel Gibson: Masochism and the Sexy Male Body," *Men and Masculinities* 5(2002): 129.

incontestable proof of the character's superior masculinity.'[145] This emphasis of resilience in the depiction of the physically wounded male body is also central to David Savran's study of masochism and masculinity, indeed it is encompassed in the title of his book *Taking it Like a Man*.

Before continuing with this line of argument I must acknowledge, as Browne does, that the equation of physical wounds with tough, or indeed hyper-masculinity, is problematised by feminist theory and the Freudian psychoanalysis on which it is based. Drawing on the work of Kaja Silverman, Brown highlights how 'the masochist position [is] so heavily coded as feminine that to assume a position of powerlessness is by definition pathological for men.'[146] This problem is particularly evident when considering the image of Christ and the crucifixion. As studies of the visual representation of this image throughout history have observed: '[Jesus'] gender has … long been a troubled subject of debate.'[147] As Kaja Silverman notes:

> Christian masochism has radically emasculating implications, and is in its purest forms intrinsically incompatible with the pretensions of masculinity. And since its primary exemplar is a male rather than a female subject, those implications would seem impossible to ignore. Remarkably, Christianity also redefines the paternal legacy; it is after all through the assumption of his place within the divine family that Christ comes to be installed in a suffering and castrating position.[148]

This problematic dichotomy inherent in the gendering of the wounded body also emerges in the mediation of 9/11. In order for images of tough masculinity to maintain their dominance within the broadcast media's narrative of 9/11, images that may be understood in terms of the passive, feminine role of the masochist had to be erased. For example, there are no images – to my knowledge – of the bodies of the victims of 9/11 that fell or jumped from the Twin Towers, after the moment of their deaths. It would seem that the survival of wounding (or some kind of triumph over the torturer) is vital to the 'success' or, to borrow from Robinson's work, 'authenticity' of the wounded hero. This requirement is also suggested by Ina Rae Hark who identifies the heroic possibilities of the wounded male arises from 'a pleasure in seeing the pain

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[145] Ibid., 130.
[146] Ibid., 130.
[147] Ina Rae Hark, "Tortured Masculinity: Gendering Jesus in *the Robe*," *Quarterly Review of Film and Video* 18, no. 2 (2001): 119.
[148] Kaja Silverman, *Male Subjectivity at the Margins* (London and New York: Routledge, 1992), 198.

endured and overcome, rather than merely feeling the pain itself.'[149] The images of these victims

as they fell also became controversial, in part, because of their depiction of the act of suicide

which is typically coded as hysterical and feminine, an association I explore in detail presently.

Despite the problematic nature of the gendering of wounded male bodies, there remains

considerable evidence to support the claim that such images retain the potential to be coded in

terms of heroic masculinity under specific conditions: Brown's analysis of Mel Gibson, David

Morgan's identification of depictions of Christ as 'a rugged, violent revolutionary'[150] are just two

examples of how the right combinations of stoicism, honourable purpose, and triumph or survival

can transform the wounded male body into an image of hyper-masculinity. It is this image, and its

opposite of the hysterical, psychologically wounded female, that underpins popular therapeutic

discourse. Dating back to early psychoanalysts such as Charcot and Freud, who associated psychic

disorders exclusively with the female brain, psychic disorders have been regarded as a marker of

femininity within the western imagination. [151] Even though science has progressed to recognise

that psychic disorders are not gender specific, there remains a stigma attached to mental health

issues within popular culture which continues to echo much earlier clinical discourses. As Steven

Ducat writes:

> Both male gender socialization and conservative ideology view help-seeking behaviour,
> along with the condition of dependency it implies, as something shameful and unmanly.
> From this perspective, attention to emotion, and especially one's psychological wounds, is
> seen as a manifestation of weakness and effeminacy in men, and a confirmation of female
> inferiority when exhibited by women.[152]

Such cultural anxieties surrounding psychological suffering and masculinity are registered in the

sense of isolation and emotional emptiness that pervades the trauma aesthetic. For example, in

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[149] Hark, "Tortured Masculinity: Gendering Jesus in *the Robe*," 118.

[150] David Morgan, "The Masculinity of Jesus in Popular Religious Art," in *Men's Bodies, Men's Gods*, ed. Björn Krondorfer (New York: New York University Press, 1996), 251. Interestingly the portrayal of Christ's crucifixion in Mel Gibson's *The Passion of the Christ* (2004) can be seen as one example of this. Alison Griffith's article examining the film's religious imagery comments on 'Gibson's exploitation of the *Braveheart*-inspired, pumped-up masculinity that is a defining feature' of the film. Alison Griffiths, "The Revered Gaze: The Medieval Imaginary of Mel Gibson's *the Passion of the Christ*," *Cinema Journal* 46, no. 2 (2007): 20.

[151] For a summary see Elaine Showalter, *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture* (London: Picador, 1997), 15.

[152] Steven Ducat, *The Wimp Factor: Gender Gaps, Holy Wats. And the Politics of Anxious Masculinity* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2004), 243.

Paul Haggis's film *In the Valley of Elah* (2007) Hank Deerfield (Tommy Lee Jones) is haunted by the last conversation he had with his son Mike. Traumatised by an event in which he runs down a young boy while driving a convoy in Afghanistan, Mike telephones his father and begs him to "get me outta here." However, Hank believes in a strong, unemotional masculinity and tells his son "Now that's just nerves talking,' refusing to acknowledge his son's need for help. As Mike becomes increasingly distressed and begins to cry down the phone, his father enquires "Have you got anyone there with you?" This may seem like he is hoping his son has a friend there for emotional support but when Mike replies "No" Hank is merely relieved that no one is there to witness his son's weak and unmanly behaviour. As the story unfolds it is revealed that Mike turned to drugs in order to suppress his traumatic emotions – in the manner required by a masculinist culture - and when he returns to base in America he becomes violent, attacks a friend, and is murdered during the fight. Thus, through Mike's tragic narrative, the film reveals the dangers of the repression of psychological suffering prescribed by the gendered ideology of trauma in Western culture.

Other, more veiled references appear in texts such as *25ᵗʰ Hour*. When confronted by a student who demands to know why she received a B minus for her paper when a male student received an A for his poorly written account of his grandmother's death, Jacob defends the grading by saying that boys find it more difficult to express their emotions, implying that any kind of articulation of feeling should be marked as an achievement. The banality of Jacob's excuse signals that men's reluctance or inability to articulate their psychological condition is perceived as a cultural truism, in the same way that Ducat highlights 'men's reluctance to ask for directions is an infamous, if trivial example of avoiding help.'[153] The extent to which this construction of repressed masculinity is rooted in the American imagination is discussed in detail by Robinson. In her chapter 'Masculinity as Emotional Constipation' Robinson observes 'the apparently unimpeachable truth that men aren't permitted to express their emotions'[154] and discusses at length the impact this has on the construction and representation of masculine identities. What

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[153] Ibid., 54.
[154] Robinson, *Marked Men: White Masculinity in Crisis*, 128.

emerges from this study of masculinity in traumatic contexts is the inherent contradiction that 'male power is secured by inexpressivity, even as inexpressivity damages the male psyche and the male body.'[155] This contradiction is particularly pertinent in contemporary culture where the popular discourse of trauma and therapy prescribes the articulation of emotions and feelings as the primary mode of healing.[156] In addition, as discussed in chapter one, this cultural preoccupation is intensified in the aftermath of 9/11 during which popular discourse was saturated with the language of trauma and therapy.

This widely acknowledged relationship between men and the expression of psychological suffering (and the prevalence of the discourse from which this concept emerges) is perhaps an additional reason why male characters dominate the post-9/11 trauma aesthetic. As well as being the focus of broadcast media in the immediate aftermath of the attack (as discussed in chapter one), the familiar figure of the emotionally repressed male allows a starting point for the representation of a trauma that is so difficult to articulate. To clarify, the experience of men in American culture is being used to represent trauma's defining 'resist[ance of] language or representation.'[157] In so doing, the trauma aesthetic constructs a two way relationship between established notions of a perceived 'crisis of masculinity' and 9/11. On the one hand, the notion of masculinity in crisis becomes a means of narrativizing the trauma of 9/11. However, the trauma aesthetic can also be seen to use 9/11 as an affirmation of white male victimhood as it becomes a literal representation of previously abstract anxieties around masculinity. This can be seen in the explicit and implicit references to specific historical discourses of masculinity in crisis, particularly that which surrounds the image of the post industrial male; a figure of masculinity that has shifted significantly in cultural currency over the years.

During the 1990s masculinity was, more than ever before, being defined by the mass media with an emphasis on a man's appearance, his body and how he accessorised, and the post-

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[155] Ibid., 165.
[156] I am referring here to the prevalence of the concept of 'talk therapy' as it is presented in such popular media formats as the television talk show.
[157] Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, 3.

industrial economic boom made this image increasingly accessible. However, traditional notions of tough masculinity were not erased from the cultural imagination. As in previous decades, the reconfiguration of gendered identities harboured deep anxieties regarding the stability of heterosexual masculinity. As the male image became increasingly visible in advertising and other commercial media, 'boys and men [became] the object of the same desirous, product-buying inducing gaze that the girls and women,' raising concerns about the feminisation of masculinity.[158] In addition, but closely related to this notion of effeminacy, there arose a deep rooted concern regarding the social and cultural agency of the post-industrial male. One of the ways in which this anxiety found expression was in the evolution of a cinematic genre Latham Hunter terms "office movies" which '[came] about to reflect the position of the "disempowered" middle-class white male: the drone of the new corporatized managerial late capitalist culture.'[159]

Considering these discourses of effeminacy and lack of agency that have surrounded the figure of post-industrial masculinity over the last decade it is perhaps unsurprising that this particular gendered identity came under renewed scrutiny in the aftermath of 9/11. As Michael Kimmel observes, the post-industrial male served as an obvious point of comparison to the brawny heroism of New York's firemen. Discussing how the (image of) firefighters became central to the 'revival of traditional masculinity'[160] he comments: 'The global business class has fared less well. Just as he was reeling from the dot-com bubble, his masculinity quotient seems to be tumbling alongside the NASDAQ.'[161] The suggestion of a 'masculinity quotient' in this short passage makes it particularly interesting to highlight the character of Slaughtery in *25th Hour* who devises a scale on which men can be rated according to their attractiveness to women. By his own measure Slaughtery scores within the 99th percentile but is clearly, and tellingly, single. We can

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[158] Lesli; Dworkin Heywood, Shari L, *Built to Win: The Female Athlete as Cultural Icon* (Minneapolis: University of Minesota Press, 2003), 72.
[159] Latham Hunter, "The Celluloid Cubicle: Regressive Constructions of Masculinity in 1990s Office Movies," *The Journal of American Culture* 26, no. 1 (2003): 72.
[160] Michael S. Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 249.
[161] Ibid., 250.

begin to see, therefore, how through the character of Slaughtery the film registers concern with the viability of the cultural construction of post-industrial masculinity.

The film introduces Slaughtery at work, massaging a stress ball in his right hand as he anxiously waits for the unemployment figure to be released by the government. The sequence opens with a close up of his red rimmed eyes looking anxiously from side to side before cutting rhythmically between close ups of a hand typing aggressively on a computer keyboard, a hand massaging a stress ball, the ticking clock, a headset, before cutting back to his eyes. The imagery and the pace of this short sequence signals the stressful nature of the financial industry and this is made explicit when we discover Slaughtery has a huge amount of a bank's money invested in the number being low. This is despite all predictions pointing to a high number and on hearing what Slaughtery has done, his boss demands that he sells some of the contracts to reduce the risk. After his boss' angry tirade Slaughtery is taunted by a colleague who implies that the incident is a reflection of his lack of authority and, by extension, masculinity: 'I'm pretty sure I just heard your daddy come over here and cut your allowance.' A similar anxiety regarding masculinity and agency is registered in *Falling Man* when Keith describes finding his friend and colleague at his desk in the World Trade Center moments after the first plane hit:

> He sat in his chair, head to one side. He'd been hit by something large and hard when the ceiling caved or even before, in the first spasm. His face was pressed into his shoulder, some blood, not much.
>
> …
>
> He watched the man breathe. He was breathing. He looked like someone paralyzed for life, born this way, head twisted into his shoulder, living in a chair day and night.[162]

In this passage the static working environment of the post-industrial male literally becomes destructive.

Both these examples emphasise the perceived lack of agency or, perhaps more appropriately in this context, victimhood, of white masculinity. Further examples which reference

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[162] Don DeLillo, *Falling Man* (London and New York: Picador, 2007), 241.

the historical discourses outlined above less explicitly can also be identified earlier in *Falling Man* when Keith has an MRI scan, during which he experiences a 'sense of helpless confinement.'[163] Similarly, in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* Joel's (Jim Carey) treatment to rid him of the memories of his relationship with Clementine (Kate Winslet) involves him wearing a device on his head while laying on a bed in a comatose state. The film then depicts Joel's experience of walking through his memories and deciding he no longer wants to forget Clementine. The dream sequence then becomes his vain struggle to fight the treatment and cuts between his desperate journey through his memories and the image of his body laying paralysed on the bed. The prevalence of images of paralysis and disempowered masculinity within the trauma aesthetic seems to suggest that historical discourses of 'masculinity in crisis' stand in for, or are in some way representative of, the trauma of 9/11.

Within the trauma aesthetic, however, the relationship between historical discourses of 'masculinity in crisis,' and the construction of the white male victim of 9/11, is more than mimetic. Rather, the positioning of the trauma of 9/11 within a broader, historical narrative serves to illustrate a cycle or trajectory of trauma. This can be seen in a more detailed examination of the central male characters of *25th Hour*. As Amy Taubin observes in an article for *Sight and Sound*, 'all three [Monty, Jacob and Slaughtery] are drawn to situations where self destruction looms large.'[164] For Monty, destruction has already occurred. He confides in Slaughtery that six months before he was caught by the police he considered giving up his life of drug dealing and investing his money but 'got greedy.' Monty's downfall casts a shadow over the other two friends, as if their own downfall were inevitable. This is emphasised in the scene where Jacob and Slaughtery discuss Monty's future. In this scene the two men are positioned facing each other at opposite sides of the frame against the background of the window looking out over Ground Zero. Although both characters are physically in the shot the focus is drawn to their reflections which appear as if superimposed over the image of the ruined Twin Towers, suggesting a direct link between the notion of destruction and masculinity. This is a similar motif to the one used in Patrick McGrath's

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[163] Ibid., 18.
[164] Amy Taubin, "Going Down," *Sight and Sound* 13, no. 4 (2003): 14.

Trauma where the image of the Twin Towers under construction appears at critical, and often

traumatic, moments during the male protagonist's life, the absence of the towers signals a kind of

inevitability of destruction. In *25th Hour* this is continued into the sense of loss, and the

anticipation of loss, that pervades the film which I will explore in more detail later in this chapter.

It is also interesting to note at this point how the image of Slaughtery and Jacob is translucent in

the scene described above which exemplifies the ways in which the trauma aesthetic depicts the

physical appearance of men in order to represent the sense of distance and isolation that

characterises the trauma of 9/11 in these texts.

There are clear patterns in the way in which male protagonists are constructed within the

trauma aesthetic. Hank Deerfield (*Valley of Elah)*, Keith Neudeker (*Falling Man*) and the old man

of *The Road* all lack the youth and vigour of more typical national heroes. Instead they are all

middle aged and possess a certain world-weariness that is reflected in their physical appearance.

Hank Deerfield, for example, is permanently dressed in beige trousers and a well worn tan leather

windbreaker. This unvaried costume and his precise daily routines (a leftover of his army life)

indicate a monotonous, slow-paced life that is far removed from the energy of any action hero.

Hank's obsessive compulsive behaviour can also be seen as a physical manifestation or

mechanical means of coping with psychological pain. As Peter Bradshaw suggests in his review of

the film for *The Guardian*, his routines function as 'a distraction from despair,'[165] and thus hint at

some kind of psychological weakness.[166] Visually Hank presents a figure of tired and defeated

masculinity which is emphasised by the cinematography. Overexposure gives Hank a washed out

complexion and dark eyes, contributing to a sense of vulnerability. Reviewing the film for *The*

Guardian Philip French highlighted these particular features, describing 'those pouches the size of

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[165] Peter Bradshaw, "In the Valley of Elah (Review)," *The Guardian*, 25 January 2008, n. pg.
[166] A more explicit example of this connection between obsessive compulsive behaviour, psychological suffering and a notion of failed masculinity can be found in the character of Charlie Fineman (Adam Sandler) in the film *Reign Over Me* (d. Mike Binder, 2007). In this film Sandler employs his trademark child-like persona to depict a man who has lost his entire family in one of the planes high-jacked on 9/11. One of the main symptoms of his post-traumatic disorder is the obsessive and repeated remodelling of the kitchen in his apartment and his aggressive insistence that visitors take of their shoes.

carpetbags beneath his eyes … His face is a map of accumulated experience'[167] Hank's weathered physical appearance, his emotional detachment and his role as an ex-military police officer investigating the disappearance of his son draw heavily on the conventions of *film noir*.

The influence of *film noir* extends beyond character type and can also be identified in the film's cinematography and *mise-en-scene*. For example, in the scene where Hank stands in the ensuite bathroom of his motel room preparing to receive the news of his son's death (Figure 3) the frame is dominated in the foreground by the wall and bathroom door creating an 'opposition of areas of light and dark' and demonstrating the kind of 'claustrophobic framing devices' characteristic of *noir* cinematography.[168] As Janey Place and Lowell Stevenson suggest in their foundational discussion of *noir*'s visual style, the use of a dramatically narrowed frame 'separate[s] the character from other characters, from the world or from his own emotions.'[169] Here this effect is achieved through the camera's voyeuristic position which functions to make the spectator aware of their separation from the film image. Furthermore, the off-centre framing of Hank is suggestive of his unbalanced psychological state which renders him emotionally inaccessible to the spectator, also contributes to a sense of distance between Hank and the viewer. The sense of detachment and isolation developed through the framing of this scene permeates the rest of the film through the use of a bleak colour palette. The desert landscapes of New Mexico, the clinical motel room and army barracks are sparse and cold and even the family home is dimly lit with the same wash of pale greys, blues and browns, underscoring the sense of absence and emptiness that marks the film's representation of trauma.

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[167] Phillip French, "In the Valley of Elah (Review)," *The Guardian*, 27 January 2008, n. pg.
[168] J. A Place and L. S. Peterson, "Some Visual Motifs of *Film Noir*," in *Movies and Methods,* ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1976), 330, 35.
[169] Ibid., 335.

Figure 3. In the Valley of Elah draws on the visual conventions of film noir in its representation of Hank.

The use of *film noir* conventions in the representation of post-9/11 masculinity is, perhaps, an unsurprising one. As Frank Krutnik writes, the genre 'seems to be driven by challenges to the mutually reinforcing regimes of masculine cultural authority and masculine psychic stability,' and the frequent representation of 'weak, confused and powerless males'[170] is echoed in the characters discussed above. Comparisons can also be drawn between the cultural climate of post-9/11 America and the post-war era from which *film noir* emerged. Vivian Sobchack, for example identifies how films noir 'mark to an extraordinary degree the lived sense of insecurity, instability and incoherence Americans experienced during the transitional period that began after the war.'[171] The use of established and familiar genre and narrative conventions is common in trauma fiction as it provides a referential basis for the communication of traumatic experience that defies representation. With this in mind the familiarity of these stylistic conventions can be read as evidence of an attempt, within the trauma aesthetic, to overcome the cognitive distance between traumatic experience and representation by referencing an historical

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[170] Andrew Spicer, *Film Noir* (Harlow: Longman, 2002), xiii and 85.
[171] Vivian Sobchack, "Lounge Time: Postwar Crises and the Chronotope of Film Noir," in *Refiguring American Film Genres*, ed. Nick Browne (Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1998), 131.

response to a similar set of social and political concerns. By the same token, the conventions of

noir are a culturally understood visual code for the themes of traumatised masculinity and

national crisis that pervade the trauma aesthetic and thus allow texts such as *Valley of Elah* to

mediate between individual and collective experience.

Although familiar, the conventions of film noir offer a very different set of meanings to

the kinds of cinematic comparisons being drawn in the broadcast media's coverage of the attacks

and, therefore, begin to develop a counter-narrative of the trauma of 9/11. The trauma aesthetic

seems self-aware in its use of this type of generic convention which allows it to evoke a sense a

repeated or cyclical cultural experience. This is particularly evident in Paul Auster's *Man in the*

Dark where the use of noir conventions verges on parody. Throughout the novel, the central

character, August Brill narrates the story of an alternative America which bares all the aesthetic

markers of a classic Hollywood noir: August describes the city of Washington as 'a shabby down-

at-the-heels kind of place, with ugly, poorly constructed buildings, nary a tree in sight, and

mounds of uncollected garbage littering the sidewalks'[172] and sends his protagonist, Owen Brick,

to a deserted diner and bleak motel room (much like Hank Deerfield in *In the Valley of Elah*). Here

the playfulness with which August/Auster uses the elements of noir suggests a more critical

approach to the way in which America narrates is own history. Where the broadcast media's

narration of 9/11 relied on a nostalgic use of various narratives and images of its imagined

'Golden Age,' the trauma aesthetic draws on the darker conventions of noir in order to draw

attention to the instability of both national and masculine identity. This cultural-political

commentary is registered throughout the narrative of *Man in the Dark* which explores the

political consequences of 9/11 by imagining an America where the attacks never occurred. The

same concerns are also made explicit at the end of *In the Valley of Elah* as Hank raises the

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[172] Auster, *Man in the Dark*, 25-26.

American flag upside down as a sign of, to borrow Joan Mellens summation of the film, a 'morally damaged' population and national ethos.[173]

The disruption of notions of individual and national identity through the use of noir conventions is accompanied in the trauma aesthetic by a series of motifs of isolation. For example, Monty Brogan, the protagonist of *25th Hour*, is visually presented in a similar way to Hank despite only being in his twenties. The film describes how Monty dealt drugs while at school and, as a result, was kicked off the basketball team, destroying his hopes of a sporting career. As a consequence of sacrificing his youth to a life of crime and violence, Monty bears a burden of guilt and the looming loss of his comfortable lifestyle as he faces seven years in prison. The sense of Monty being old beyond his years is emphasised by his youthful girlfriend Naturelle, who he meets while she is still a high school student. In a scene at the night club, only hours before he leaves for prison, Monty watches Naturelle from a gallery as she dances to the music being played by 17 year old DJ Dusk. Bathed in blue light, and with the music muffled and distorted by the thick glass window, Monty is detached from the youthfulness below him.

A very similar visual evocation is used in *Falling Man*. Early in the novel Lianne remembers watching Keith take a shower and describes him 'standing numbly in the flow, a dim figure far away inside plexiglass,'[174] and later describes how, 'people have trouble approaching him on the simplest social level. They think they will bounce off. They will hit a wall and bounce.'[175] I suggest that these are visual metaphors for the process of dissociation which typically accompanies traumatic experience which Van der Kolk, et al. define as 'a compartmentalization of experience.'[176] It is also interesting to note how this sense of distance and detachment experienced by these characters is also registered as a kind of invisibility. The blue lighting of Monty in the scene described above makes him difficult to see clearly, it makes him seem

[173] Joan Mellen, "Spiraling Downward: America in *Days of Heaven*, *in the Valley of Ellah*, and *No Country for Old Men*," *Film Quarterly* 61, no. 3 (2008): 24.

[174] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 23.

[175] Ibid., 190.

[176] Bessel A. van der Kolk, Onno van der Hart, and Charles R. Marmar, "Dissociation and Information Processing in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder," in *Traumatic Stress*, ed. Bessel A. Van der Kolk, Alexander McFarlane and Lars Weiseth (New York: The Guildford Press, 1996), 306.

otherworldly and suggests isolation.[177] This is matched by Keith as 'a dim figure.' The depictions also indicate a sensory detachment; the muffled music in *25th Hour* and Keith's numbness in *Falling Man*. I will explore this sensory aspect of dissociation in greater detail in chapter four but here I draw attention to the way in which the process of dissociation is often described (particularly by children) as a rendering of the self as invisible.[178] It would seem, therefore, that there is a direct psychological link between the experience of trauma and the visual representation of the individual. The next section uses art theory as a theoretical basis to examine the sense of detachment that characterises the trauma aesthetic's depiction of the 'self' in more detail. In addition, the following section will demonstrate how the process of mediation, and the vicarious experience of 9/11, is used to represent a particular kind of dissociation.

A Human Still Life

Art, specifically painting and drawing, plays a prominent role in *Falling Man* and it is used to support the novel's representation of trauma as isolation and emptiness. At one point in the novel Lianne discusses a portrait her son Justin has been drawing with his grandmother.

> "Justin and I. We need to talk about skin color, flesh tones."
>
> "He likes white."
>
> "He's thinking very white. Like paper."
>
> "He's uses bright colour for the eyes, the hair, maybe the mouth. Where we see flesh, he sees white."
>
> "He's thinking paper, not flesh. The work is a fact in itself. The subject of the portrait is the paper."
>
> …
>
> "Does he have a white crayon?"
>
> "He doesn't need a white crayon. He has white paper," she said.[179]

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[177] It is interesting to note that a similar visual motif is used in *Falling Man*. Towards the end of the novel Lianne watches a poker game on television and describes the spectators seated in a 'spooky blue' and 'icy violet light' from which they are 'able to see little or nothing. 'DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 213. This similarity in the use of colour and light is indicative of the trauma aesthetic's intensely visual quality that sees even the novel's adopting an almost filmic mode of representation.

[178] See van der Kolk, B. A. 'The Complexity of Adaptation to Trauma' in *Traumatic Stress*, 191.

[179] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 113-14.

Richard Dyer examines the psychological connotations of white as a (non)colour in Western culture and observes how whiteness is associated with neutrality, citing the dictionary definition of white as 'colourless.'[180] This same understanding of whiteness is at work in Justin's portrait as 'white' becomes synonymous with 'nothing,' 'absence.' That the portrait embodies a sense of absence through its use of colour as opposed to a sense of purity or peace is partly enabled by the fact that Justin does not choose to use a white crayon therefore white is not a colour but an indicator of blank space.[181] In the context of the trauma aesthetic this suggests a perspective of emptiness, or perhaps more accurately considering the picture is a portrait, soullessness.[182]

The artistic rendering of the human subject as blank or invisible is echoed in Amy Taubin's description of Monty's physical appearance in *25th Hour*: 'Part weasel, part Renaissance prince, Norton looks like a guy who's cool, eroding from the inside, has become tissue paper thin.'[183] The reference to a type of paper here again invokes the idea of whiteness and both these examples, with their metaphorical use of blankness and erosion, demonstrate what Dyer identifies as 'the degree to which whiteness aspires to dis-embodiedness. To be without properties also suggests not being at all. This may be thought of as pure spirit, but is also hints at non existence, or death.'[184] Dyer goes on to write that the pursuit of whiteness reveals 'a need always to be everything and nothing, literally overwhelmingly present and yet apparently absent, both alive and dead.'[185] This sense of liminality registers not only in the direct examination of whiteness, identity and art, but also in the other visual representations discussed earlier in this chapter. For example, the same concept underpins the depiction of a transparent (both there, and not there; visible and not visible) human figure used in the scene in *25th Hour* which focuses

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[180] Richard Dyer, *White* (London and New York: Routledge, 2007), 46-47.
[181] As Dyer comments, 'a sheet of white paper is blank' as opposed to being a block of solid colour.' ibid., 47.
[182] This is in contrast to Natalie M. Kalmus' suggestion that white 'emanates a luminosity that symbolizes spirit' Nathalie M. Kalmus, "Color Consciousness," in *Color: The Film Reader*, ed. Angela Dalle Vacche and Brian Prince (New York: Routledge, 2006), 27.
[183] Taubin, "Going Down," 14.
[184] Dyer, *White*, 39.
[185] Ibid., 39.

on the reflections of Slaughtery and Jacob in the glass window as opposed to their solid, 'real' figures.

The trauma aesthetic's use of the metaphor of the individual as blank or transparent to represent the tension between presence and absence is echoed in other responses to the trauma of 9/11 which focus on the image of the human body, specifically the face. Two notable examples are the many missing person posters which were displayed in the streets surrounding Ground Zero and their (re)presentation by artist Tatana Kellner in her installation *Requiem for 9/11*. Critical discussion of both the missing person poster's and Kellner's *Requiem* highlight the haunting quality of these visual responses to the trauma of 9/11. For example, Nancy K. Miller describes Kellner's silk screen printed organza as 'banners [that] float like the melancholy ghosts of the lost and the disappeared.'[186] Discussing the missing person's posters Kevin T. Jones et al., note Foss and Domenici's definition of haunting as 'an experience of a disembodied spirit.'[187] That the impact of these images seems predicated on an apparent detachment between the image of the body and the spiritual/psychological being that dwells in it prompts me to return to Wallace's discussion of representation as trauma cited above. Discussing the very same problem in relation to the image of the corpse - which the images of the missing person posters arguably stood in for in the absence of corpses – Wallace states: 'In death, [the] union between form and content … becomes undone, and in that sense, our body becomes pure image, our "content" having been lost at the moment of our demise … Pushed further, we see that the reverse is also true, that the image in its irreducible distance from animate materiality is itself cardaverous … incapable of the referent's resurrection.'[188] A blunt and powerful illustration of this traumatic detachment occurs in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* when Oskar chooses to refer to his dead father as 'inanimate.'[189] The consequence of this detachment is a profound sense of the emptiness of the

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[186]Nancy K. Miller, "Portraits of Grief: Telling Details and the New Genre of Testimony," in *Literature after 9/11*, ed. Ann Kenniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 31.
[187]Quoted in Kevin Jones, Kenneth Zagacki and Todd Lewis, "Communication, Liminality and Hope: The September 11th Missing Person Posters," *Communication Studies* 28, no. 1 (2007): 108.
[188] Wallace, "Trauma as Representation: A Meditation on Manet and Johns," 13.
[189] Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, 90.

image, a key theme within the trauma aesthetic; two particularly rich examples of which appear in *Falling Man* and *Man in the Dark*.

In talking of 'empty images' as a central component of the trauma aesthetic, I am not referring to the kind of 'banality of images' that Nicholas Mirzoeff identifies in the broadcast media coverage of the Iraq war. For Mirzoeff this banality of images is a result of media saturation and the increased awareness of 'the possibility of manipulating images by technical means and of the wide range of possible interpretations of any given image.'[190] Consequently, 'the very awareness of the input of the viewer in creating meaning has paradoxically weakened that response.'[191] Mirzoeff summarises his analysis with the declaration that 'there is no longer anything spectacular about this updated society of the spectacle.'[192] However, the iconic images of 9/11 do not function in this way, at least not in the context of the trauma aesthetic. The visual power of these images, evidenced in their capacity to vicariously traumatise, demonstrates a more active engagement of the witness than identified by Mirzoeff. Despite what I call their emptiness, the images from 9/11 do not form part of society's 'ambient media' that invites what Mirzoeff terms 'vernacular watching [which] takes place in the corner of one's eye.'[193]In contrast, the images are arresting and obtain much more attention than a mere sideways glance: There is no denying that the images of 9/11 served as a spectacular function as used in the broadcast media. This, then, is a different kind of emptiness, one that simultaneously draws the witness in and pushes them away. These images embody the emptiness that is at the heart of a trauma that cannot be fully known, understood, or memorialised, because it persistently denies the identification of experience and of the individual. To clarify, the images that are reproduced within the trauma aesthetic are not images emptied of meaning but images where meaning is emptiness.

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[190] Nicholas Mirzoeff, *Watching Babylon: The War in Iraq and Global Visual Culture* (London and Newyork: Routledge, 2005), 14.
[191] Ibid.
[192]Ibid., 67.
[193]Ibid., 30.

Falling Man takes its title from one of the most iconic images to emerge from the events of 9/11 and also refers to a performance artist who recreated the image in various locations around New York City in the months following the attacks. Laura Frost observes how this image in particular played a prominent role in the process of vicarious traumatisation on 9/11. Citing evidence gathered by Galea et al. Frost states: 'Psychological studies after 9/11 singled out witnessing falling people – live or on TV – as a major predictor of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD): this, of the many upsetting images of the day, had a lasting traumatic effect on some viewers.'[194] The power of this image is registered in DeLillo's novel, not only implicitly as the novel's thematic focus, but also explicitly in the description of Lianne's reaction to the image: 'this picture burned a hole in her mind and heart, dear God, here was a falling angel and his beauty was horrific.'[195]

What stands out here is the artistry of the image, its aesthetic beauty, a quality which is frequently discussed as problematic in the context of trauma representation.[196] There has been much critical debate around the ethics of representation in the memorialisation of 9/11 and the image of the Falling Man in particular has been labelled by many as in some way too graphic, but what precisely does this mean?[197] DeLillo explores this question of representation in *Falling Man* by examining the eponymous image in comparison to still life painting, a connection which is initially made when Lianne stands with her mother's lover Martin, gazing at a still life painting:

> The painting in question showed seven or eight objects, the taller ones set against a brushy slate background. The other items were huddled boxes and biscuit tins, grouped before a darker background. The full array, in unfixed perspective and mostly muted colours, carried an odd spare power.
>
> They looked together.

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[194] Laura Frost, "Still Life: 9/11's Falling Bodies," in *Literature after 9/11*, ed. Ann Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn (New York: Routledge, 2008), 180.

[195] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 222.

[196] I am thinking here of Theodor Adorno's much quoted statement that 'to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric.' Theodor Adorno, "Cultural Criticism and Society," in *Prisms* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1967), 34. This sentiment is directly echoed in Michael Rothberg's response to the attacks in the edited collection *Trauma at Home*. Michael Rothberg, ""There Is No Poetry in This": Writing, Trauma and Home," in *Trauma at Home*, ed. Judith Greenberg (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 147-57.

[197] For a discussion of the various reasons given for the censorship of the image of the Falling Man see David Friend, *Watching the World Change* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2006), 136-41.

Two of the taller items were dark and somber, with smoky marks and smudges, and one of them was partly concealed by a long-necked bottle. The bottle was a bottle, white. The two dark objects, too obscure to name, were the things that Martin was referring to,

"What do you see?" he said.

She saw what he saw. She saw the towers.[198]

The transformation of the still life painting into an image of the Twin Towers reveals three things. Firstly, the impact of the image and the way in which it haunted the American imagination in the aftermath of the attacks. Secondly, it directly aligns the spectacle of 9/11 with an artistic aesthetic and, building on this, it underscores the sense of absence and emptiness that characterises the image.

It can be deduced from references elsewhere in the novel that the painting Lianne and Martin are looking at is the work of modernist painter Giorgio Morandi. Discussing the modernist still life aesthetic, and with specific reference to Morandi's work specifically, art critic Norman Bryson observes that few objects are used in the modernist frame and 'those few possessions that are displayed are chosen to make the surrounding space vibrate with emptiness.'[199] Here, therefore, the emptiness of Morandi's art becomes an embodiment of both the literal emptiness of the city after the towers fell and the metaphorical emptiness that characterises the vicarious experience of that fall. Importantly, however, that emptiness, or absence, is only registered as such through the recognition of something which was, or should be in that void. This gives a haunting quality to the artistic representations described in *Falling* Man. Consider for example, Lianne's description of another Morandi painting when she first visits her mother's apartment soon after 9/11:

These were groupings of bottles, jugs, biscuit tins, that was all, but there was something in the brushstrokes that held a mystery she could not name, or in the irregular edges of vases and jars, some reconnoitre inwards, human and obscure, away from the very light

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[198]DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 49.
[199] Norman Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked: Four Essays on Still Life Painting* (London: Reaktion Books, 1990), 97-98.

and colour of the paintings. *Natura Morta*. The Italian term for still life seemed stronger than it had to be, somewhat ominous, even…[200]

This description highlights the way in which still life removes the objects being depicted from their quotidian and familiar contexts. Bryson is again useful in unpacking the affect of still life on the spectator and how it relates to the vicarious experience of 9/11. Discussing early Roman art Bryson states that one of the central functions of still life was to create 'the greatest possible contradiction between the way a thing seems and what it actually is. More precisely, there is a radical disappearance of substance under signs.'[201] It is through this process of disassociation that the abstract objects in the painting can he viewed as an image of the Twin Towers. We can see, therefore, how the motif of still life is used in *Falling Man* to deconstruct the arbitrariness of systems of representation so that objects and images no longer have fixed or stable meanings. Within the trauma aesthetic, this breakdown of the relationship between signifier and signified not only echoes the apparent meaninglessness which marked the events of 9/11 within American culture but also acknowledges the meaninglessness of experience and identity more generally.

The novel's broader commentary on the absence of meaning in the construction of self and the experience of that self within the world can be demonstrated through an examination of the image of the Falling Man as still life. Despite its human subject, this image has many of the same qualities of a still life and this has not gone unnoticed by other scholars examining the impact of 9/11 on American literature. Laura Frost, for example, takes the artistic term as the title for her discussion of the image, and it is re-mediations in various art forms, in which she begins to unravel why this image in particular became such a prominent, if controversial, icon of the trauma of 9/11. The novel invites this kind of analysis in its detailed description of the image which focuses on the composition of the towers within the frame – a concern which was also central to photographer Richard Drew's selection of the image.[202] However, in order to understand

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[200] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 12.

[201] Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, 48-49.

[202] Tom Junod quotes Drew as saying 'That picture just jumped off the screen because of its verticality and symmetry. It just had that look.' Junod, Tom, 'The Falling Man' in *The Observer* (7 September 2003), available at: http://www.guardian.co.uk/theobserver/2003/sep/07/featuresreview.review1, accessed: 4 March 2010.

precisely why the trauma aesthetic is so preoccupied with this image, and its affect, I suggest a more rigorous interrogation of this apparent connection between art theory and trauma theory is needed. It is my suggestion that the human figure itself is also rendered as a form of 'still life' in its photographic reproduction, and as such functions as a metaphor for the vicarious experience of trauma and the recognition of individual and collective vulnerability.

The first, and perhaps most important, aspect of the Falling Man image which enables it to function as still life is its anonymity. Karen Engle documents how journalist Peter Cheney was instructed by the editor of *The Globe and Mail* to investigate the identity of the iconic Falling Man captured in Drew's much reproduced photograph. Although the search led to a man named Jonathan Briley, there was no way to be certain of the Falling Man's identity without forensic evidence. Engle writes explains the consequence of this anonymity is that the human figure is reduced to 'nothing but the ephemera of an orange shirt, black high-tops, a white jacket and dark skin … All of this goes to show that, in the end, a photograph is no substitute for a body.'[203] In the same manner as still life 'human presence is not only expelled physically,' but so too are 'the values which human presence imposes on the world.'[204] As a result, the image becomes haunted by the spectre of unknown identity, it represents 'the world minus its narratives,' when 'to narrate is to name what is unique.'[205] This resistance, or even rejection, of narration is not only characteristic of the specific trauma of 9/11 but also the traumatic recognition of the fragility of one's own identity and sense of being-in-the-world more generally.

The link between the absence and emptiness that marks representation as trauma, and the crisis of individual and national identity is explicitly illustrated in *Man in the Dark* when August narrates the occasion when he watched, with his granddaughter and daughter, the brutal execution of Katya's ex-boyfriend Titus on the internet:

> When the head is finally severed from the body, the executioner lets the hatchet fall to the floor. The other man removes the hood from Titus's head, and then a third man takes

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[203] Karen Engle, *Seeing Ghosts: 9/11 and the Visual Imagination*, vol. McGill-Queen's University Press (Montreal and Kingston2009), 40.
[204] Bryson, *Looking at the Overlooked*, 60.
[205] ibid., 60.

> hold of Titus's long red hair and carries the head closer to the camera. Blood is dripping everywhere. Titus is no longer quite human. He has become the idea of a person, a person and not a person, a dead bleeding thing: *une nature morte.*[206]

Here we can clearly see that the mediation of trauma reduces life to a blank, empty image. The trauma aesthetic then (re)mediates this through the figure of the isolated, almost invisible male protagonist. The focus of the following section of this chapter is the way in which the trauma aesthetic builds on this sense of isolation by also developing a profound sense of disorientation and placelessness.

There's an Empty Space Where America Used to be.

In the introduction to *The Body and the City* Steve Pile illustrates the profound practical and emotional connections between individuals and their surroundings. He asserts that people use space 'to gain a sense of who they are' and 'their place in the world.'[207] Lakoff and Johnson identify a similar privileging of space in their discussion of orientational metaphors where they observe that 'most of our fundamental concepts are organised in terms of one or more spatialization metaphors.'[208] From their analysis we can see the importance of being able to position not only material objects but abstract thoughts and emotions in terms of physical opposition. This process not only gives meaning to the subject of the metaphor but the individual who is positioned at the centre point of a personal universe from which everything else is defined as in, out, up or down. Within the trauma aesthetic this sense of meaningful place and orientation is replaced by meaningless space and disorientation in an attempt to represent the liminal position of the vicarious witness who is simultaneously absent and present at the site of trauma.

Unlike traumas experienced directly, vicarious trauma does not have the location of a direct experience as the starting point for deciphering and making sense of the trauma. As Lakoff

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[206] Auster, *Man in the Dark*, 176.
[207] Steve Pile, *The Body and the City: Psychoanalysis, Space and Subjectivity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), 6.
[208] George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2003 (1980)), 17.

and Johnson highlight; 'spatialization metaphors are rooted in physical and cultural experience; they are not randomly assigned. A metaphor can serve as a vehicle for understanding a concept only by virtue of its experiential basis.'[209] Without the direct experience of the trauma itself, how does one begin to rearticulate it in terms of metaphor? The same problem of geographical distance and traumatic experience can be identified in the Eisenberg and Tajiri's films, mentioned above, that attempt to work through the transgenerational trauma of their parents' experience of the Holocaust.[210] Citing James Young, Wasserman highlights the 'gap in experience' that is the result of not having been at the site of trauma at the point when it occurred. Consequently, the process of resolving the secondary trauma involves a physical return to the site of trauma in order to bridge this gap in some way. Wasserman observes how both film makers locate 'the exact address of her mother's internment' and notes the way in which Tajiri 'shoots extensive footage of the site of the internment camp and the surrounding dessert landscape.'[211] This physical reorientation of the post-traumatic self, 'through this journey to a place she remembered but had never been, allows her to resolve the mystery of the fragment, the picture that was in her memory, but which she did not understand.'[212]

Although the broadcast media allowed for a spatial identification that enabled the process of vicarious traumatisation to take place (as detailed in chapter one), the process of vicarious witnessing simultaneously involved a kind of spatial detachment that is comparable to that identified in the secondary witnessing of Holocaust survivor's children. This spatial detachment is twofold. Firstly, there is a literal, physical distance between the witness and the trauma as the broadcast media allowed the events to be witnessed in real time from across the country. Like Eisenstein and Tajiri, vicarious witnesses of 9/11 may have little or no personal memory of the trauma site. Consequently, the image of Ground Zero becomes the central point of the trauma of 9/11 providing a concrete, physical space in order to make the trauma somehow

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[209] Ibid., 18.
[210] Wasserman writes that 'Eisenberg's and Tajiri's parents witnessed the evets that were the source for not only their own trauma, but also the subsequent trauma of their family members.'Wasserman, "Constructing the Image of Postmemory," 162.
[211] Ibid., 170.
[212] Ibid., 170.

more knowable and manageable (and real?). It is not insignificant that Washington, that day's other site of trauma, becomes all but erased from the cultural narrative of 9/11. As Marita Sturken has observed, Ground Zero became a sight of pilgrimage in the aftermath of the attacks. DIscussing the many improvised shrines that appeared around Lower Manhattan, Sturken writes: 'these shrines were places where people who were not in New York at the time of 9/11 felt that they could connect to the event and offer condolences by leaving objects coded with mourning.'[213] Sturken also goes on to note similar rituals that took place at the New York New York Casino in Las Vegas, where a spontaneous shrine was created in front of the Casino's mural of the New York Skyline demonstrating 'the need to connect to a space that signified New York, even in a highly constructed, kitsch way.'[214]

In addition to the examples offered by Sturken, it is interesting to note how vicarious witnesses attempted to bridge the spatial distance that characterised their experience by submitting tourist photos taken in New York before 9/11 to digital archives commemorating the attacks. Two of the biggest digital archives available online, thisisnewyork.org (an online version of an exhibition that toured the United States following 9/11) and 911digitalarchive.org, include a striking number of still photographs taken by people visiting the World Trade Center in the years before 9/11. Holiday photos featuring famous landmarks are not taken so much for an aesthetic purpose as to function as evidence that the person has visited a place; they declare 'I have been here.' As such they have the same function that Karen Engle attributes to souvenirs in that 'they gratify the nostalgic hunt for authenticity; they verify an experience.'[215] Therefore, the inclusion of such photographs in commemorative archives very forcefully signals the need to compensate for the physical distance of vicarious witnessing.

Within the trauma aesthetic, efforts to overcome the distance of witnessing 9/11 are invariably unsatisfactory. Rather than being loaded with meaning, touristic and ritualistic practices are represented as hollow and empty, only serving to reaffirm the loss and absence at the heart

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[213] Sturken, *Tourists of History*, 178.
[214] Ibid., 179.
[215] Engle, *Seeing Ghosts*, 67.

of the trauma. In *Falling Man* Keith returns to his apartment a day or two after the attacks and pauses at one of the barriers surrounding ground zero:

> He realized someone had joined him at the fence, a man in a dust mask who maintained a calculated silence designed to be broken.
>
> "Look at it," he said finally. "I say to myself I'm standing here. It's hard to believe, being here and seeing it."
>
> His words were muffled by the mask.
>
> … He took out his cell phone and entered a number.
>
> "I'm standing here," he said but has to repeat himself because the person he was talking to could not here him clearly.
>
> "I'm standing here," he said.[216]

In this passage the stranger's 'calculated silence' indicates a staged or insincere reverence for ground zero but the emptiness of his repeated declaration 'I'm standing here' is only fully revealed when Keith leaves his apartment a little while later and sounds out the statement for himself.

> He stood and looked and felt something so lonely he could touch it with his hand. At the window the intact page stirred in the breeze and he went over to see if it was readable. Instead he looked at the visible sliver of One Liberty Plaza and began to count the floors, losing interest about halfway up, thinking of something else.
>
> He looked in the refrigerator. Maybe he was thinking of the man who used to live here and he checked the bottles and cartons for a clue. The paper rustled at the window and he picked up the suitcase and walked out the door, locking it behind him. He went about fifteen paces into the corridor, away from the stairwell, and spoke in a voice slightly above a whisper.
>
> He said, "I'm standing here," and then, louder, "I'm standing here."
>
> In the movie version, someone would be in the building, an emotionally damaged woman or a homeless old man, and there would be dialogue and close-ups.[217]

I have quoted this passage at length for a number of reasons. It is interesting, for example, to note how DeLillo highlights the piece of paper fluttering against the window. When the towers collapsed thousands of sheets of paper filled the air and Sturken notes how items such as this

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[216] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 25.
[217] Ibid., 27.

'were transformed into historical objects and collectable items, materials conveying poignancy and loss.'[218] Here, however, Keith is quickly distracted from the piece of paper suggesting that he does not share or 'buy into' the same popular, commercialised response to 9/11. This feeling is reinforced when he suggests how his exit from the apartment would have been dramatised, and sentimentalised, in a film. In so doing, DeLillo reveals the comparative emptiness and banality of the experience. Even though Keith has a very definite physical connection to the site of the trauma there remains a sense of distance that is represented in the passage above by the intense feeling of loneliness and the detachment Keith feels from his apartment; despite being in his own home, it feels as if it belongs to somebody else.

Also noteworthy in this passage is the link that is made between Keith's profound disassociation and the cinematic convention of experience observed. In highlighting that no one is present to bear witness to his experience of loneliness and isolation Keith also registers his own failure to bear witness to the traumatic events that have unfolded in his life. Keith's disassociation from the scene of his apartment, and himself as the man who used to live there, mirrors the detached experience of the cinema spectator. This is then, in a sense, a re-articulation of the common claim that the experience of 9/11 was 'like a movie' but the focus here is shifted from the spectacular, visual qualities of the events to the distance that mediation imposes on the spectator. The same sense of detachment is echoed in the experiences of Lianne's Alzheimer's patients, one of whom describes the distressing occasion when he was unable to coordinate his hands to put on his watch: 'There it was, in my right hand. But the right hand could not seem to find its way to the left wrist. There was a spatial void, or a visual gap.'[219] Similarly, and specifically referencing the trauma of 9/11, Anna C comments: '…it's way too big, it's outside someplace, on the other side of the world. You can't get to these people or even see them in their pictures in the paper … with these people you can't even think of it. You don't know what to do. Because they're a million miles outside your life.'"[220] In these examples we can seen how the position of the

[218] Sturken, *Tourists of History*, 176.
[219] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 95.
[220] Ibid., 64.

vicarious witness, removed from the site of the trauma, is itself traumatic. This is particular to

vicarious witnessing as this kind of disassociation is generally employed by victims of trauma as a

defensive mechanism that places them in a position of safety and allows them to watch traumatic

events without experiencing psychological distress.[221]

The passage above also serves to illustrate how the trauma aesthetic typically focuses on

the second way in which the mediation and vicarious experience of 9/11 created a spatial

distance between the witness and the trauma: the rendering unfamiliar of familiar space. While

the convergence of images of destruction (usually reserved for distant landscapes) and familiar

landmarks allowed for spatial identification, they simultaneously (and paradoxically) made those

landmarks unfamiliar. Consistently within the trauma aesthetic, America is presented as if it were

a distant, or 'other' landscape, specifically one that is caught up in some kind of conflict or

devastation. For example, in *Falling Man*, just before Keith's encounter with the stranger at

ground zero cited above, New York is described as 'a city somewhere else, under permanent

siege.'[222] Similarly, in *Man in the Dark* August Brill imagines the city of Wellington in a war torn

America and in *The Road* Cormac McCarthy depicts a post apocalyptic landscape littered with only

the vague reminders of what America used to be. The films being examined here do not employ

the metaphor of unfamiliar or distant space so explicitly in their representation of the trauma of

9/11. The only example that presents itself is the use of the desert landscape of New Mexico in

The Valley of Elah which bears some visual similarities with the Iraqi landscape as seen in Mike

Deerfield's amateur footage.[223] This is perhaps, in part, a difference of media forms. A novelist can

choose to include or erase familiar landmarks whereas this is more difficult in film – without

considerable technical intervention - where the camera captures every detail of a location. Indeed

film's unavoidable inclusion of familiar backdrops became a problem within the industry in the

immediate aftermath of 9/11 as a number of films due to be released included scenes in which

the Twin Towers appeared. However, despite these difference and problems, I maintain, that the

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[221] For a concise summary of the functions of dissociation see van der Kolk, van der Hart, and Marmar, "Dissociation and Information Processing in Posttraumatic Stress Disorder," 306-08.
[222] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 25.
[223] It should be noted that this footage was actually filmed in Morocco.

trauma aesthetic is underpinned by a sense of a distant and unfamiliar environment that can be identified in the more subtle ways in which America, and the city in particular, are depicted.

Interestingly, Pile cites de Certeau's description of viewing New York from the Top of the World Trade Center. Drawing on de Certeau's discussion of the way in which cities are mapped and made readable Pile states: 'The City is a means of organising space into its proper place – it cuts up, parcels and names, houses, streets, neighbourhoods, blocks and so on.'[224] As discussed above, the inherent nature of a traumatic event is to break down these codes and patterns that allow an individual to orientate themselves in the world. For de Certeau the World Trade Center offered an omniscient bird's eye view that allowed a kind of spatial orientation that was/is not possible from the ground.[225] While I do not want to overstate the significance of de Certeau's coincidental reference to the World Trade Center, the ways in which the events of 9/11 and the trauma aesthetic map onto his description of the experience of New York City are too striking to overlook. When the towers fell they removed the possibility for that omniscient bird's eye view. The city became strange and it was widely articulated that there was a sense that everything had changed: a change which produced a sense of disorientation and vulnerability and severely disrupted the formation of individual and collective identities.

The trauma aesthetic sees the events of 9/11 as significantly disrupting this sense of familiarity, not by making the city seem entirely foreign and *un*familiar but by presenting the same, familiar world, changed in strange and sometimes imperceptible ways. Consider for example how Keith comments, as he walks around New York in the days following the attacks, 'the ordinariness so normally unnoticeable fell upon him oddly, with almost dreamlike effect.'[226] Similarly, in *The Road* the man returns to his childhood home and finds things oddly familiar but also horrifically changed: 'He pushed open the closet door half expecting to find his childhood

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[224] Pile, *The Body and the City*, 226.
[225] Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1998 (1984)), 92.
[226] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 51.

things. Raw cold daylight fell through from the roof. Gray as his heart.'[227] This uncanny recognition of the surrounding environment produces a state of intense vulnerability in these characters which is represented through the visual styles of these texts which function to disorient their central characters.

The opening pages of *Falling Man* provide an extended example of how the trauma aesthetic constructs a particular kind of uncanny cityscape which evokes the sense of vulnerability and disorientation felt in the wake of 9/11. The first paragraph reads:

> It was not a street anymore but a world, a time and space of falling ash and near night. He was walking north through rubble and mud and there were people running past holding towels to their faces and jackets over their heads. They had shoes in their hands, a woman with a shoe in each hand, running past him. They ran and fell, some of them, confused and ungainly, with debris coming down around them, and there were people taking shelter under cars.[228]

Immediately the novel establishes a sense of spatial disorientation. Space expands outwards from the contained familiarity of a street, as it is defined by Pile above, to an entire world that is somehow vacuous in its description as 'a time and space.' In addition, familiar objects appear in unfamiliar places or are used in unfamiliar ways - jackets on heads, shoes in hands – in a kind of bricolage of everyday life.

> The world was this as well, figures in windows a thousand feet up, dropping into free space, and the stink of fuel fire, and the steady rip of sirens in the air. The noise lay everywhere they ran, stratified sound collecting around them, and he walked away from it and into it at the same time.[229]

> In time he heard the sound of the second fall. He crossed Canal Street and began to see things, somehow differently. Things did not seem charged in the usual ways, the cobbled street, the cast-iron buildings. There was something critically missing from the things around him. They were unfinished, whatever that means. They were unseen, whatever that means, show windows, loading platforms, paint-sprayed walls. Maybe this is what things look like when there is no one here to see them.[230]

In this paragraph we can see most clearly the way in which the cartography of the city is altered by trauma; highlighting the arbitrary nature of the way in which cities are organised and made familiar in order to subvert them. Drawing again from de Certeau Pile states: 'The City organises

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[227] Cormac McCarthy, *The Road* (London: Picador, 2006), 26-27.
[228] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 3.
[229] Ibid., 4.
[230] Ibid., 5.

space not simply by naming – and thereby creating an identity which presumes an essence but has no essence in advance of being named – and also by citation … which, by reference to other spaces, gives an apparent shared meaning to space, as if everyone believed it.'[231] In the paragraph above this shared code/map is deconstructed as 'the cobbled street' has no name, and the buildings Keith sees have no addresses. This sense of place and location being arbitrary is continued in the novel as Keith and his family refer to the apartment building where Justin's friends live as 'Godzilla Apartments or simply the Godzilla.'[232] Here location and space is defined not in relation to cultural or shared codes, or indeed in spatial terms at all (i.e it is never given an exact address that positions it in relation to other New York landmarks). Instead this is a much more personal assignation of the meaning of a location, shared only between a select group of people and based on a code that is more intimate than the arbitrariness of a formal address or coordinates.

It cannot be overlooked that this particular use of the metaphor of disorientation signals an additional subtext regarding the relationship between language and national identity in the novel. The cinematic reference – *Godzilla* (1954) was a Japanese film about a monster that had evolved as a result of nuclear testing destroying the city of Tokyo and was remade in 1998 in an American version set in New York – is imbued with connotations of size, scale, and appearance signalling, if somewhat tangentially, the way in which New York is constructed within the cultural imagination through its cinematic image. This is described by James Saunders in the introduction to *Celluloid Skyline* as he makes the distinction between the 'real' and cinematic New York cities:

> For over a century, movies have been made about New York. Taken as a whole they offer more than just another genre: they have pieced together, in film after film, the lineaments of a single, coherent place … It is a "city" so dense in texture, so rich in association and memory and sense of place, that it forms an astonishing presence.[233]

That Keith and his family use the term 'Godzilla Apartments' to refer to a location in New York simultaneously undermines and reinforces language's ability to convey meaning and this, I argue,

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[231] Pile, *The Body and the City*, 226.
[232] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 71.
[233] James Saunders, *Celluloid Skylines: New York and the Movies* (London: Bloomsbury, 2001), 4.

is evidence of the tension between the notion of individual and collective traumatic experience which is a central concern of the trauma aesthetic which I explore in more detail in the next section. To continue analysing the trauma aesthetic's representation of geographical space I want to highlight how, in the passage above, Keith's perception of the city is framed as an absence.

Ann Kaplan is one of many critics and commentators to note that the removal of the Twin Towers from New York's skyline was a significant, indeed, in some interpretations primary, factor in the psychological impact of 9/11. She writes: 'Their visual absence was traumatic: That is it was impossible to comprehend that they were gone – that I could no longer find the towers in their place.'[234] Within the trauma aesthetic this sense of absence extends beyond the site of the Twin Towers and permeates the visual representation of the city as a whole. This is explicit in the passage above in the statement that the once familiar landmarks have 'something critically missing' and is also implicit in the suggestion that this is a world as it appears in the absence of people. A more extended example of this aspect of the trauma aesthetic can be identified in *25th Hour*.

The profound absence that characterises the post-9/11 New York skyline is clearly evident in Spike Lee's *25th Hour*. The film's opening credit sequence (which begins 4 minutes in) is a montage of shots examining the 'Tribute in Light' installation; a series of eighty-eight lights arranged next to Ground Zero that beamed two towers of blue light into the night sky, representing the lost towers. The sequence begins with a low angle shot of the lights themselves. The shot is held for nearly twenty seconds when the lights rotate and the sequence cuts to a shot from the centre of one of the 'towers' looking straight up into the beam of light. During this twenty second shot the light appears to rhythmically pulsate and change and the camera moves upwards giving a kind of kaleidoscope effect. The sequence then cuts back to a shot of the lights and captures dust swirling in the beams of light before cutting to increasingly wider angle shots showing the 'towers' against the city's skyline. The sequence is nearly three and a half minutes long in total and the stylised study of the memorial emphasises themes of loss and absence: The

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[234] Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*, 12.

shots of the beams against the skyline reveal the towers as translucent, ethereal, ghostly; the image of the dust swirling in the beams of light, and the repeated images of the 'towers' piercing the black expanse of the night sky suggest that the light only serve to illuminate emptiness and absence rather than replace or fill it. In addition, the sequence is accompanied by a mournful music score that begins with a lilting melody over a slow and steady bass line of plucked strings. As the sequence continues the music builds and a vocal accompaniment crescendos into a wailing variation of the melody using quarter tones that give the music a kind of Middle Eastern sound.

Despite the not entirely misplaced criticism that the 'Tribute in Light' montage received for its intense sentimentality,[235] the emphasis it places on the intense sense of loss and absence that pervaded post-9/11 New York sets the tone for a film in which the city is something already lost and always about to be lost. To borrow an eloquent phrase from *Falling Man*, the narrative of *25th Hour*, 'live[s] in the spirit of what is ever impending.'[236] Earlier in this chapter I outlined a similar commentary with regards the film's representation of masculinity and the connection between this and the film's depiction of the city is supported by interpretations of 9/11 as symbolic castration. However, unlike Amy Taubin I do not contend that 'it's the connection between Monty's personal fear of emasculation and the sense of emasculation that is at the centre of the post-9/11 malaise that makes *25th Hour* so haunting.'[237] Instead, I want to re-emphasise the qualities of immanence and loss that marks the film's use of cultural narratives of 'masculinity in crisis' in order to demonstrate how this is mirrored in the visual representation of the city.

As in many of Spike Lee's earlier films, *25th Hour* pays careful attention to the detail of its locations. In an interview with Lee for *Cineaste,* Paula Masood remarks on the cinematography's

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[235] For example, David Rooney's review of *25th Hour* in *Variety* notes how the 'full-bodied, brooding score contributes to an at times overly portentous, operatic feel.' David Rooney, "*25th Hour* (Review)," *Variety*, December 13 2002, n.pg. Peter Rainer describes the film's explicit reference to 9/11 as 'romanticism of a rather low order.' Peter Rainer, "*25th Hour* (Review)," *New York*, 6 January 2003, n. pg.
[236] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 212.
[237] Taubin, "Going Down," 15.

'remarkable texture that captures every detail of its setting'[238] and Patricia O'Neil states that the bold inclusion of Ground Zero is indicative of Lee's 'commitment to New York as a material place.'[239] However, there are subtle differences in Lee's specific depiction of a post-9/11 New York which sets it apart from his earlier work. Discussing Lee's 1989 film *Do the Right Thing* Saunders makes the suggests that, 'notwithstanding its simmering anger and apocalyptic conclusion, much of [the film] is a series of richly textured, often amusing vignettes, revealing a complex and community-sustaining street life.'[240] He makes a similar observation regarding *Crooklyn* (1994), citing a scene which depicts 'the simple joy of racing down the down the length of a city sidewalk.'[241] In contrast, the streets and parks of Manhattan in *25th Hour* are cold and lonely places almost completely devoid of any sense of community. Although, as O'Neil observes, the film makes use of non-actors and is 'populated with ordinary city folks' they are, in general, few and far between.[242] Furthermore, what O'Neil describes as the 'unassuming ease' with which the main characters navigate this population, I argue is a profound sense of detachment. Consider, for example, the sequence immediately following the Tribute in Light montage, which marks the beginning of the film's main narrative.

The sequence begins with a medium close up of Monty sitting, with his dog Doyle, on a bench overlooking the harbour. It appears to be a cold, grey morning and a single jogger goes past without taking any notice of Monty. The composition of the shot is strikingly linear as Monty sits on the bench nearest to the camera and a seemingly endless row of identical benches reaches off into an unfocused vanishing point, emphasising the extent of the space and its emptiness. After a brief exchange with a heroin addict, one of Monty's (now ex) customers we cut to Monty walking alone through a park, past a couple more joggers who pay no attention, and then alone down a street. Even some time later in the film, when Monty arrives at the night club for his 'farewell party' Naturelle comments how much younger the crowd queuing up is, signalling how their

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[238] Paula J. Massood, "The Quintessential New Yorker and Global Citizen: An Interview with Spike Lee," *Cineaste* 28, no. 3 (2003): 6.
[239] Patricia O'Neill, "Where Globalization and Localization Meet," *Cineaction* 64(2004): 2.
[240] Saunders, *Celluloid Skylines: New York and the Movies*, 179.
[241] Ibid., 181 n.26.
[242] O'Neill, "Where Globalization and Localization Meet," 4.

group is in some way set apart. This sense of detachment from the post-9/11 city populace is similarly registered in *Falling Man* when DeLillo describes Lianne's experience of attending a street parade: 'And, yes, she felt a separation, a distance. This crowd did not return to her a sense of belonging.'[243] Even the seemingly intense bonds between the main characters of *25th Hour* are fundamentally flawed: Monty suspects Naturelle of going to the police; he discovers his friend/colleague Kostya was the one who betrayed him; his father was an alcoholic and the reason Monty entered the drug trade in order to support his business after the death of his mother; even the three old friends 'have little in common except a reciprocal sense of loyalty mixed with guilt.'[244] In contrast to the broadcast media's coverage of 9/11 which emphasised the solidarity of New Yorkers and the unity of the Nation, the trauma aesthetic presents a fractured community in which individuals are always, in some way, lost.

The sense of immanence and loss that characterises the trauma aesthetic, as I have illustrated through the above analysis of *25th Hour*, is captured in Alison Young's description of the role of the image, particularly the image of the city post-9/11: 'After September 11th, all concrete is also smoke, all flesh is already dust. Whoever stands proudly in any photograph may yet vanish. Whatever has been built can be destroyed. The certainty of such possibility animates every image; ruination dwells in every building. Its immanence has become the condition of possibility at every glance.'[245] Another way of articulating this characteristic is a persistent sense of annihilation that has just occurred, is occurring and is about to occur. The verb to annihilate is glossed in the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

1. To reduce to nothing, blot out of existence.
2. To make null and void, cancel, abrogate; to treat as non existent.
3. To extinguish virtually.
4. To destroy the collective or organised existence of anything.[246]

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[243] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 182.
[244] Taubin, "Going Down," 14.
[245] Alison Young, *Judging the Image: Art, Value, Law* (London: Routledge, 2005), 123.
[246] ""Annihilate"," in *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* (1986), 74.

All of these definitions accurately describe the specific sense of emptiness that pervades the trauma aesthetic and this is demonstrated in the way in which the role and function of language is explored, particularly in texts such as *Falling Man* and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. I briefly highlighted how the description of 'Godzilla Towers' in *Falling Man* destabilised notions of individual and collective knowledge which, I argue, is an illustration of point four of the definition of annihilate offered above. The more extensive commentaries of the representation of trauma through language is the focus of the next, and final, section of this chapter.

Like Leaves that Fall into a River from a Tree

As the beginning of this chapter outlined, language and its (in)ability to refer accurately to a traumatic history has long been a central concern of trauma studies. Within the trauma aesthetic this concern gains renewed intensity in light of the mediated experience of 9/11 as texts attempt to manage the problems of representing an event which is already, in itself, a representation. As a result, the illusory nature of written and spoken language becomes a primary theme within the trauma aesthetic, most notably in the novels *Falling Man* and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. Juiliet Mitchell comments, in her insightful article 'Trauma, Recognition, and the Place of Language,' that the unfamiliarity created by language's inability to refer to the surrounding world is akin to 'that simple but extraordinary experience of childhood that the world is there without us.'[247] It is interesting to note, therefore, that both *Falling Man* and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* use the character of a child as the focus for their exploration of language and trauma.

In *Falling Man* this linguistic theme is explored through Keith's son Justin. The importance of Justin's immature uses of language and his child's perspective of the world around him can be identified in his interaction with his two friends who, troubled by the possibility of further attacks on the city, anxiously watch the skies with a pair of binoculars. When Keith reveals

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[247] Mitchell, "Trauma, Recognition and the Place of Language," 122.

to Lianne the motive behind their strange behaviour is a fear of a man named Bill Lawton, and explains:

> '"Robert thought, from television of school or somewhere, that he was hearing a certain name. Maybe he heard the name once, or misheard it, then imposed this version on future occasions. In other words, he never adjusted his original sense of what he was hearing."
>
> "What was he hearing?"
>
> "He was hearing Bill Lawton. They were saying bin Laden."[248]

Despite being a childish mistake, that is, in one way, comic, 'the myth of Bill Lawton,' like Manet's *Olympia*, mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, becomes a 'trauma of representation' as it ultimately denies the possibility of understanding, and accurately representing the (already mediated) trauma of 9/11. The label of 'Bill Lawton,' formulated in the imagination of children, is no more or less connected to a living human being than the label 'bin Laden' constructed in a cultural imagination through vivid and powerful media incarnations.

The same unsettling realisation of the arbitrariness of language registers in Lianne's worried response to her son's imagined version of 9/11 and echoes in other moments throughout the novel that also address the distance between signifier and signified. For example, quite early in the novel Keith acts out his ritual of correcting his name on his post before opening it 'because it wasn't him with the name misspelled.'[249] Sometime later in the novel, Lianne questions her mother about her lover Martin's true identity inferring that you do not truly know a person if you do not know their name. Her mother's response is: "Why do I have to know his name? He's Martin. What will I know about him if I know his name that I don't know now?"'[250] Significantly, this conversation between Lianne and her mother ends with Lianne mentioning her latest translation project about ancient, pictorial alphabets and is followed by a brief interruption of Lianne's narrative that recalls an incident between two of Keith's poker playing friends.

> Someone told Rumsey one night, it was Dockery the waggish adman, that everything in his life would be different, Rumsey's, if one letter in his name was different. An *a* for the

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[248] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 73.
[249] Ibid., 32.
[250] Ibid., 145.

u. Making him, effectively, Ramsey. It was the *u* the *rum*, that had shaped his life and mind. The way he walks and talks, his slouchings, his very size and shape, the slowness and thickness that pours off him, the way he puts his hand down his shirt to scratch an itch. This would all be different if he'd been born a Ramsey.

They sat waiting for R's reply, watching him linger in the aura of his defined state.[251]

In all three of these examples – the Bill Lawton/Bin Laden confusion, the mystery that lies behind Michael's false identity, and the suggestion that Rumsey's persona has been defined by a single letter in his name – language fractures the notion of a fixed identity and, therefore, performs a traumatic function.

In *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* the traumatic impact of 9/11's mediation is depicted through Oskar Schell's reaction to the telephone messages left by his father on the day of the attacks. After being sent home from school Oskar returns to his family's apartment to find several messages from his father on the answering machine. The messages reveal that Thomas is trapped in one of the Twin Towers and although he insists that everything is ok his messages get increasingly desperate. As Oskar sits listening to the messages the phone rings again but he finds himself unable to answer it, and he sits listening as his father leaves what will be his final message on the machine. Filled with guilt for not speaking to his father Oskar hides the answering machine in his closet and replaces it with an identical one but he continues to be haunted by his father's words. This sense of being haunted by a persistent repetition of spoken words brings to mind Judith Greenberg's discussion of the echo in relation to trauma narratives. Discussing the acoustical phenomenon of the echo Greenberg observes how the sound of an echo is disembodied from its original utterance and she writes:

> In this respect, the echo that *survives* between presence and non-presence or life and death can suggest the way in which a trauma may seem to lurk and linger invisibly in the air and uncontrollably posses its victim. When speaking of an echo, one considers *only* the returning sound, not the original. The trope of the echo can symbolize persistence of belated and fragmentary after-effects, returns, or reflections of an original – the original

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[251] Ibid., 150.

> utterance or the original traumatic moment(s)-even if that original remains inaccessible. PTSD might be described as being possessed by echoes.[252]

The framing of Oskar's father's messages as a traumatic echo in the novel can be identified by their qualities of belatedness, disembodiment and fragmentation that Greenberg outlines in the passage above. Firstly, the messages are clearly a belated return of the traumatic moment as Oskar periodically recalls them throughout his narrative. At one point in particular, after deciding to pursue his quest for a lock to fit a key he found amongst his father's belongings returns to the messages because he 'really needed to hear him.'[253] It is at this moment that the sense of disembodiment is most profoundly felt. Oskar retrieves the answering machine from its hiding place in his closet and as he plays the first message he describes the feeling of hearing his father's voice: 'Even though the volume was turned way down, so Dad's voice wouldn't wake Mom, he still filled the room, like how a light fills a room even when it's dim.'[254] Although Oskar hopes the message will provide him with a feeling of connection with his father, the disembodied voice, (re)mediated in fragmented form, only reaffirms the absence of his father.

The fragmentary quality of the message-echo can be identified in Oskar's own fragmented recollection of them – detailing parts of the messages at different points throughout the novel – and in the way, when put together, they form a fragmented narrative of his father's experience in the Twin Towers. However, this is perhaps more directly illustrated in Oskar's re-presentation of the messages. As a means of dealing with the horror contained in his father's last words, Oskar translates them into Morse code then translates them into items of jewellery: 'I used sky-blue beads for silence, maroon beads for breaks between letters, violet beads for breaks between words, and long and short pieces of string between the beads for long and short beeps.'[255] It would seem therefore, that Oskar's trauma can be modelled on the acoustic phenomenon of the Echo. It is also interesting note how Greenberg's discussion of Ovid's myth of Echo can be applied to the novel to more fully understand the role of language and mediation in the novel.

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[252] Judith Greenberg, "The Echo of Trauma and the Trauma of Echo," *American Imago* 55, no. 3 (1998): 325.
[253] Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, 69.
[254] Ibid., 69.
[255] Ibid., 35.

Drawing on the work of critic Clair Nouvet, Greenberg writes: 'Through Echo and Narcissus, Nouvet argues, Ovid links the (in)ability to speak (Echo), the (in)ability to hear one's own words as they echo back in different and unfamiliar form (Narcissus), and the (in)ability to "know the self."'[256] (336-337). Each of these conditions are represented in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*. Thomas Schell Snr. (Oskar's Grandfather) represents Echo as he suffers a form of traumatic aphonia after moving to the United States, gradually losing the ability to articulate words. He poetically describes this experience in the first chapter he narrates in the novel: 'the meaning of my thoughts started to float away from me, like leaves that fall from a tree into a river, I was the tree, the world was the river.'[257] Consequently, Thomas carries around a notebook in which he writes down the things he is unable to say. However, as he explains; 'It wasn't unusual for me to run out of blank pages before the end of the day, so should I have to say something to someone on the street or in the bakery or at the bus stop, the best I could do was flip back through the daybook and find the most fitting page to recycle…'[258] Although this is not a direct representation of Echo's relationship to language – unable to initiate speech she is only able to repeat the words of others that have just spoken – Thomas's reliance on previous, written utterances in order to communicate depicts the 'limitations of traumatic narratives' in a similar way:

> if someone asked me, "How are you Feeling?" it might be that my best response was to point at, "The regular, please," or perhaps, "And I wouldn't say no to something sweet," when my only friend, Mr Richter, suggested, "What if you tried to make a sculpture again? What's the worst thing that could happen?" I shuffled halfway into the filled book: "I'm not sure, but it's late."[259]

This passage clearly demonstrates how, like Echo, Thomas has no linguistic agency and his mode of communication precisely embodies the fragmented and deceptive qualities of testimony that Greenberg identifies in trope of Echo: 'the fact that as soon as word's are uttered they diffract and splinter into multiple and often unintended meanings.'[260]

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[256] Greenberg, "The Echo of Trauma and the Trauma of Echo," 336--37.
[257] Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, 16.
[258] Ibid., 28.
[259] Ibid., 28.
[260] Greenberg, "The Echo of Trauma and the Trauma of Echo," 337.

Narcissus's '(in)ability to hear one's own words' can be identified in the character of Mr

Black who, Oskar discovers, has spent many years living in total silence after turning off his

hearing aids. Again, I acknowledge that Mr Black is not a direct representation of Narcissus but

the silence he surrounds himself with similarly cuts him off from experience and knowledge. Like

Oskar's Grandfather, Mr Black attempts to catalogue his life experience with 'encylopedic

breadth,'[261] keeping an index card for every person he has met, written about or heard of with a

record of their name and a 'one-word biography.'[262]Again this highlights the limitations of

language and testimony and quite explicitly highlights the '(in)ability to "know the self"' as Oskar

questions the usefulness of reducing a person's life and identity to one word. This problem of

identity is also troublesome for Oskar who is himself an echo of his father and grandfather. He

becomes distressed when his mother and Grandmother make reference to their similarities, a

feeling he expresses in a conversation with his mother:

> "It doesn't make me feel good when you say that something I do reminds you of Dad."
> "Oh. I'm sorry. Do I do that a lot?" "You do it all the time." "I can see why that wouldn't
> make you feel good." "And Grandma always says that things I do remind her of Grandpa.
> It makes me feel weird, because they're gone. And it also makes me feel unspecial."[263]

What seems to trouble Oskar is that, as a fragmented and disembodied return of his father and

grandfather, he is unable to construct his own individual identity.

Through these similarities with Greenberg's reading of Ovid's Echo, we can see how

Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close personifies the problem of language within the trauma

aesthetic. Although not a faithful adaptation of the myth of Echo it is significant that the

similarities lie in the way in which the process of communication, or perhaps more accurately in

this context, mediation is revealed as problematic and, therefore, traumatic. Like Justin's

construction of the Bill Lawton myth, and the image of the Falling Man discussed earlier in this

chapter, the constant (and indeed ultimate) resistance of language to accurately signify identity,

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[261]Mitchum Heuhls, "Foer, Spiegelman, and 9/11's Timely Traumas," in *Literature after 9/11*, ed. Ann
Keniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn (New York: Routledge, 2008), 48.
[262] Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, 157.
[263] Ibid., 43.

history or experience in the novel is illustrative of the concept of 'representation as trauma' that defines the vicarious experience of 9/11.

While Greenberg identifies the trauma-of-echo trope as common within trauma narratives it seems particularly resonant within the context of 9/11. Firstly, the mediation that enabled the widespread vicarious experience of the events can itself be read as an echo; disembodied from the original event and reproduced in a fragmented form. Secondly, the post-traumatic culture that followed the attacks has been fed by the persistent echo of the images from that day. The resonance of the trauma of 9/11 is then more of a visual echo than an aural one but the principles of dissonance, fragmentation and persistence are the same. With this intense visuality in mind it should be noted that Greenberg's analysis is of exclusively literary texts, and it is a novel that I have used here as a detailed illustration of the trauma-of-echo trope. However, it should not be ignored that *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, like all the literary texts examined in this thesis, has a particularly visual, even filmic, quality. Indeed, the visual echo of 9/11 is explicitly and 'elliptically,' to use the term given in Laura Frost's analysis, illustrated through the novel's inclusion of photographic images throughout.[264] From this perspective it can be seen that the trope of trauma-of-echo is central, if sometimes latent, within the trauma aesthetic. It underpins the absence of the Twin Towers in the New York Skyline in *25th Hour*; it also captures the sense of a persistent, historic trauma that marks the construction of masculinity in both *25th Hour* and in *In the Valley of Elah* where male characters appear to travel down a road where destruction is always inevitable and always immanent; in *Falling Man*, Peter Drew's iconic 9/11 image is echoed in the performance artist with whom Lianne becomes obsessed. It is also important to note that the novel's title itself is an echo, and, in this sense, is self-referential as all texts dealing either directly or indirectly with the events of 9/11 are echoes in and of themselves.

To reemphasise the sense of emptiness and distance in the trauma aesthetic, with which this chapter began, I want to conclude by looking at the themes and metaphors identified throughout the chapter in relation to Cathy Caruth's discussion of trauma and language.

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[264] Frost, "Still Life: 9/11's Falling Bodies," 186.

Highlighting the work of Paul de Man, specifically his 1982 essay "The Resistance to Theory" Caruth pinpoints the problem of reference in the relationship that links 'the sciences of language (logic, rhetoric, and grammar) with the sciences of the world in general (arithmetic, geometry, astronomy and music).'[265] Caruth then identifies within de Man's work how 'the story of how the problem of reference became, in the history of thought, inextricably bound up with the fact of literal falling.'[266] In Caruth's interpretation of de Man Newton's discovery of gravity meant that a world, previously thought of as being governed by motion, was now a world of falling. A similar moment can be identified in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* when Oskar discovers Mr Black's bed. After carving the bed out of an enormous oak tree, Mr Black has hammered a nail into it every day since the death of his wife causing it to become a magnetic pole:

> It was only then that I observed that the key was reaching toward the bed. Because it was relatively heavy, the effect was small. The string pulled incredibly gently at the back of my neck, while the key floated just a tiny bit off my chest. I though about all the metal buried in Central Park. Was it being pulled, even just a little, to the bed?[267]

Although the force being described here is magnetism rather than gravity, Oskar's experience illustrates the same principal of 'an attractive force pulling [objects] toward each other.'[268] That Oskar is preoccupied with the notion of falling specifically can be seen in throughout the novel. For example, while riding a rollercoaster in Coney Island he wonders 'if what I was feeling was at all like falling.'[269] In addition, it are the images of the people falling from the Twin Towers which he singles out from the mediation of the events, searching them out on the internet.

Although Newton's theory could be accurately represented as a mathematical formula, language (that is, the term 'gravity') could only refer to a 'magical invisible entity that made no rational sense.'[270] Thus, the discovery of the law of gravity marked the moment in the history of philosophical thinking when language became unable to refer to the material world: 'In a world of

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[265] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 75.
[266] Ibid., 75.
[267] Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, 162.
[268] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 75.
[269] Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, 147.
[270] Ibid., 76.

falling, reference could not adequately describe the world.'[271] As this chapter has demonstrated, the emptiness and distance that characterises the trauma aesthetic is constructed, implicitly and explicitly, through a combination of images of falling - the fall of masculinity, the fall of the twin towers, and, the image of the Falling Man- and in its depiction of these images the trauma aesthetic embraces their spatial and cognitive distance. For these texts post-9/11 America is, very profoundly, a world of falling.

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[271] Ibid., 76.

3. A (Vicarious) Witness for History: The Mediation of Memory and the Past in the Trauma Aesthetic

"Nothing Will Ever be the Same" or "History Repeating"? 9/11's Complex Temporality

In addition to the overt gendering of trauma in the aftermath of 9/11, political and broadcast media discourses were marked by a preoccupation with history and temporality. Interestingly, to dissect this discourse and highlight its various strands is to recognise that the temporal framing of 9/11 was not only complex but often contradictory. These strands can be broadly categorised into two opposing arguments: 9/11 as a historical rupture and 9/11 as a repetition of history. The latter of these arguments was perhaps less forcefully or widely articulated but it played a significant role in the cultural narrativisation of 9/11 nonetheless.

In the aftermath of 9/11 there were two particular historical reference points repeatedly employed by the broadcast media, and within political rhetoric, to contextualise the events and endorse a particular kind of geo-political response: namely, World War II and the Cold War. The impulse to locate such points of historical comparison is evidence of what Janet defines as the process of translating fragmented, traumatic memory into coherent narrative memory. This is implicit in Elaine Tyler May's remark that 'those previous national crises provided precedents that allowed policy makers and citizens, consciously or not, to react to an unfamiliar situation in familiar ways.'[272] For May 'it was the Cold War that echoed most loudly across the post-9/11 landscape'[273] as provocative similarities were drawn in the fight against "evil" and terror. Emily Rosenberg posits the attack on Pearl Harbour in December 1941 was an equally powerful historical reference within post-9/11 discourse. She writes:

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[272] Elaine Tyler May, "Echoes of the Cold War: The Aftermath of September 11 at Home," in *September 11 in History: A Watershed Moment?*, ed. Mary L. Dudziak (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 52.
[273] Ibid., 42.

Although diverse narratives about Pearl Harbour had circulated among Americans since 1941, by the summer of 2001, memory-boom culture had become saturated as never before with books, videos, films, and recollections of the 1941 attack. "Infamy" provided a sign that was culturally legible to almost everyone. It invoked a familiar narrative about a sleeping nation, a treacherous attack, homeland casualties, the need to pull together to victory, and eventual triumph. It evoked the ethos- of the "greatest generation."[274]

That Pearl Harbour was able to function as 'a relatively uncomplicated and uncontested symbol (at least at first)'[275] signals that its evocation post-9/11 is more directly associated with ideological values and a sense of national nostalgia than the actualities of the event itself. This is supported by Rosenberg's observation that the rhetoric which had structured the narrative of Pearl Harbour, recycled by President George W. Bush in the wake of 9/11, was also the rhetorical style of the Western.[276] Faludi forcefully condemns the often crude and simplistic ways in which such examples of national nostalgia functioned in the aftermath of 9/11, and argues that they allowed the nation to 'cocoon[ing] itself in the celluloid chrysalis of the baby boom's childhood.'[277] This resulted, for Faludi, in the negation of any recognition of America's violent past that might suggest the need to accept some sort of culpability for 9/11. In section three of this chapter, 'Interrogating Nostalgia as Therapy', I will demonstrate how the trauma aesthetic quite deliberately seems to construct an alternative narrative framework for 9/11 and its aftermath.

Despite the powerful suggestion that 9/11 enabled Americans to revive a lost era of heroism, solidarity, and resolve, many citizens, politicians and media pundits continued to proclaim that 9/11 had created a historical rupture. As Mary L. Dudziak observes in the introduction to the edited collection *September 11 in History*, '[t]he idea that the world was transformed on September 11 was pervasive in popular culture.'[278] This is most explicitly and widely evidenced, in the much used expression "Nothing will ever be the same again," and its variants, that appeared repeatedly in commentary on the events. Indeed, the very suggestion of

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[274] Emily S. Rosenberg, *A Date Which Will Live: Pearl Harbour in American Memory* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 174-75.

[275] Ibid., 187.

[276] Ibid., 176.

[277] Faludi, *The Terror Dream*, 4.

[278] Mary L. Dudziak, ed. *September 11 in History: A Watershed Moment?* (Durham and London: Duke University Press,2003), 3.

a post-9/11 era implicitly constructs a notion of a pre-9/11 era, positioning September 11 as a transformative, landmark event in history.

Significantly, the proclamation of 9/11 as a historic rupture was accompanied by a profound erasure of pre-9/11 history. Mark Redfield discusses how this erasure functions through the terms used to describe the events themselves with particular reference to the name-dates "September 11" and "9/11." He writes:

> The formal minimalism of the name-date would be nugatory in its effects were it not for the name-date's endless repetition as a mantra in a consumer culture in which all other dates, times, places, acts, or meanings melt into air. Before or after September 11, 2001, very few US citizens could have been counted on to know what September 11 means in Chilean history: the naked phrase "September 11" rhetorically performs that ignorance, while the global hegemony of American media and culture imposes the sign of that erasure worldwide. And each time we now say "September 11," we repeat, however momentarily or provisionally, this act of effacement and presupposition.[279]

It is important to add to this analysis that the historic erasure that occurred in the rhetoric of 9/11 did not just efface foreign histories. On the contrary, the political and broadcast media narrative of the attacks did much to erase significant moments in, and periods of, America's own violent history; most notably its history of slavery and its role in the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagaskai in 1945. This later reference, or rather absence of reference, is particularly interesting when considering the rhetoric of 9/11 as the first use of the atomic bomb marked the moment when the term "ground zero" entered the popular lexicon. Therefore, as Amy Kaplan observes, its use to describe the site of the destroyed World Trade Center 'relies on a historical analogy that cannot be acknowledged because to do so would trouble the very binary oppositions and exceptionalist narratives erected on that ground.'[280] Here, I suggest, Kaplan begins to reveal the unifying crux of 9/11's complex temporality. Although the evocations of history discussed above seemingly conflict with a notion of a post-9/11 era that is definitively detached from history, the selective nature of those evocations and erasures indicate a common objective to construct/maintain a cultural narrative of American exceptionalism: history is employed within

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[279] Redfield, "Virtual Trauma: The Idiom of 9/11."
[280] Amy Kaplan, "Homeland Insecurities: Transformations of Language and Space," in *September 11 in History: A Watershed Moment?*, ed. Mary L. Dudziak (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2003), 57.

the cultural narrative of 9/11 to paint an uncomplicated picture of America as innocent victim, untainted by its identity as the perpetrator of violence and, simultaneously excused from any acknowledgement of culpability.

In contrast to the clearly defined, linear historical narratives used to frame 9/11 within the broadcast media, the trauma aesthetic displays an impulse to construct a more nuanced, multifarious historical context for the trauma of 9/11. A particularly rich example of this is Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* whose young protagonist is himself a figure constructed out of past (albeit fictional) narratives. As Michiko Kakutani usefully summarises in a review of the novel for the *New York Times,*

> Like J. D. Salinger's Holden Caulfield, Oskar wanders around New York City, lonely, alienated and on the verge, possibly, of an emotional breakdown. Like Günter Grass's Oskar Matzerath in "The Tin Drum," he plays a musical instrument (in his case, a tambourine) while commenting on the fearful state of the world around him. And like Saul Bellow's Herzog, he writes letters to people he doesn't know.[281]

Kakutani makes these observations critically, arguing that Oskar's overt inter-textuality is 'entirely synthetic' and thus somehow inauthentic. While I do not think this is entirely inaccurate I suggest that, rather than being a fault in the author's creativity, Oskar's likeness to his literary predecessors is illustrative of the persistence of history, particularly traumatic history, in post-9/11 America. This need to (re)consider the past in order to understand the present also informs the novel's overall structure which alternates between Oskar's post-9/11 narrative and the narrative of Oskar's Grandfather which recalls the traumatic experience of the bombing of Dresden in 1945 by the British and American Air Forces. The firestorm which lasted two days devastated the city, killing many civilians, and although the allied forces defended the raids as military action there has been much criticism as to the necessity of the attacks.[282] Although the novel never explicitly offers a political position on the justification of the bombings, by aligning this historical trauma with 9/11 it is similarly coded as an act of terrorism. As Francisco Collado-Rodriguez notes 'the two events, distant in time and presented fragmentarily by the two

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[281] Michiko Kakutani, "A Boy's Epic Quest, Borough by Borough," *The New York Times*, 22 March 2005, n. pag.
[282] For a summary see Richard Overy, "The Post-War Debate," in *Firestorm: The Bombing of Dresden 1945*, ed. Paul Addison and Jeremy A. Crang (London: Pimlico, 2006), 123-42.

traumatised narrators, coincide in many aspects,'[283] and he continues to observe in a footnote that the reference to Dresden was largely ignored by reviewers due to its controversial commentary on America's victim status post-9/11.

The novel further destabilises the exceptionalist narrative of 9/11 through a poignant reference to the bombing of Hiroshima. As part of a show-and-tell exercise at his school Oskar plays a tape of a Japanese woman, Tomoyasu, being interviewed about her experience of the day the atomic bomb was dropped on her city. Tomoyasu describes the horrific scenes of the dead and dying as she searched for her missing daughter, providing graphic detail of how she found her daughter on a river bank the next day, her wounds filled with maggots and her skin is melting away from her body. All she can do is vainly pick the maggots from the wounds and hold her until she dies nine hours later. Throughout the recording the interviewer presses Tomoyasu for details about the environmental effects of the explosion – the mushroom cloud, the black rain – more interested in this than her personal narrative of human suffering. Oskar similarly ignores the emotional aspect of the interview and is instead fascinated by scientific facts he has discovered about the blast, immune to the horror being described. The awkward comedy of Oskar's unaffected response to the interview is indicative of the kind of banal perspective from which historical traumas (particularly non-American traumas) are often viewed from an American perspective. The novel's intimate and graphic detail of the traumatic affects of Dresden and Hiroshima attempts to reinstate an affective perspective on these historical traumas and, interweaved with a post-9/11 narrative, refuses to isolate or prioritise the trauma of 9/11.

The need to recognise the potentially damaging effects of a singular, linear narrative of history is also a central theme of *Man in the Dark*. Like many of Auster's novels *Man in the Dark* is a self-reflexive exploration of the process of narration and the boundaries between 'reality' and fiction but this particular novel is considerably more politically minded. In a more complex rendition of the interweaving of historical narratives in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* Auster

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[283] Francisco Collado-Rodríguez, "Trauma, Ethics and Myth-Oriented Literary Tradition in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*," *Journal of English Studies* 5-6(2005): 58.

explores the potential for alternative and parallel histories. Like Foer's novel *Man in the Dark* alternates between two main narratives, August's autobiographical narrative and his "fictional" narrative. In August's fictional narration he imagines a world where 9/11 never happened but where the United States have been devastated by a second civil war. To simplify what is a particularly intricate plot, the protagonist of August's imagined war narrative, Owen Brick, wakes up at the bottom of a deep hole in an unfamiliar military uniform. On being rescued from the hole he is told that he has been selected to kill a man called August Brill who is writing the war in his head.

> There's no single reality, Corporal. There are many realities. There's no single world. There are many worlds, and they all run parallel to one another, worlds and anti-worlds, worlds and shadow-worlds, and each world is dreamed or imagined or written by someone in another world. Each world is the creation of a mind.[284]

Each world is, then, a narration and by this model it can be argued that post-9/11 America, and the War on Terror, is as much a narration as the Civil War of August's alternative America: As August's narration creates a civil war, the cultural narration of 9/11 created the War on Terror. This comparison is also evident when Owen returns to the 'real' America with Virginia (his high school sweetheart who reappears in the alternative America), who remarks: 'It's like stepping into a dream, isn't it? The same place, but entirely different. America without war.' To which Owen replies 'America's at war, all right. We're just not fighting it here. Not yet anyway.'[285] Through this complex layering of 'reality' and fiction, or perhaps more accurately put, the novel's acknowledgement of reality *as* fiction, Auster invites a critical interrogation of the dominant cultural narrative of 9/11 and its aftermath.

A similar model of history, which allows for multiple alternatives, is posited in *The Road* when the Man considers the relationship between his memories and historical fact: 'He thought each memory must do some violence to its origin. As in a party game. Say the word and pass it on. So be sparing. What you alter in the remembering has yet a reality, known or not.'[286] This

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[284] Auster, *Man in the Dark*, 69.
[285] Ibid., 111.
[286] Ibid., 139.

depiction of memory evokes a very personal sense of history that is no less 'real' because of its deviations from recorded historical fact. Indeed, as this chapter will go on to demonstrate, there seems to be something almost more truthful about this kind of memory that allows itself to be informed by the nuances of individual experience. Before exploring this in more detail, however, it is necessary to highlight how this nonlinear, multifarious and personal model of history and memory in the trauma aesthetic is accompanied by a less structured/ measured sense of time. For example, in *The Road* the man remarks that 'ever is a long time. But the boy knew what he knew. That ever is no time at all'[287]. Similarly, in *Falling Man* Keith expresses the temporality of the days following 9/11 stating: 'In these last few days we have lost a thousand years' and 'history measured in inches.'[288] The somewhat contradictory nature of these expressions of time and history seem to suggest a more flexible measure of time based on personal experience that manipulates, or even completely ignores, the arbitrary structures society imposes on time. This is perhaps best described as experiential time and its appearance within the trauma aesthetic is in stark contrast to the rigid depiction of time used in the cultural narration of 9/11.

The events of 9/11, as they were presented in the broadcast media, were very clearly modelled on a fixed idea of what Parks and Thrift term 'locational time;' a formation of time filtered through 'high-order social structures, most notably that of the clock.'[289] Coverage of the attacks meticulously reported the timings of the events from the first plane hitting the North Tower at 08:46 to its collapse at 10:28. Detailed timelines of the events are widely available on the internet, newspapers and magazines reproduced images with precise time stamps[290] and documentaries such as the *History Channel*'s *102 Minutes that Shook the World* are just some examples of the obsession with locational time in the narration of 9/11 that worked to contain and reduce to scale the trauma of the events. In contrast, as I suggested above, the trauma aesthetic models time on an experiential framework in which the experience of events and places

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[287] McCarthy, *The Road*, 28.
[288] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 44 and 46.
[289] Don Parkes and Thrift Nigel, "Putting Time in Its Place," in *Making Sense of Time*, ed. Tommy Carlstein, Don Parkes, and Nigel Thrift (London: Edward Arnold, 1978), 122.
[290] For example, *Newsweek* Extra edition, September 2001 in Sturken, *Tourists of History*, 170.

is filtered through the 'lower-order' social level of the mind and its individual attitudes and perceptions. This results in a much less clearly defined temporal pattern that does not adhere to a strict linear progression and, I argue, more effectively represents the traumatic impact of the event.

In *The Road* the malleability of experiential time is mirrored in the novel's narrative structure. Examining the intimate relationship between space, time and place Yi-Fu Tuan observes that 'biological time' (the organisation of our physiological processes) is quite rigorously measured and follows a clear, rhythmic pattern. The repetitions and recurrences of biological time are also, according to Tuan, a 'common measure of distance.' Tuan elaborates on this spatial dimension of physiological processes and writes:

> If the distance is short it can be given as so many paces. Walking is a rhythmic process the individual units of which can be added up. Giving distances as *x* paces is not an abstraction for the paces are intimately felt both as the pendulum-like swing of steps and as the sum of cumulative muscular efforts. Great distances are judged by rhythms in nature and particularly by the alterations of day and night.[291]

In *The Road* both biological and natural rhythms are severely disrupted as the man and boy continue their journey South: biological rhythms are disturbed by the scarcity of food, illness and extreme fatigue and natural rhythms all but disappear as days are almost as dark as nights and the seasons are only vaguely discernable by a change in temperature. The precise ways in which *The Road* uses its environment as an expression of time (or perhaps more accurately timelessness) is discussed in more detail in section two of this chapter. What I want to focus on at this point is a more detailed examination of time and place and how it relates specifically to the witnessing and memorialisation of trauma in the context of 9/11.

The notion of expanded or flexible time is commonly found in the theorising of traumatic experience. For Caruth, the moment of trauma itself 'is in fact a break in the mind's experience of time.'[292] Whether it is experienced as an apparent speeding up or slowing down of time it is nonetheless a disruption of time's rhythmic, linear progression. Furthermore, building on the

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[291] Yi-Fu Tuan, "Space, Time, Place: A Humanistic Frame," in *Making Sense of Time*, ed. Tommy Carlstein, Don Parkes and Nigel Thrift (London: Edward Arnold, 1978), 14.
[292] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 61.

work of Freud and Laplanche, Caruth asserts that the traumatic impact of an event is grounded in the belatedness of its realisation rather than in its occurrence as 'a pure quantity of stimulus.'[293]

Clarifying this understanding of trauma's temporality Caruth writes:

> It is not simply, that is, the lateral threatening of bodily life, but the fact that the threat is recognized as such by the mind *one moment too late*. The shock of the mind's relation to the threat of death is not the direct experience of the threat, but precisely the *missing* of this experience, that fact that, not being experienced *in time*, it has not yet been fully known.[294]

As a result the victim revisits the traumatic event through flashbacks and nightmares and, in so doing, continues to disrupt the linear progression of time by repeating the past as a loop. As discussed in the previous chapter, place often plays an important role within trauma fiction as it can allow the individual or collective victims to locate, contain, and retrospectively witness the lost moment of trauma described by Caruth. To summarise, place plays three key roles in the experience and transmission of trauma: It allows an individual to recapture the lost moment of traumatic experience; its materiality provides a physical connection that functions as an experiential link for victims that have no direct experience of the original trauma.; and the traumatic memory of place holds the potential to transcend temporal distance, allowing for the communication of trauma across generations.

In order to understand the relationship between traumatic memory, time and place in more detail it is useful to consider again Tuan's anthropological discussion of time in which he asserts that time is aligned with movement due to the fact that 'movement takes time and occurs in space.' It follows, therefore, that 'place is a break or pause in movement – the pause that allows a location to become a center of meaning with space organised around it.'[295] Although in making this claim, Tuan does not specifically refer to the formation of places of trauma, his terminology invites such a consideration; if both the construction of place, and the experience of trauma can be understood as a 'break' in the normal flow of experience then it seems to follow that the experience of trauma should become inextricably linked with the site of its occurrence.

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[293] Ibid., 62.
[294] Ibid., 62.original emphasis
[295] Tuan, "Space, Time, Place: A Humanistic Frame," 14.

The trauma of 9/11 and the assignation of Ground Zero as a place of cultural significance and the location of traumatic memory can certainly be read in this way. As Marita Sturken posits, 'it could be said that Ground Zero was created in the moment on September 11, 2001, when the World Trade Center collapsed, shockingly in a cloud of dust and debris.'[296] As people paused in the streets, or in front of their television screens, to witness the traumatic events, the space where the World Trade Center had stood became a place filled with cultural, political and personal meaning.

The intrinsic connection between trauma and place is further demonstrated through the highly ritualised practices that allow people to connect with traumatic events for which they were not physically present. It is perhaps for this reason, considering the majority of those traumatised by 9/11 experienced the events vicariously, that the site of Ground Zero became so central to the process of narrating and managing the cultural trauma. Indeed, in the aftermath of 9/11 the need to engage with the trauma site was particularly intense as people flocked to Ground Zero, posted holiday snaps of the World Trade Center in online archives and purchased souvenirs of the lost towers in an attempt to lay some kind of claim to the space of trauma and commit it to memory. However, as Sturken observes, the many layers of collective meaning that were being inscribed on the primary site of 9/11's trauma resulted in Ground Zero becoming 'more a concept than a place.'[297] Furthermore, the ways in which people engaged with Ground Zero as a site of mourning and memory remained intensely mediated. Even in the continuing aftermath of the attacks Ground Zero remained 'a space defined by and experienced through media technologies, a place constantly mediated through images, a place "visited" via websites and by tourists, a place filled with photographs that is itself relentlessly photographed.'[298] The profound need to bridge the experiential gap between the victim and the site of trauma has resulted in Ground Zero becoming a highly over determined place that perpetuates the vicarious experience of trauma rather than acknowledging and accounting for its specificity.

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[296] Sturken, *Tourists of History*, 167.
[297] Ibid., 168.
[298] Ibid., 168.

Although Ground Zero forcefully asserts the significance of place in the memorialisation of trauma, it simultaneously fails to effectively contain the memory of 9/11 as a vicariously experienced trauma. I argue that this is, in part, a result of Ground Zero's status as an intensely urban and highly commercialised space. An early assertion of the city as ineffective site of memory is made by Freud in *Civilization and its Discontents*. After previously using ancient Rome as an architectural metaphor for memory he revises this analogy and states that, because 'demolition and replacement of buildings occur in the course of the most peaceful development of a city,' it is 'unsuited to a comparison of this sort with a mental organism [memory].'[299]

Where Freud focuses on individual memory and the city as a metaphorical representation of that memory, Andreas Huyssen examines the relationship between physical urban space and cultural memory. Through a variety of detailed case studies, including New York City, Huyssen implicitly draws on Freud's later theory of memory to suggest that cities function as palimpsests on which history is constantly written and erased. Completed in the months following 9/11 Huyssen concludes his book with a coda on the potential for 9/11 to be effectively memorialised within the cityscape. Noting the apparent immediacy of the need to redevelop the World Trade Center site and the ensuing debates over how this should be carried out he comments: 'The issue here is not the imaginative ability or inability of artists, architects and designers, but rather the objective problems of representing and memorialising traumatic events in built space.'[300] The problem of creating an appropriate and lasting memorial to 9/11 within New York City is also addressed by David Simpson and Ann Kaplan providing significant evidence to the legitimacy of Freud's theory.[301]

An alternative argument is raised by Karen Engle who examines the memorial function of postcards of the New York City skyline in the aftermath of 9/11. Observing the proliferation of

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[299] Sigmund Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, trans. James Strachey (London and New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1961), 19.
[300] Andreas Huyssen, *Present Pasts: Urban Palimpsests and the Politics of Memory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2003), 159.
[301] Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*, 136-47; David Simpson, *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2006), 55-86.

these and other images of the World Trade Center before its collapse on September 11 she

questions whether the Twin Towers have vanished from urban memory or whether they still

haunt the cityscape. Engle does not offer a definitive answer to this question but goes so far as to

'wonder at Freud's denial; memory seems as entangled with destruction as it is with building.'[302] I

agree, that there is potential for destruction to form a part of urban memory but I argue that it is

limited and the ways in which it is achieved are inherently problematic within the context of 9/11.

Firstly, it cannot be ignored that an individual's status as a local within a city is bound up with

their intimate experience of the city's constantly changing topography. However, this intensely

localised memorialisation of destruction in collective memory is not trans-historical in the way

that an event such as the trauma of 9/11 seems to demand: it is available to only a select group of

people and is maintained only as long as those people survive. Moreover, this particular kind of

urban memory requires a direct experience of place that is unavailable to the vicarious witness of

9/11. Finally, although the memorialisation of destruction is evident in a variety of responses to

9/11—particularly commercial gestures of commemoration in the form of World Trade Center

souvenirs, but also in other examples including the forensic analysis of the debris at Ground Zero

and the meticulous preservation of the 'Ground Zero landscape' as archive—I argue that these

prosthetic acts of memory actually underscore the problem of the city as a site of trauma and

memory rather than contest it.

The archival, forensic approach to the management of 9/11 is, I argue, an example of

what Pierre Nora has termed *lieux d'histoire*. This concept is concisely outlined by Whitehead who

writes '[m]emory is replaced by the assiduous collection of remains, testimonies, documents,

images – an endlessly proliferating construction of archives.'[303] This is in contrast to a more

individually driven construction of memory based on psychological responses and emotions. It is

for this reason that I suggest the trauma aesthetic moves away from the archival city and draws

on natural imagery in its representation of history and memory. The following section of this

chapter will examine the ways in which natural imagery is used within the trauma aesthetic as a

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[302] Engle, *Seeing Ghosts*, 59.
[303] Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, 51.

metaphor for the vicarious experience of 9/11 and the profundity of the sense of loss it created. Leading on from this analysis a section titled 'The Nature of Shared Memory' continues the focus on the uses of natural imagery in the trauma aesthetic, identifying the ways in which non-urban environments are used to construct a space in which the collective memory of traumatic experience can be shared while also allowing for the nuances of individual responses, with particular focus on the use of coastal scenes in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* and *The Road*.

Wilderness and the Zero Degree of History

Although, as I have outlined above, the cityscape by itself does not perform the kind of collective, trans-historical memory work required in the management of a trauma such as 9/11, this does not necessarily account for a turn towards natural imagery in the representation of a trauma which was (and continues to be) so intensely urban. In order to elicit the aesthetic potential of landscape as a lens through which to view the trauma of 9/11, I draw attention to an image taken at Ground Zero that features a young tree in silhouette against the ruins of the World Trade Center (Figure 4). I do not want to overstate the significance of this particular image within the mediation of 9/11; this photograph was not an iconic image from the events and is not representative of a trend in Ground Zero photography. However, it is this status as a virtually unknown image that I suggest allows it to function as an aesthetic alternative to the iconic images of 9/11 that, through their widespread circulation developed an obsessive and over-determined sense of urban place. The Ground Zero image is comparable to what British artist Paul Nash terms 'invisible landscapes.' Defining this term in a short piece for *Country Life*, Nash writes:

Figure 4. Discovering wilderness at Ground Zero

> The landscapes I have in mind are not part of the unseen world in a psychic sense, nor are the part of the unconscious. They belong to the world that lies, visibly, about us. They are unseen merely because they are not perceived; only in that way can they be regarded as invisible.[304]

For Nash such scenes hold the potential for representation beyond mere documentary as 'they have another character, and this is neither moral or sentimental nor literary, but rather something – for want of a better word, which may not exist – poetical.'[305] Nash's suggestion that natural landscapes can be used as a metaphorical language to articulate abstract ideas and feelings that cannot accurately be put into words echoes the language of testimony discussed in the previous chapter. The potential for natural landscape to represent trauma became central to Nash's paintings while employed as official war artist during the First and Second World Wars. As Simon Grant comments in his detailed examination of this particular stage in Nash's Career; 'Landscape became the emotional filter through which Nash mediated the devastating effects of war.'[306] In a letter to his wife in February 1917 Nash explicitly equates his use of landscape as a form of testimony:

> I am no longer an artist interested and curious. I am a messenger who will bring back word from the men who are fighting to those who want the war to go on forever. Feeble,

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[304] Paul Nash, "Unseen Landscapes," in *Paul Nash: Writings on Art*, ed. Andrew Causey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000 (1938)), 144.
[305] Ibid., 144.
[306] Simon Grant, "Paul Nash: War Artist, Landscape Painter," in *Paul Nash: Modern Artist, Ancient Landscape*, ed. Jemima Montagu (London: Tate Publishing, 2003), 39.

inarticulate, will be my message, but it will have a bitter truth, and may it burn their lousy souls.[307]

Interestingly, trees played an important role in many of Nash's paintings including *Broken Trees* (1917), *Desolate Landscape* (1917) and *Wire* (1918-19) and it is this particular image that appears in the Ground Zero photograph above and that, I argue, elucidates the resonance of natural imagery within the urban trauma site of 9/11.

In order to fully understand the significance of the tree at Ground Zero, and other uses of natural imagery within the trauma aesthetic, it is useful to compare the image to Tom Thomson's painting *The Jack Pine* (1917)(Figure 5). The key similarity between the Ground Zero photograph and Thomson's oil painting is the visual focus on a solitary tree in the foreground of each image. Discussing Thomson's work Jonathan Bordo argues that the solitary tree in Western art is illustrative of the central paradox of representing wilderness: '*The* wilderness as enunciated from Tom Thomson's *The Jack Pine* is a condition that in principle denies access to the presence of a Subject. It both denies the speculation and invites testimony to this situation or condition.'[308] Bordo goes on to discuss how this paradox of witnessing is negotiated in the image through the solitary tree. He posits '[t]he crossing of the threshold from the witnessed to unwitnessed is marked by the erasure of the figural traces of human presence from the contents of the representation and the substitution of that witness figure, for example, by the non-human figure of a solitary tree. The solitary tree is a stand in for the specular witness.'[309] Through its compositional and aesthetic likeness to *The Jack Pine*, the Ground Zero image evokes a similar condition of human absence in the trauma site of 9/11. Unlike the urban memory work which undertakes a forensic approach in the obsessive reconstruction of the human body, the evocation of wilderness in this image suggests the absence of human remains that marked the traumatic impact of the attacks. Furthermore, the profound erasure of the human subject that frames Ground Zero as a burial site was also contributed to by the fencing off of the site and the denial of

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[307] Cited in Leonard Robinson, *Paul Nash 'Winter Sea': The Development of an Image* (York: William Sessions, 1997), 28.

[308] Jonathan Bordo, "Picture and Witness at the Site of the Wilderness," *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 2 (2000): 229, original emphasis.

[309] Ibid., 231-32.

access to those not involved in the rescue operation and, by the absence of the vicarious witness who only had mediated access to the site. Where the order of the city allows the witness to firmly position themselves in relation to the trauma, the natural imagery of the wilderness creates a liminal space that continually destabilises the position of the witness.
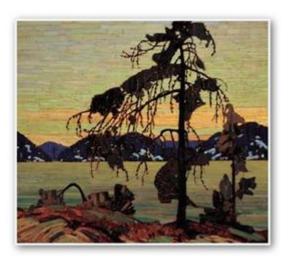

Figure 5. Tom Thomson's The Jack Pine (1917)

The imagery of the wilderness then, can be understood as offering a commentary on the experience of the vicarious witness who is at once present (witnessing the events in real time) and absent (physically removed from the site). This is a central reason, I argue, that the imagery of the wilderness is employed within the trauma aesthetic. However, where the landscape art discussed by Bordo 'exalts a picture that testifies to an unpicturable condition – the wilderness sublime'[310], the 'unpicturable condition' of the trauma aesthetic is trauma itself, for which wilderness is a useful metaphor. An explicit example of how wilderness is employed within the trauma aesthetic to represent the experience of the vicarious witness can be identified in Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*. The following short passage in particular evinces the liminal condition of the vicarious witness through the depiction of wilderness:

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[310] Ibid., 227.

He walked out into the gray light and stood and he saw for a brief moment the absolute truth of the world. The cold relentless circling of the intestate earth. Darkness implacable. The blind dogs of the sun in their running. The crushing black vacuum of the universe. And somewhere two hunted animals trembling like ground-foxes in their cover. Borrowed time and borrowed world and borrowed eyes with which to sorrow it.[311]

The tension between the presence and the absence of the witness is created here as the man is both the subject and the viewer of the image: he stands before the image but also within it as one of the 'two hunted animals,' a metaphor which further evokes the sense of wilderness as a 'sign to threaten the extinction of the very human sign.'[312]

It is worth noting at this point that the structure of the novel, discussed briefly above in terms of its fluid, non-linear representation of the passing of time, also contributes to a sense of the destabilised position of the witness that persists throughout the novel. Kenneth Lincoln describes the novel as arranged into 'pointillist paragraphs,' referencing a style of impressionist painting which uses individual dots of colour to build a complete image.[313] This summary of the novel's construction suggests that the individual descriptions of the landscape can be understood as snapshots of framed images. In this way the novel presents the landscape as image and in so doing suggest the 'controlled viewing conditions of a gallery [which] offer a defence against the horror evinced by [traumatic] images.'[314] This can be interpreted as an acknowledgement within the novel of the process of mediation involved in vicarious witnessing and thus can be seen to open up a space in which the specificity of this process can be more effectively represented and reflected upon. The problem of bearing witness to a vicariously experienced trauma is also evoked through the detailed natural images that saturate the descriptions of landscape including the passage cited above. By drawing on the aesthetic of wilderness, *The Road* creates a sense of timelessness that mirrors the mediated experience of 9/11 that was continually replayed, marking what some scholars have called the 'the installation of a new time marked by a boundless

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[311] McCarthy, *The Road*, 138.

[312] Bordo, "Picture and Witness at the Site of the Wilderness," 227.

[313] Kenneth Lincoln, *Cormac Mccarthy: American Canticles* (New York and Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 165.

[314] Jill Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford University Press, 2005), 64.

present.'[315] The natural imagery of the wilderness is useful in this construction of timelessness for, as Bordo asserts, 'the wilderness is that state or condition that obliterates history by initiating history from that very moment as enshrined in visual testament.'[316] Bordo terms this erasure of time in the wilderness the 'zero degree of history' and I argue that this quality of the wilderness is used within the trauma aesthetic to represent the unique temporality of trauma which falls outside the rhythms and duration of everyday experience.

The reference to the rotation of the earth at the beginning of the passage introduces a model of astrological time that is continued in the references to the sun and the stars. Tuan posits that astrological time uses the reference points of the sun and the stars to map out a 'cosmic space that ... provides a structured world' in which communities are able to organise their existence. This model of time relies on the cyclical repetition of the movement of the sun and earth in the passing of day and night and the rotation of the seasons. In *The Road* however, astrological time is presented as all but destroyed. For example, 'the cold relentless circling of the intestate earth' suggests that the progression of the seasons that symbolises vitality and regeneration has been replaced by death and destruction. This is elaborated by the anthropomorphic adjective 'intestate' which suggests the earth has died without bequeathing anything of its pre-apocalyptic existence for its survivors to nurture and revive. This construction of the landscape as a spatial representation of the impossibility of life and rejuvenation is supported in other moments in the novel where the landscape is described as 'barren' and 'desolate' which are defined, respectively in the *OED* as 'unproductive' and 'destitute of inhabitants.'[317] We can begin to see, therefore, that by disrupting the markers of astrological time, *The Road* constructs a perpetual traumatic present in its depiction of landscape which denies a clearly defined past to which trauma can be consigned and offers no hope of a future in which trauma can be resolved.

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[315] Harry Harootunian, "Remembering the Historical Present," *Critical Inquiry* 33(2007): 471.
[316] Bordo, "Picture and Witness at the Site of the Wilderness," 231.
[317] "Barren" Def. 4. and "Desolate" Def. 3. ""Annihilate"."

The inability to construct a clear, linear narrative of history can, by extension, be understood as an inability to bear witness to trauma. As Dori Laub comments, in order to assimilate traumatic experience into a coherent narrative 'historical reality has to be reconstructed and reaffirmed.'[318] Therefore, by rejecting historical reality, the trauma aesthetic denies the process of bearing witness. This is demonstrated further in *The Road* through the use of natural imagery to represent the difficulty of seeing. Tim Edwards examines what he terms the recurrence of 'ocular motifs' throughout the novel, and suggests that they illustrate the extreme, and almost painful, difficulty of bearing witness.[319] In the passage cited above darkness is described as 'implacable,' coding it as an entity which cannot be defeated or reduced. A further sense of threat and physical oppression is attributed to the darkness of the novel's landscape when it is described as 'a crushing black vacuum.' The persistent denial of the ability to see throughout the novel is significant for, as Shoshana Felman asserts; 'in the legal, philosophical and epistemological tradition of the Western world, witnessing is based on, and is formally defined by, first-hand seeing.'[320] This is particularly resonant in the context of 9/11 where the intense process of mediation directly aligned 'seeing' with 'witnessing.' However, the mediated seeing of the vicarious witness does not incorporate the direct experience associated with the "eye-witness" and is, in this sense, a failure to bear witness. For this reason, I argue the emphasis in *The Road* on the descriptions of darkness and the difficulty of seeing paradoxically bears witness to the trauma of *not* seeing.

There are many interesting examples of darkness and not seeing as a metaphor for vicarious witnessing in the novel but I draw attention to one particular passage that demonstrates the trope in some detail. In addition, the following passage is illustrative of how the trope

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[318] Dori Laub, "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching," in *Testimony*, ed. Shoshana and Dori Laub Felman (New York: Routledge, 1992), 69.

[319] Tim Edwards, "The End of the Road: Pastoralism and the Post-Apocalyptic Waste Land of Cormac Mccarthy's *the Road*," *The Cormac McCarthy Journal* 2(2008), http://journals.tdl.org/cormacmccarthy/article/viewFile/710/484#page=55.

[320] Shoshana Felman, "The Return of the Voice: Claude Lanzmann's *Shoah*," in *Testimony*, ed. Shoshana and Dori Laub Felman (New York: Routledge, 1992), 207.

functions in relation to the novel's overarching themes of timelessness and wilderness outlined above:

> The blackness he woke to on those nights was sightless and impenetrable. A blackness to hurt your ears with listening. Often he had to get up. No sound but the wind in the bare and blackened trees. He rose and stood tottering in that cold autistic dark with his arms outheld for balance while the vestibular calculations in his skull cranked out their reckonings. An old chronicle. To seek out the upright. No fall but preceded by a declination. He took great marching steps into nothingness, counting them against his return. Eyes closed, arms oaring. Upright to what? Something nameless in the night, lode or matrix. To which he and the stars were common satellite. Like the great pendulum in its rotunda scribing through the long day movements of the universe of which you may say it knows nothing and yet know it must.[321]

Here McCarthy expands on the depiction of darkness noted in the previous cited passage, depicting it as a material entity that assaults all the senses. The oppressive nature and the absolute completeness of the darkness that falls in the landscape of *The Road* can be understood as a representation of the disorientation and the profound sense of loss that marks the experience of trauma. Although most readers would be able to relate to the fear associated with being lost in the dark, to fully understand the significance of such imagery (which occurs a number of times in the novel), and how it relates to the novel's construction of timelessness, it is useful to turn again to Tuan's discussion of the experience of time. Discussing the ways in which Western thought models life as a linear progression symbolised by the measures of astrological time Tuan observes that 'Human time, like the human body, is asymmetrical: one's back is to the past and ahead lies the future. Living is a perpetual stepping forward into the light and an abandonment of what is behind's one's back, cannot be seen, is dark and is in one's past.'[322] The intense disorientation of the darkness that falls in the landscape of *The Road*, creates a sense of formless time and boundless space which, like Kant's concept of the Sublime, 'breaks down ... the very notion that behind the field of phenomena, lies some positive, substantial Thing.'[323]

The evocation of the concept of the Sublime, which incidentally has a historical association with the grandeur and scale of the American landscape, is particularly poignant within

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[321] McCarthy, *The Road*, 14.
[322] Tuan, "Space, Time, Place: A Humanistic Frame," 9.
[323] Slavoj Žižek, *Tarrying with the Negative: Kant, Hegel, and the Critique of Ideology* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993), 38.

the context of giving testimony to trauma as it reveals the limitations of witnessing and representation. This is further emphasised in the passage above through the reference to Foucault's pendulum ('Like the great pendulum in its rotunda scribing through the long day movements of the universe of which you may say it knows nothing and yet know it must'). Žižek notes as an aside in *Tarrying With the Negative* that Foucault's Pendulum, which swings across a vertical plain in a demonstration of the earth's rotation is an embodiment of the logic of the Kantian Sublime. He explains;

> Its spectacular effect is not due solely to the fact that it literally makes us lose our footing (since ground itself, the phenomenological foundation and stable measure of our experience of movement, proves to be shifting); what is even more awesome is that *it implies a third imaginary point of absolute immobility*. The sublime point of absolute rest produced by way of the self-reference of movement, i.e., the point with reference to which both the pendulum and the earth surface are moving.[324]

In *The Road* this 'sublime point,' evoked through the astrological and natural imagery of the novel's landscape, equates to trauma itself in that it cannot be accurately represented and continually displaces the position of the witness. Like the motion of falling, discussed in chapter two, the perpetual movement of the dark Earth within a boundless universe, provides a metaphor for the limits of the representation, and thus the testimony, of trauma. Furthermore, the revelation that the sublime point is paradoxically a powerful position within the universe and simultaneously a 'perspective illusion'[325] mirrors the profound sense of absence that characterises traumatic experience, and echoes throughout the landscape of the novel.

In contrast to the memory work associated with the city – in the context of 9/11 at least – the landscapes of the trauma aesthetic more readily allow for the representation of the sense of absence and loss that characterises trauma. The potential for landscape to annihilate the political, geographical, cultural and historical contexts which can – for want of a better word – clutter the city as a site of traumatic memory is central to the Holocaust photography of Mikael Levin and Dirk Reinartz. Discussing their work Ulrich Baer writes:

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[324] Ibid., fn 46, 245, original emphasis.
[325] Ibid., Ibid.

> Through the photographs, we enter into sites out of which only death was supposed to lead; we are confronted with spaces designed to destroy all memory of those who were brought there. The deliberate destruction of evidence that would reveal these sites' significance constitutes the event's historical truth and limits the possibility of its telling. For the *nothing* to be "translated" into sight, it must be shown as *nothing*, rather than as the absence of something we could know.[326]

While I do not want to suggest that the trauma of 9/11 is directly comparable to that of the Holocaust, or that Ground Zero can be interpreted in the same way as the sites of concentration camps, it is useful to consider how the traumatic significance of Ground Zero also lay in its 'disclosure of nothing,' particularly with regards to human remains. As Patricia Yaeger comments; 'In the cacophony of 9/11, the bodies that allow us to mourn have vanished, or merged with polluted air, or simply turned into construction debris.'[327]

The sense of timelessness that characterises the natural imagery of *The Road* is mirrored by a profound sense of absence and emptiness in the landscape of the novel. Because time holds no governance in any measured, linear sense clearly defined place is transformed into ambiguous space. This is achieved in the novel, as Chris Walsh remarks, through 'the sheer absence or lack of materiality' in the text, 'where all signifiers of previous order, place and supposed security lack any kind of signifying purpose.'[328] This placelessness allows the landscape of the novel to reveal the arbitrary quality of language and, thus, its ineffectiveness as a mode of representation. Consider, for example, the following passage from *The Road*:

> He'd had this feeling before, beyond the numbness and the dull despair. The world shrinking down about a raw core of parsible entities. The names of things slowly following those things into oblivion. Colours. The names of birds. Things to eat. Finally the names of things one believed to be true. More fragile than he would have thought. How much was gone already? The sacred idiom shorn of its referents and so of its reality.[329]

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[326] Ulrich Baer, *Spectral Evidence: The Photography of Trauma* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2002 (2005)), 75.

[327] Patricia Yaeger, "Rubble as Archive, or 9/11 as Dust, Debris, and Bodily Vanishing," in *Trauma at Home: After 9/11*, ed. Judith Greenberg (Lincoln and London: University of Nebraska Press, 2003), 189.

[328] Chris Walsh, "The Post-Southern Sense of Place in *the Road*," *The Cormac McCarthy Journal* 6(2008), http://journals.tdl.org/cormacmccarthy/article/viewFile/710/484#page=48.

Other scholars such as Wesley G. Morgan have argued that the novel contains a number of geographical markers that allow the narrative to be mapped along the same southern terrain that features in McCarthy's earlier Tennessee novels such as *Child of God* and *The Orchard Keeper*. See Wesley G. Morgan, "The Route and Roots of *the Road* " *The Cormac McCarthy Journal* 6(2008).However, I argue that the novel's frequent reference to the unfamiliarity of the landscape, and the man and boys continual uncertainty as to their precise location, outweigh any sense of a fixed location that could be determined through a rigorous comparison of the novel to maps and other geographical documents.

[329] McCarthy, *The Road*, 93.

This depiction of landscape, and the other examples from the text discussed above, allow the novel to metaphorise the experience of the witness and the challenge of giving testimony. The next section continues to explore the uses of natural imagery within the trauma aesthetic, building on this understanding of its representational potential to identify how it is used in texts such as *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* to spatialise traumatic memory.

The Nature of Traumatic Experience

The spatialisation of memory has its origins in early theories of mnemonics which posited that the human memory could be enhanced by associating pieces of information with material objects that would aid recall in the future.[330] It is also common to metaphorically refer to memory itself as a space in which information is stored. As Edward Casey suggests, space can function both as the site of, and a metaphor for memory.[331] To continue with the focus on natural imagery from the previous section of this chapter it is interesting to observe the central role landscapes and nature have played in the practice and theorisation of memory. For example Anne Whitehead observes how, particularly in literature, landscape is endowed with a 'temporal consciousness'[332] that enables it to retain and communicate history in some way. Significantly for the purposes of this study, where mnemonic systems that employ objects and interior spaces primarily serve individual memory, the spatialisation of memory within landscape often functions on a collective or cultural level. A familiar example of this is the way in which landscape is used within the construction of national identity. As scholars such as David Lowenthal and Stephen Daniels have

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[330] For an overview of early theories of mnemonics see Anne Whitehead, *Memory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 28-29.
[331] Cited in ibid., 10.
[332] Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, 49.

documented, the scale and grandeur of the American landscape has been historically used to symbolise qualities of power and strength in the construction of a coherent national identity.[333]

Kenneth Foote observes that some of the most important landscapes that contribute to the formation of national identity in the United States, are sites of violence and tragedy which undergo various 'modifications,' framing them in ways that emphasise positive cultural values such as heroism and unity and efface less desirable feelings such as shame or guilt. In the introduction to his study of a number of these sites Foote offers an eloquent summary of landscapes potential for trans-historical and collective memory, as follows:

> The very durability of the landscape and the memorials placed in the landscape makes these modifications effective for symbolizing and sustaining collective values over long periods of time. Landscape might be seen in this light as a sort of communicational resource, a system of signs and symbols, capable of extending the temporal and spatial range of communication. In effect the physical durability of landscape permits it to carry meaning in the future so as to help sustain memory and cultural traditions.[334]

What this understanding reveals, however, is that the memory of landscape is filtered through various historical and cultural frameworks that construct a clear narrative of trauma, offering catharsis and closure. The memorialisation of Ground Zero has certainly been framed in this way. As David Simpson remarks, the motivations behind the redevelopment of the ruins of the World Trade Center went 'beyond mere rehabilitation,' incorporating a 'more strident call for triumphalism, for an economic and patriotic display of national and local energy that can pass muster as embodying the spirit of America and, inevitably, of capitalist democracy itself'.[335] The drive to elicit positive meaning or to bring about a sense of closure from the trauma of 9/11 is, as I have already argued, contrary to the objectives of the trauma aesthetic. With this in mind, this section explores the ways in which the trauma aesthetic constructs an alternative space for the

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[333] See S. Daniels, *Fields of Vision: Landscape Imagery and National Identity in England and the United States* (Polity Press, 1993). See also David Lowenthal, "The American Scene," *Geographical Review* 58, no. 1 (1968).

[334] Kenneth E. Foote, *Shadowed Ground: America's Landscapes of Violence and Tragedy* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1997 (2003)), 33.

[335] Simpson, *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration*, 61.At the time of writing the significance of Ground Zero as a space heavily invested in cultural memory and meaning has gained renewed resonance. Controversy over the construction of an Islamic cultural centre within a close proximity of the memorial site has highlighted the ways in which the claiming of space and memory is achieved through powerful, and often exclusive cultural criteria.

memory of 9/11 that is marked by three key characteristics. Firstly, I argue that the memory-scape of the trauma aesthetic is a liminal space that lies somewhere between the geographically determined place of trauma and the entirely metaphorical construction of landscape as memory. Secondly, this liminal space allows for the more effective representation of the experience of trauma which occurs between knowing and not knowing, a liminality that was intensified by the specificity of vicarious traumatisation on 9/11. Thirdly, the liminal memory-scape of the trauma aesthetic offers the potential to share collective memories while also allowing for the nuanced variations of individual experience, free from overarching grand narratives of trauma.

A text that explores the space of memory and the boundaries between knowing and not knowing, conscious and unconscious, remembering and forgetting is *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*. The film tells the story of Joel Barish (Jim Carrey) who discovers his girlfriend Clementine (Kate Winslet) has undergone a clinical procedure to erase their turbulent relationship from her memory. Angry and hurt that Clementine should do such a thing Joel arranges to have the procedure himself taking all the material objects he owns that remind him of Clementine to Lacuna Inc. so that a group of technicians can locate and erase his memories of her from his brain. However, as Joel undergoes the procedure (which involves him taking a strong sedative) he realises he doesn't want to forget Clementine. Losing the happy memories in order to erase the unhappy ones is too high a price to pay. In an attempt to cheat the procedure Joel journeys through a psychological landscape constructed from memories of his childhood and relationship with Clementine, taking her with him in an attempt to hide from the Lacuna technicians.

Discussing how the film attempts to locate memory José van Dijck observes how '[o]n the one hand personal memory is situated inside the brain – the deepest, most intimate physical space of the human body. On the other hand, personal memories seem to be located in the many objects Joel and Clementine (like most of us) create to serve as reminders of lived experiences.'[336] However, I argue that this observation is incomplete as even when the cerebral markers of

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[336] José van Dijck, *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age*, ed. Mieke and Hent de Vries Bal, Cultural Memory in the Present (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 28.

memory, and the prosthetic, mediating objects associated with them are destroyed, the film suggests that the characters continue to be shaped and influenced by those memories in some way. This is evident in the way in which Clementine becomes confused and distressed when her new boyfriend (a technician from Lacuna who steals Joel's memory objects in order to woo Clementine) uses the same romantic declarations that Joel did at the beginning of their relationship. Although Clementine has no bodily or material memory of these words being said to her in the past her distress suggests that there is still some kind of recollection taking place causing the words, in their new, present context, to seem out of place. Most powerfully however, this notion of memory's liminal location between the cerebral and the material is evident in the way in which both Joel and Clementine are inexplicably drawn back to the beach at Monthauk and, as a result, back into each other's lives. We can term this type of memory metaphysical memory.

The beach at Monthauk is central to the film's spatialisation of memory. In addition to being the 'real', geographical location in which Joel and Clementine rediscover one another, the beach is also a central space within the landscape of Joel's memory. Gaining significance as the site of their first meeting, the couple return to the beach twice in Joel's memory sequence. This location lends itself particularly well to the representation of metaphysical memory due to its status as 'a quintessentially liminal territory.'[337] Discussing the cultural symbolism of the beach Jennifer Webb defines it as 'a literal littoral, a space between: between fluid and solid, between safety and risk, between social and the natural.'[338] This liminal quality of the beach offers an alternative to the over-determined sense of place of the city outlined earlier in this chapter and thus, I argue, opens up the possibility for a more personal form of memory work. This is line with a Romantic view of the coast which, as Alain Corbin outlines, saw the vastness of the ocean as a metaphor for fate 'and made of the beach a fine line marked by the rhythms of the water, which

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[337] Maoz Azaryahu, "The Beach at the End of the World: Eilat in Israeli Popular Culture," *Social & Cultural Geography* 6, no. 1 (2005): 120.
[338] Jennifer Webb, "Beaches, Bodies and Being in the World," in *Some Like It Hot: The Beach as Cultural Dimension*, ed. Allan Edwards, Keith Gilbert and James Skinner, *Sports, Culture and Society* (Oxford: Meyer and Meyer Sport, 2003), 82.

were in turn driven by the lunar cycle; treading this line became an invitation to reassess one's life periodically.'[339] However, where the Romantic potential for the beach as a liminal space offers a positive and affirming exploration of the self, the use of the beach as a site of memory in *Eternal Sunshine* metaphorises a more uncertain experience that, I argue, mirrors the fragmented, disorienting experience of trauma.

The use of the beach as a metaphor for a feeling of uncertainty and instability associated with memory can be identified in the first scene that returns the couple to Mounthawk in the landscape of Joel's memory. After 'hiding' in a shameful memory of Joel's adolescence in which his mother caught him masturbating in his bed, Clementine emerges from beneath the bed sheets to discover they have been transported to the beach. The almost imperceptible transition between locations, and the resulting juxtaposition of interior (the bed) and exterior *mise-en-scenes* creates a sense of disorientation and displacement. This has contributed to the specificity of the beach as a space which is traditionally considered to fall outside of the normal codes of social behaviour which enables it to 'function as a form of disorder.'[340] In this scene the disorder of the beach as liminal space reflects the instability of memory and the challenge of sustaining a coherent sense of self as Joel's memories uncontrollably collapse into one another. It should be noted that this metaphorical use of the beach does not exhibit the sense of freedom typically associated with social disorder identified by Peterson. Such freedom has enabled the beach to become a 'carnivalesque' space which permits the display and voyeuristic consumption of the human body that contrasts starkly with the melancholic atmosphere that characterise the beach spaces of the trauma aesthetic.[341] Rather, Joel is trapped in his own psyche and involuntarily drawn into memories which he wants to avoid; his mind makes a series of subconscious connections between events, emotions, places and objects in his life that are seemingly out of his control. This can be understood as a kind of 'involuntary memory' process that has been theorised

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[339] Alain Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea: The Discovery of the Seaside 1750-1840*, trans. Jocelyn Phelps (London: Penguin, 1988 (1995)), 165.

[340] Mark Peterson, *Consumption and Everyday Life* (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 105.

[341] See Rob Shields, *Places on the Margin: Alternative Geographies of Modernity* (London and New York: Routledge, 1991 (1992)).

by Freud, Bergson and Proust. This is a complex area of memory studies but for the purposes of this analysis we can highlight the connection Whitehead makes between the concept of involuntary memory and traumatic memory. Noting that 'the [involuntary] memories recovered are often of unhappiness and irreversible loss, so that they resuscitate or reactivate a former grief or sorrow'[342] she proposes that they closely resemble the pathological re-emergence of the symptoms of trauma.

Further examples of the ways in which the natural imagery of the beach can be seen to illustrate the effects of traumatic memory on the individual can be identified when Joel returns once more to the memory of Mounthawk and recalls his first meeting with Clementine before he finally wakes from the procedure. As night falls the couple leave the party on the beach and break into an empty beach house to escape the bad weather. Once inside the house Joel remembers how he had left Clementine there and expresses a deep regret for this moment in their past. As Joel realises that this is the memory of the moment he lost Clementine and, consequently, the moment he will lose her again, the beach house begins to crumble, the sand and the waves encroach on the house, and Joel is pictured wading through rising water, and then buried in sand as his memories of Clementine retreat from him. This powerful scene employs the elements of the beach to represent the conflicting instability and persistence of traumatic memory, evoking what Webb describes as,

> the peculiarly evocative relationship between the water and the edge of land; the uncertainty and indeed the mutability of that edge's location metaphorises the uncertainty about where the body ends and where the rest of the world begins, or where the cut-off point is between the body's own inside and outside.[343]

By displacing the individual in this way, and blurring the boundaries that contain and regulate perceptions of reality, the liminal space of the beach mirrors the experience of trauma.

The destabilising effect of liminal space can also be identified in the scenes that take place on the frozen Charles River. A favourite spot of Clementine's, she takes Joel there as a kind of consummation of their relationship that she calls 'an ice honeymoon.' When they arrive

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[342] Whitehead, *Memory*, 111.
[343] Webb, "Beaches, Bodies and Being in the World," 82.

Clementine immediately ventures onto the ice while Joel is more cautious, worried that the ice might crack or even break. After some hesitation he joins Clementine in the middle of the river and they lay down and look at the sky. Like the beach, the frozen river offers a space outside the limits of the chaos of everyday life (just barely visible in the form of a stream of traffic in the distance) and, like the wilderness of *The Road*, a space which uproots the individual and suspends them within a boundless and timeless universe (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Joel and Clementine submit themselves to the liminal space of the frozen lake.

What links this liminal experience specifically to trauma is the underlying danger that underscores the ethereal beauty of this particular space: in addition to being a space that is not quite solid ground nor moving water, the expanse of ice is a transitional space, created by the change in seasons and thus always about to disappear and marked by danger. Webb offers a similar reading of the beach which she also opens up to encompass other formations of liminal space in nature. She writes:

> The beach is also a place of danger, especially in terms of its potential for transformation and transmutation, its status as a place of magic ... The anomalous status of the beach – of wild places generally – provide it an "other" significance that is both its seduction and its danger.[344]

This can be understood as a confrontation with death, or the possibility of death which is theoretically comparable to Caruth's suggestion that the experience of trauma is defined more

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[344] Ibid., 83.

accurately as the ongoing experience of having survived death.[345] In *Eternal Sunshine*, then,

natural imagery is used to construct the space of trauma, a space between life and death. This is

similar to the way in which the image of the falling man, discussed in the previous chapter,

symbolised the eternal immanence of the traumatic impact. However, it seems as if the specific

kinds of natural imagery allows for a more detailed, visual representation of the witness's

confrontation with death.

Consider, for example, the beach that appears towards the end of *The Road*. Although the

man is unsure why he has chosen this as their destination, there is the sense that the beach, the

edge of the land which has been so completely devastated, will offer some kind of hope or signs

of regeneration. However, on reaching the coast line they are confronted with a tableau of death

and decay:

> Along the shore of the cove below them windrows of small bones in the wrack. Further
> down the saltbleached ribcages of what may have been cattle. Gray salt lime on the rocks.
> The wind blew and dry seedpods scampered down the sands and stopped and then went
> on again.[346]

By undermining the expectations of the scene – a disappointment captured in the man's apology

to his son that the sea is not blue, as he had described it – the novel invites what Bennett terms

'an empathic encounter': the spatialisation of traumatic loss in the novel's depiction of the beach,

indeed in the natural imagery throughout the novel, can be understood as an attempt to

construct a space which enables the reader to metaphorically '*live out* traumatic experience in an

extended sense.'[347]That the beach as a liminally coded space, is particularly effective at

engendering this kind of affective viewing is supported by Corbin's description of uses of the

beach in landscape art of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Commenting on the

way in which artists and viewers understood the symbolism of the beach, Corbin writes;

> They experienced it as a vast stage, surrounded by headlands, with the infinite expanse of
> water as a back drop. Contemplating nature's excess created the dramaturgy of feelings

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[345] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 7.
[346] McCarthy, *The Road*, 230-31.
[347] Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, 65 original emphasis.

> ... The extent of this flat stage made numerous dramatic scenes possible, all juxtaposed with fallacious simultaneity. In this setting, struggle and mourning could be placed side by side.[348]

Similarly, in the trauma aesthetic the imagery of natural, liminal spaces such as the beach provide a setting that not only represents the logistics of traumatic memory but also enables a collective response to trauma that is informed by the affective experience of individuals. To clarify, the natural imagery discussed here draws on shared notions of liminality, trauma and memory, but, as a space outside the temporal and ideological restrictions of culture and society, also invites and encourages the nuanced interpretation of the individual.

This use of natural imagery in the trauma aesthetic's representation of shared memory can be observed in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* in the image of Mr Black's oak tree bed. Mr Black tells Oskar the story of how his bed used to be a tree in the park that his wife once tripped on, causing her to cut her hand during their courtship. After spending the majority of his married life working as a war correspondent away from home, Mr Black returned home to dedicate himself to his wife. Upon his return Mr Black went to the park, felled the tree, and brought it home in the pieces he then made into the bed. After his wife's death Mr Black begins hammering a nail into the bed every single day and by the time it is discovered by Oskar it is covered with eight thousand six hundred and twenty-nine nails. Oskar asks Mr Black about the significance of this ritual, thinking that 'it would let him tell me about how much he loved [his wife].'[349] However Mr Black replies that he doesn't know why he does it and tells Oskar "I suppose it helps! Keeps me going! I know it's nonsense!" He then adds that "Nails aren't light! One is! But they add up!"

Although the image of Mr Black's tree-bed is not visually comparable to the kind of solitary tree discussed above, it still seems to function in a similar way by bearing witness to, and acting as the site of Mr Black's traumatic memory. The tree-bed is a symbol of experiential time: The thousands of nails testify to the passing of time but the very presence of the tree which

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[348] Corbin, *The Lure of the Sea*, 236.
[349] Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, 162.

caused injury to the woman Mr Black loved and eventually lost is a physical manifestation of the persistence of the past and of traumatic memory. As Mr Black tells Oscar, the event of the original trauma, when his wife-to-be cut her hand on the tree occurred 'so long ago.' However, Oscar suggests that this distant past is really 'just yesterday in your life,' to which Mr Black replies, 'Yesterday! Today! Five minutes ago! Now!"[350] The tree bed is also significant as, for Oskar at least, it links him with Mr Black via their experiences of loss and mourning. When Mr Black tells Oskar he worried the bed would get so heavy it would crash into the apartment below (where Oskar happens to live) Oskar translates this to mean that 'You couldn't sleep because of me.'[351] Throughout the novel Oskar is concerned with the need to effectively communicate emotions between individuals, inventing a variety of fantastic devices that would allow people to see when someone was sad or in pain. Where these impossible, literal means of sharing traumatic memory fail the metaphorical function of the tree allows Oskar and Mr Black to bear witness not only to their own trauma, but to each other's.

The tree-bed as a metaphor for the experience of trauma can also be seen in the intertextual reference Mr Black makes to Debussy's musical composition *The Sunken Cathedral*. The reference to Debussy's Prelude for piano here is an interesting one. The original French title of the piece is *La Cathédrale Engloutie* and, based on the legend of the Breton city of Ys, is an example of musical impressionism. The legend (in a number of variations) tells the story of a city built below sea level and protected by sluice gates. The city was ruled by a pious King who had a wild and sinful daughter, Princess Dahut, who, during one folly-filled night stole the key to the sluice gates and opened them, letting the water flood into the city, submerging it forever. According to the legend, the city's cathedral would sometimes rise out of the water at dawn as a reminder to the people of Ys of their past sins and the loss that they suffered. The legend is itself an allegory for the persistence of memory but this connection is intensified by the novel's specific reference to the musical representation of the legend which uses sustained, sonorous chord sequences to appropriate the watery sounds of the cathedral bells at it rises out of the sea. In

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[350] Ibid., 161.
[351] Ibid., 162.

Images and Ideas in Modern French Piano Music, Siglind Bruhn provides the following detailed

description of the final moments of *The Sunken Cathedral*:

> After a transition, as the enchanted onlooker muses on the experience, the entire
> Cathedral rises once more from the waters, this time clearly before the mind's eye –
> Debussy specifies *comme un echo de la phrase entendue précédement* (like an echo of the
> phrase heard previously) and *floutant et sourd* (floating and muffled). A bridge bar ...
> returns us to the resonance of the beginning (*dans la sonorité de la début*), but the image
> of the cathedral lingers in the mind in a continuing pedal-note C and a conclusion on a
> softly but widely registered C-major chord.[352]

This impressionistic style, where the music recalls not only sounds but images and emotions, is a

further example of metaphysical memory. The lingering image of the cathedral (and by extension

a powerful sense of loss) on which the piece concludes, reminds Mr Black of his own loss and

guilt. However, he cannot fully acknowledge the connection between the loss of his wife, the bed

and the beloved music because the memories that the music evokes lie somewhere in between

the historical fact of his lived past and the fragments of that past he retains in his mental archive.

Like the persistence of Joel and Clementine's shared romantic experience, Mr Black's traumatic

past exists within a liminal space that can only be experienced as fleeting sensation or mental

image and, like trauma itself, can only begin to be represented in the form of metaphor.

Interrogating Nostalgia as Therapy

Previously in this chapter I highlighted how the inscription of traumatic memory on a landscape is

shaped around cultural ideologies. It is the nature of these ideologies, what they reveal (or

perhaps more accurately attempt to conceal) about America's management of 9/11, and how

they are re-articulated within the trauma aesthetic that forms the focus of this final section.

Within a post-traumatic context, the application of these ideologies can be most readily seen

through cultural practices and enunciations of nostalgia. Within the many discourses that

emerged around the events of 9/11, I suggest that two broad categories of nostalgia can be

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[352] Siglind Bruhn, *Images and Ideas in Modern French Piano Music: The Extra-Musical Subtext in Piano
Works by Debussy, Ravel, and Messiaen*, Aesthetics in Music (Hillsdale: Pendragon Press, 1996), 44.

identified in the cultural narration of the trauma, both of which are addressed throughout the trauma aesthetic: nostalgia precipitated through consumer culture and nostalgia associated with the Western. Faludi's *The Terror Dream* provides a scathing critique of the uses of nostalgia in the wake of 9/11, particularly the often crude uses of the generic codes of the Western genre, claiming that such cultural memory work is reductive and regressive.[353] Indeed, operating within the broadcast media, these modes of nostalgia underpinned an unambiguous narrative of innocence, and national unity. However, I argue that the trauma aesthetic is evidence that the nostalgic frameworks used in the cultural narration of 9/11 provide the basis for a more nuanced analysis of the cultural impact of the attacks. In what remains of this chapter I will demonstrate how the trauma aesthetic evokes the same nostalgic frameworks (consumer culture, the Western) but utilises them in alternative ways in order to open up the space for an alternative narrative of 9/11 and its aftermath.

That the trauma aesthetic takes a more oblique approach to the relationship between nostalgia and memory can, in part, be observed in its seeming appreciation of the nostalgia reflex that occurs in the aftermath of traumatic events. *The Road*, for example, is littered with objects that are not only literal indicators of the material loss that has occurred but are symbolic of a lost way of life and cultural identity. Perhaps the most iconic of these is the single can of Coca-Cola the man finds in a vending machine and gives to his son. The boy offers to share the drink but his father encourages him to savour the taste as it is likely to be the only time he gets to experience it. The spectre of the past is also found in the taste of canned foods that the pair find in an underground shelter. These items provide what Alison Landsberg describes as 'a sensuous experience that serves to turn [the] cultural memory into an experiential event.'[354] The sweet tastes and richness of the foods long forgotten are reminders of a time of abundance and safety and thus function as 'prosthetic memories' within the novel. Landsberg argues that this type of

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[353] This argument is implicit throughout *The Terror Dream* but is explicitly articulated in the summation that 'we reacted to our trauma ... not by interrogating it but by cocooning ourselves in the chrysalis of the baby boom's childhood' (4).
[354] Alison Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory: The Transformation of American Remembrance in the Age of Mass Culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 26.

memory is a product of mass culture and its associated technologies and offers the following

definition for her terminology:

> Prosthetic memories are not strictly derived from a person's lived experience. Prosthetic memories circulate publicly and although they are not organically based, they are nevertheless experienced with a person's body as a result of an engagement with a wide range of cultural technologies. Prosthetic memories thus become a part of one's personal archive of experience, informing one's subjectivity as well as one's relationship to the present and future tenses.[355]

The exploration of prosthetic memory is particularly pertinent within the context of 9/11 and its

aftermath as the vicarious experience of the attacks can be seen to rely on the cultural

technologies through which it is transmitted in a number of ways. Firstly, the mediation of the

events via the broadcast media can itself be seen as engaging with prosthetic memory through

the evocations of historical traumas outlined at the beginning of this chapter. Although most

people in America now have no lived-experience of these events, their continued circulation

within popular culture enables them to function as a prosthetic memory for times of national

strength, unity and resilience. In addition, as discussed in the previous chapter, many witnesses

asserted a relationship with New York based on their cinematic experience of the city, a use of

prosthetic memory that was further evidenced in the many comments that compared the

spectacle of the events to scenes from Hollywood disaster movies such as *Independence Day*

(1996) and *Armageddon* (1998). The vicarious witnessing of 9/11 can, then, be seen as already an

act of prosthetic memory, intensely mediated through various technologies of memory, producing

a response to the events that align it with historical notions of national identity and cultural

values.

In the aftermath of the events the commodification of trauma through the production of

souvenirs and advertising campaigns perpetuated the practice of prosthetic memory that had

been initiated in the mediation of the events. What Daniel Harris has termed 'The Kitschification

of Sept. 11'[356] can be understood as a textbook example of how prosthetic memories are

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[355] Ibid., 25-26.
[356] Cited in Sturken, *Tourists of History*, 217.

mobilised through 'the commodification produced by capitalism.'[357] Purchasing items such as key chains and snow globes that featured the image of the now lost twin towers, offered the vicarious witness a 'veneer of authenticity' and a means of 'creating connections to this highly over-determined and intensely symbolic site.'[358] Implicit in Sturken's analysis of the role such items play in the memory work of the vicarious witness is the suggestion that prosthetic memories are less authentic (if not entirely inauthentic) in comparison to memories associated with direct, personal experience.

This concern is also raised within the trauma aesthetic. For example, to look again at *The Road*, following a particularly hearty meal prepared from the supplies found in the shelter, the man has a dream in which he sees creatures he has never seen or heard of before. This experience of being faced with something for which he has no indexical referent for makes him consider how his son, who has never known anything but the post-apocalyptic world in which he now lives, must feel when confronted with the past:

> He turned and looked at the boy. Maybe he understood for the first time that to the boy he was himself an alien. A being from a planet that no longer existed. The tales of which were suspect. He could not construct for the child's pleasure the world he'd lost without constructing the loss as well and he thought perhaps the child had known this better than he. He tried to remember the dream but he could not. All that was left was the feeling of it. He thought perhaps they'd come to warn him. Of what? That he could not enkindle in the heart of the child what was ashes in his own.[359]

Here the prosthetic memory the man attempts to give his son fails to effectively reconstruct the past but this is not simply because the boy has no authentic experience of that past. Rather, the novel suggests, prosthetic memory fails because it constructs a glossy image of a past that is itself inauthentic. This is not to say that the trauma aesthetic rejects the role of nostalgia in cultural memory work, rather it signals the need to participate in a different kind of nostalgia in order for the past to have a meaningful influence on the present.

Svetlana Boym categorises nostalgia into two broad types: restorative and reflective. The kind of prosthetic memory work that is associated with the consumer and tourist practices

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[357] Landsberg, *Prosthetic Memory*, 29.
[358] Sturken, *Tourists of History*, 218.
[359] McCarthy, *The Road*, 163.

outlined above can be seen as falling within the first of these two categories that 'proposes to rebuild the lost home and patch up the memory gaps,' and 'manifests itself in total reconstructions of the past.' The trauma aesthetic, however, engages in a more reflective form of nostalgia that focuses on 'the imperfect process of remembrance,' and 'lingers on ruins, the patina of time and history.'[360] An example of this kind of nostalgia can also be found in *The Road* in the description of the billboards along the side of the road on which the man and boy travel:

> They passed through towns that warned people away with messages scrawled on the billboards. The billboards had been whited out with thin coats of paint in order to write on them and through the paint could be seen the pale palimpsest of advertisements for goods which no longer existed.[361]

This description has a haunting quality as the image of the past lingers under the messages that symbolise the danger and destruction that is the present. Significantly however, there is no real sense of longing for the return of the past. Instead, the reflection on the past in this short passage makes it seem empty and valueless. In an almost literal illustration of Boym's definition of reflective nostalgia, the billboard dismisses restorative nostalgia in which the past 'has to be freshly painted in its "original image" and remain eternally young' and focuses 'not on the recovery of what is perceived to be an absolute truth but on the meditation on history and the passage of time.'[362] This is emphasised here by the reference to consumer goods as a symbol of a capitalist past and the vehicle for the restorative nostalgia of prosthetic memory. However, throughout the trauma aesthetic a variety of narrative devices work to consistently construct a less glossy image of the pre-9/11 past. For example, in *Falling Man*, Keith and Lianne's pre-9/11 past is marred by an unhappy marriage that had left them living in separate apartments. Similarly in *25th Hour* Monty's father becomes nostalgic over a picture of Monty as a young boy dressed up as a fireman and laments over how he ended up a drug dealer facing seven years in prison. However, Monty reminds him that the picture does not show the loss of his mother, or his father's depression and alcoholism which led Monty into the life of crime that allowed him to support them financially.

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[360] Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 41.
[361] McCarthy, *The Road*, 135.
[362] Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia*, 49.

The trauma aesthetic's participation in a more reflexive form of nostalgia allows for a more critical exploration of aspects of American national identity that are erased through the restorative nostalgia that pervaded the cultural response to 9/11. The focus of this critique appears to be the ways in which the uses of nostalgia in the dominant narrative of 9/11 erased any trace of America's violent past in its construction of itself as an innocent victim and justified an immediate, violent response to that victimisation. This is particularly evident in the masculinist discourse of the Western that pervaded political rhetoric in the aftermath of 9/11 and during the early stages of the 'War on Terror'. As Faludi observes:

> The attack on home soil triggered a search for a guardian of the homestead, a manly man, to be sure, but one particularly suited to protecting and providing for the isolated American family in perilous situations. He was less Batman than Daniel Boone, a frontiersman whose proofs of eligibility were the hatchet and the gun – and a bloody willingness to wield them.[363]

As they were presented in the broadcast media, these nostalgic reconstructions of the Western myth were typically unproblematic. However, a central objective of the trauma aesthetic seems to be, not to necessarily articulate an alternative narrative of national identity, but to offer a more probing and critical perspective on the narrative that already exists. An extended example of the ways in which the trauma aesthetic interrogates these specific narratives and myths of national identity is David Cronenberg's *A History of Violence*. The film tells the story of Tom Stall, a typical all-American male, married with two children and his own business, whose true identity is revealed to be that of Joey Cussack, a violent gangster from Philadelphia. What makes the film particularly interesting in the context of this thesis is its explicit evocation of the fictional Western narratives that dominated political discourse in the aftermath of 9/11 and the way in which it undermines the crude and simplistic binaries of good and evil on which such narratives are typically based.

A History of Violence initiates its critique of the notions of morality and culpability that dominated the post-9/11 American imagination by drawing on their familiarity in the opening sequences. The film begins at a rural motel, panning along a deserted veranda before reaching a

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[363] Faludi, *The Terror Dream*, 148.

door, out of which two men appear. One man, Leland (Stephen McHattie) wears a dark suit, and a belt with a hefty buckle and the other, Billy (Greg Bryk), is dressed casually in jeans and t-shirt and he smokes a cigarette that hangs loosely in the corner of his mouth. There is no dialogue for nearly a minute and the scene is dominated by a high pitched sound like the buzz of insects. Leland walks off to check them out of the motel while and the ominous buzzing sound is briefly interrupted when Billy turns on the engine to pull the car forward and a Country and Western song plays on the radio. After a few moments Leland comes out wiping his hands on a rag, which he puts into a bin before getting into the car. The two men discuss the heat, at which point they realise they do not have enough drinking water for their journey and Billy heads back into the office to fill up a plastic container from a water cooler. Once in the office he casually wanders around, checking the pay phone for change, looking at the postcards for sale. The camera pans down to the bottom right as the man walks out of the frame, revealing the dead body of the manager slumped in the chair, covered in blood and a smeared, bloody handprint dragged across the counter. Billy is completely unmoved by the horror he finds in the office and seems to barely even notice as walks over to the water cooler before discovering another body, the maid's, sprawled across the floor in a pool of blood. As he begins to fill up the water carton, a young girl enters through a door to his left. The man stands and turns towards her, pulling a gun from the back pocket of his jeans. Then, crouching, and putting a finger to his lips as a sign for the girl to stay quiet, he raises the gun and fires without hesitation.

In this sequence production techniques and narrative work to code the two men within an established, and accepted, framework of what it is to be evil. As Amy Taubin notes in her review of the film for *Sight and Sound*, the sequence has 'a nightmarish tone,' achieved through the use of a wide angle lens, 'amped-up, abruptly edited sound effects,' and the slowness of the actors who move 'as if they were underwater.'[364] In addition, the motivation for the three murders is weak and there is no remorse. After killing the manager and the maid the older man nonchalantly confesses 'I had a little trouble with the maid, but everything's ok.' And the murder

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[364] Amy Taubin, "Model Citizens," *Film Comment* 45, no. 5 (2005): 28.

of the little girl is merely collateral damage to ensure no witnesses are left at the scene. In this respect, the two men adhere to a cultural notion of what it is to be evil as it is described by Jackson who states that 'evil people do not have any politics and there is no need to examine their causes of grievances. Evil people do what they do simply because they are evil.'[365] In these ways the opening sequence of the film can be seen to draw heavily on familiar generic codes and conventions in order to elicit a particular response of horror and repulsion from the spectator.

This depiction of evil in the form of the two characters in the opening sequence stands in stark contrast to the initial representation of the film's central protagonist Tom Stall (Viggo Mortensen) who is introduced in the film's second sequence as he rushes to comfort his young daughter who has awoken, screaming, from a nightmare. The dramatic change in the moral framing of the characters of each sequence is emphasised by the abruptness of the editing. Significantly, however, matching the shot of Billy pulling the trigger to a close up of Tom's daughter screaming creates an unsettling sense of continuity between the two very different scenes, thus foreshadowing the moral complexity that develops later in the film. Despite this momentary ambiguity the framing of Tom as the 'good' counterpoint to the evil depicted in the opening sequence is continued throughout the first half of the film. Not only is Tom an attentive father but an upstanding, churchgoing member of the community and a businessman who runs a friendly diner frequented by locals. He even picks up litter in the street. Tom is also elevated to the status of local hero after Leland and Billy turn up in his diner and Tom shoots them both dead when they threaten to kill his staff and customers. Unlike the murders that take place in the opening sequence, Tom's killing of Leland and Billy is framed as both justified and necessary.

Having seen Tom on the news, some of his colleagues from his old life recognise him and visit him at his diner. When they leave Tom rings the local Sheriff who then follows them out of town. After pulling their car over the Sheriff advises them that he will not tolerate them harassing any of the town's people: "this is a nice town. We have nice people here. We take care of our nice

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[365] Richard Jackson, *Writing the War on Terrorism: Language, Politics and Counter-Terrorism* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 2005), 69.

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people." The Sheriff's warning to Fogarty and his men directly echoes the kinds of statements being made by President George W. Bush in the immediate aftermath of 9/11. For example, the same evocation of a caring community is identified in an address given by President Bush only a few days after September 11 at the Episcopal National Cathedral to mark a national day of prayer and remembrance. The President remarks that, in the traumatic aftermath of 9/11, 'Americans showed a deep commitment to one another, and an abiding love for our country.'[366] Implicit in these constructions of the inherent innocence of America and its people, in both the post-9/11 political discourse and within the Sheriff's dialogue in *A History of Violence*, is an opposition of a deviant, evil other. This opposition is made explicit in other examples from Bush's public speeches in the weeks and months following the attacks, particularly in relation to the instigation of the War on Terror, in which the coding of the Arab other as evil played a significant role in the justification of the invasion of Iraq. An early example of this oppositional moral framing can be found in a speech in which President Bush asserts: 'Anybody who tries to affect the lives of our good citizens is evil.'[367]

It is on this firmly established opposition of good and evil that the film begins to reveal the truth about Tom's dark and violent secret identity. As his paranoia and fear cause him to become increasingly violent the wholesome image he projects early in the film becomes increasingly unstable. Interestingly, this mirrors the deterioration of America's political image as the broadcast media exposed evidence of torture and illegal interrogation techniques being used at Abu Ghraib prison. As images of American soldiers torturing and abusing inmates at the prison appeared in the broadcast media, America's construction of itself as an innocent victim justified in its use of aggression came into question. As Henry Giroux remarks:

> In sharp contrast to the all-too-familiar and officially sanctioned images of goodhearted and stalwart Americans patrolling Iraqi neighbourhoods, caring for wounded soldiers, or passing out candy to Iraqi children, the newly discovered photos depicted Iraqi detainees

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[366] George Bush, " Address at the National Day of Prayer and Rememberance 14 September, 2001," http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/gwbush911prayer&memorialaddress.htm.
[367] Bush, George W., From a speech given at Dixie Printing Company, Glen Burnie, MD cited in Rachel Bailey Jones, "Intolerable Intolerance: Toxic Xenophobia and Pedagogy of Resistance," *High School Journal* 95, no. 1 (2011): 36.

being humiliated and tortured ... Like Oscar Wilde's infamous picture of Dorian Gray, the portrait of American patriotism was irrevocably transformed into its opposite.[368]

This same Dorian Gray-esque transformation can be identified in three key moments in *A History of Violence*. The first occurs at the end of the scene in which Tom kills Leland and Billy. Propped on a stool at the counter in his diner Tom looks down at the dying Leland who gasps for breath through the blood that is pumping through the mess of his now shattered jaw. The camera cuts on a graphic close up of Leland's horrific injuries, confronting both the spectator and Tom with the devastating reality of his action, to a shot of Tom's face. Tom, out of breath and in pain, looks down at Leland and then at the gun in his hand, seemingly taken-aback by the violence of his own actions (Figure 7)

Figure 7. Tom is shocked by his capacity for violence.

It is interesting to compare this with a later moment in the film when Tom explains to Jack why he feels Fogarty and his men are dangerous and a threat to their family. Jack becomes anxious and asks his father what they will do if Fogarty turns up at the house looking for trouble to which Tom replies 'We'll deal with it.' As he speaks he cocks the shotgun he is holding in his hand and again the camera cuts to a medium close up of his face and the barrel of the gun. This

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[368] Henry A. Giroux, "Education after Abu Ghraib," *Cultural Studies* 18, no. 6 (2004): 780.

time however there is no fear or surprise in Tom's expression and he now appears more than

comfortable holding a weapon and contemplating its uses. The sense of foreboding that

accompanies the emergence of this side of Tom's character is underscored as the scene ends by

cutting to a brief shot of Jack whose face who appears alarmed by his father's out-of-character

violent attitude(Figure 8).

Figure 8. Tom/Joey's violent nature becomes more apparent.

Tom's transformation into Joey Cussack becomes complete when Fogarty and his men

visit the house and attempt to take him back to Philadelphia. As Tom approaches Fogarty the

camera continues to frame his face which is fixed with a slightly open-mouthed snarl. When he

speaks his voice is notably different, his accent suddenly distinctly Northern and much harsher

than in previous scenes. Tom fights with and disables/kills Fogarty's two henchmen before taking

on Fogarty himself. Fogarty gets Tom down on the ground, at which point Tom admits to being

Joey Cussack when he tells Fogarty "I should have killed you back in Phillie." A gunshot sounds

and, somewhat surprisingly Fogarty slumps to the ground, revealing Jack standing on the grass

with his father's shot gun in his hand. Tom/Joey stands up and the camera cuts to a close up of his

face as he stands staring at his son. Spattered in Fogarty's blood and with his mouth set in an

almost-snarl he is barely recognisable as the friendly family man from earlier in the film (Figure 9).

Figure 9. Tom has now fully transformed in to the grotesque Joey Cussak

Through the dual character of Tom Stall/Joey Cussack *A History of Violence* explicitly blurs

the boundaries between good and evil, right and wrong, which had formed the foundation of the

cultural narration of 9/11 in the broadcast media. Like the character of Monty in *25th Hour,* Tom

simultaneously evokes feeling of sympathy and disgust which makes the spectator more acutely

aware of the way in which they judge individuals and assign culpability. The next chapter explores

in more detail how the trauma aesthetic engages with the spectator/reader, addressing the ways

in which these questions of culpability and the nature of vicarious experience are registered in,

and articulated through, the body of the witness.

4. No Blood, No Screams: The Body and the Limits of the Trauma Aesthetic

The Body as Witness

In an essay published in *The Guardian* on September 12, 2001, British novelist Ian McEwan commented:

> No blood, no screams. The Greeks, in their tragedies, wisely kept the worst of moments off stage, out of the scene. Hence the word: obscene. [9/11] was an obscenity. We were watching death on an unbelievable scale, but we saw no one die. The nightmare was in this gulf of imagining. The horror was in the distance.[369]

The profound absence, as it is described here through spatial metaphors of distance, has been the focus of the previous two chapters of this thesis. Throughout I have identified this structuring metaphor of the trauma aesthetic which consistently works to displace or render less visible the body of the witness. For example, in *Falling Man* Keith's detachment from the world around him results in his becoming a kind of vague presence to those closest to him. Similarly, lighting and colouring in *25th Hour* give Monty a washed-out, almost translucent appearance that suggests the imminent loss of his secure and familiar life. I have also argued that spatial metaphors such as the wilderness function to displace and disorient the position of the witness in a way that echoes the inherently liminal position of the vicarious witness. However, in spite of this profound sense of the absence of the body, McEwan's summation of the trauma of 9/11 points, indeed insists upon, the visceral and the corporeal: the lost bodies of 9/11 and the violence of their death seem to intrude into the experience of watching the events even though they are not visible within the traumatic spectacle. It is the resonance of this aspect of 9/11, and its management within the trauma aesthetic through the corporeal body, which forms the focus of this final chapter.

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[369] Ian McEwan, "Beyond Belief," *The Guardian*, 12 September 2001, n. pg.

The relationship between the body and trauma forms part of a broader debate on the relationship between the mind and the body that has featured prominently throughout medical history. It is perhaps through Freud and Charcot's work on hysteria—which diagnosed the physical symptoms of so-called hysterical episodes as the manifestation of repressed emotional traumas—that concept of the psychosomatic began to enter the popular understanding of trauma. Since Freud, and with the recognition of PTSD in 1980, psychiatrists such as Babbette Rothschild, Jean Benjamin Stora and Bessel van der Kolk have examined in detail the ways in which psychological disorders are manifested as physical symptoms, and encouraging practitioners to use the body as a diagnostic tool. As Stora succinctly states in the opening chapter of *When the Body Displaces the Mind*, 'if the mind is disturbed (a disorder caused by multiple factors), it can generate somatic illnesses and the so-called psychosomatic and/or psychiatric approach is then required.'[370] Similarly in *The Body Remembers*, Rotschild argues that 'understanding how the brain and body process, remember, and perpetuate traumatic events holds many keys to the treatment of the traumatized body and mind.'[371] In both these studies, and others like them, there is an emphasis on listening to what the body has to say about the experience of trauma. Over the last few decades this conceptualisation of the body has filtered into popular culture and has propagated a wealth of self-help literature and various other forms of cultural and consumer products which promote 'the maintenance of the inner body [including the psyche] ...[through]the enhancement of the appearance of the outerbody.'[372] By understanding the body as both connected to, and reflecting the psychological state of an individual, these scientific and popular discourses frame the body as a potential witness to trauma and therefore capable of some kind of testimony.

The scientific recognition of the relationship between the body and psychological trauma is, however, predated by art and literature which has a long history of exploiting the metaphoric possibilities of the body as a traumatic witness. This is particularly notable within narratives of

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[370] Jean Benjamin Stora, *When the Body Displaces the Mind: Stress, Trauma and Somatic Disease* (London: Karnac Books, 2007), 9.

[371] Babette Rothschild, *The Body Remembers: The Psychophysiology of Trauma and Trauma Treatment* (New York and London: Norton and Company, 2000), 5.

[372] Mike Featherstone, "The Body in Consumer Culture," in *The American Body in Context: An Anthology*, ed. Jessica R. Johnston (Wilmington, DE: Scholarly Resources, 2001), 80.

rape or incest and in the narratives of second generation trauma survivors. Within these narratives the body typically becomes both the site of traumatic injury and traumatic memory, either through visible injury or illness or through a kind of genetic transference. For example, Laurie Vickroy observes how Larry Heinemann's *Paco's Story* uses the scars on the protagonist's body to 'express horrors that remain largely hidden and unspoken.'[373] A rather different function of the body occurs in Anne Michael's novel *Fugitive Pieces*. As Whitehead observes, the novel constructs a notion of molecular memory that allows the traumatic affect of the Holocaust to be passed on to subsequent generations. Analysing the character of Jakob, Whitehead comments that 'through his blood, the humiliation and fear that his father endured during the Holocaust has been transmitted to him.'[374] As a result the trauma haunts the (secondary) victim and becomes impossible to escape or work-through. The depictions of traumatised bodies can function in many ways depending on the nature of the trauma, the gender, ethnicity or class of the victim and various other factors. However, there are two broad functions of contemporary representations of the traumatised body which have particular resonance within post-9/11 discourse. These are: the body as spectacle and the body as witness.

The first of these functions is perhaps best understood in terms of what Mark Seltzer terms our contemporary 'wound culture,' which he defines as characterised by 'the public fascination with torn and opened bodies and torn and opened psyches, a public gathering around the wound and the trauma.'[375] For Seltzer, the consistency with which trauma has been projected onto and narrated through the body in a variety of media and narrative forms has resulted in this becoming a familiar trope within the representation of trauma and even in our experience and understanding of our everyday lives. Particularly within contemporary visual culture, with the popularity of fictional and non-fictional spectacles of traumatised minds and bodies there seems an increasing emphasis on the etymology of 'trauma' as a Greek word meaning 'wound:' the psychological becomes inextricably bound up with the corporeal in the representation and

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[373] Laurie Vickroy, *Trauma and Survival in Contemporary Fiction* (Charlottesville and London: Univeristy of Virginia Press, 2002), 32.
[374] Whitehead, *Trauma Fiction*, 55.
[375] Seltzer, *Serial Killers: Death and Life in America's Wound Culture*, 109.

working through of traumatic experiences. Such graphic depictions of the body, however,

become removed from the actual experience of trauma in that their meanings are externally,

rather than internally, constructed. A clear example of this can be found in the spectacle of the

body that dominates the television crime series *CSI*, in all three of its regional locations. In each

episode the body is displayed and investigated in intimate detail in order to uncover the crime

behind the individual's death. However, despite the detailed forensic evidence that is collected

from the body, the narratives of *CSI* do not seek to provide the body its own voice. As Janet

McCabe remarks while quoting Foucault: '*CSI* bodies speak volumes but they are only ever an

"effect and object of power, as an effect and object of knowledge" over which someone else has a

right to speak about them.'[376] Thus, the body as spectacle becomes removed from the experience

of trauma and is denied its own voice.

The alternative function of the body as witness is usefully illustrated by Jennifer Griffiths'

discussion of Gayle Jones's *Corregidora* and Maxine Hong Kingston's *The Woman Warrior*.

Griffiths observes how both novels feature a historical trauma within the family of the female

protagonist. In *Corregidora*, Ursa is forced to work-through the trauma of her great-

grandmother's rape as she suffers an injury that leaves her unable to bear her own children. For

Maxine in *The Woman Warrior*, the tragedy of her aunt's suicide and her subsequent erasure

from the family history is mirrored in her own vulnerability as a woman and an immigrant. For

Griffith, the inscription of trauma on the body is not just a matter of genetic inheritance but can

be understood as the result of a cultural 'scapegoat[ing of] the female body' which works to

displace anxieties surrounding female sexuality through established narratives and labels of

shame. Griffiths argues that the narratives of *Corregidora* and *The Woman Warrior* counter this

marginalisation of the traumatised female body and re-center it as the source of effective

testimony:

> In *Corregidora* and *The Woman Warrior*, Ursa and Maxine search for a language of
> implicit memory and for the place of the body in testimony. Part of the task of moving

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[376] Janet McCabe, "Mac's Melancholia: Scripting Trauma, 9/11 and Bodily Absence in *Csi: Ny*," in *Reading Csi: Crime Tv under the Microscope*, ed. Michael Allen (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2007), 175.

away from the false projection of cultural anxiety onto femininity entails acknowledging the actual bodily experience of trauma, or telling the body's story instead of inscribing a story onto the body. Ursa and Maxine use their bodies to construct an alternative testimony, identifying and differentiating the way in which the female body functions in narratives of crisis from the actual experience of that crisis. It is through this creation of a new form of testimony – one that acknowledges the body's voice and the changing complexity of the traumatic response as it resonates within new bodies and in new places – that traumatic repetition loses its paralyzing grip.[377]

By situating the body as the origin of testimony, rather than the subject of testimony, the narratives of the two novels move beyond the visual spectacle of representation and attempt to literally embody the experience of trauma.

As it is the latter of these two functions that seems to offer the more nuanced and effective form of testimony, it is perhaps surprising that the trauma aesthetic, which consistently seems to reject familiar or conventional modes of representation, is repeatedly drawn to the body as the subject of traumatic representation rather than the producer of traumatic testimony. For example, Oskar's self-harming in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, Keith's obsessive physiotherapy in *Falling Man* and the moment when Hank (*In the Valley of Elah*) cuts himself shaving as he grieves for his son can all be read as forms of 'acting out' as it is understood within the popular understanding of trauma. However, even though these representations of corporeality are not as nuanced as the other metaphors which structure the trauma aesthetic, their insistence on the importance of the corporeal body cannot be ignored. By positing a commonplace understanding of the body as a surface on which the corporeality of trauma is displayed, the trauma aesthetic establishes a baseline from which it can develop a more creative and effective response to 9/11. Furthermore, the recognition of the various familiar ways in which the traumatised body is presented in contemporary culture allows the trauma aesthetic to respond to the broadcast media which simultaneously displayed and marginalised the body in the wake of 9/11.

In the aftermath of the attacks the subject of the victims' bodies was highly controversial, as the censorship of the falling man evidences, and the visceral details of the events were largely

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[377] Jennifer Griffiths, "Uncanny Spaces: Trauma, Cultural Memory, and the Female Body in Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* and Maxine Hong Kingston's *the Woman Warrior*," *Studies in the Novel* 38, no. 3 (2006): 362.

ignored. Images of the so-called '9/11 Jumpers' were consigned to the depths of the internet and images of bodies or remains on the ground are entirely absent from the extensive archives of professional and amateur coverage of the events. There are some conflicting accounts regarding the existence of such images. For example, David Friend quotes *Time's* director of photography, Michele Stephenson, as saying that censorship played no part in the absence of visceral images, they simply didn't exist.[378] In contrast Barbie Zelizer states that staff at MSNBC made a conscious decision to 'push[ed] aside numerous pictures showing blood and body parts to find the more antiseptic images.'[379] Whether censorship was taking place on the ground, in the news room or was simply not required at all the debate over images of remains signals a tension between the visible and the invisible, the present and the absent.

The liminal status of the body in the aftermath of 9/11 has been discussed by scholars such as Laura Tanner and Patricia Yaeger as a defining characteristic of 9/11's traumatic affect. The problem posed by the total devastation of the attacks is put simply by Yaeger who asks 'how do we respond to trauma when the only thing left is "stuff"?'[380] Already a profound dilemma within a culture where rituals of mourning are centred around the sanctification and interment of a body, this is even further complicated by Tanner who questions how the nature of vicarious experience impacts the role of the body within the working-through of 9/11:

> Even as individual mourners struggle to comprehend the enormity of loss without the closure of a loved one's body, what role do bodies play in constructing and articulating the collective grief of Americans whose connection to the events of September 11 is mediated through physical distance and the space of representation?[381]

We can begin to see, therefore, that the problem of the body in the aftermath of 9/11 is not just an ethical one but is caught up in issues surrounding the nature of traumatic experience and its representation. I argue that the broadcast media coverage of 9/11 largely ignores these

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[378] Friend, *Watching the World Change*, 131.

[379] Barbie Zelizer, "The Voice of the Visual in Memory," in *Framing Public Memory*, ed. Kendall R. Phillips (Tuscaloosa, Alabama: The Univeristy of Alabama Press, 2004), 170.

[380] Yaeger, "Rubble as Archive, or 9/11 as Dust, Debris, and Bodily Vanishing," 188.

[381] Laura Tanner, *Lost Bodies: Inhabiting the Borders of Life and Death* (Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2006), 225.

complexities and instead works to erase the problem of the absent body through a series of displacements that seek to reconstruct alternative objects of mourning and sites of memory.

The first, and arguably most obvious, example of this displacement is the anthropomorphic construction of the destroyed twin towers which were described as a kind of 'phantom limb' that haunted the city.[382] As Marita Sturken notes, this had the effect of transferring the literal wound onto the skyline which was more accessible and representable than the wounded body.[383] Secondly, the process of collecting debris from Ground Zero and placing it in velvet bags and urns to be delivered to the families of victims attempts to negate the absence of the body by providing a physical substitute.[384] The inadequacy of this process is explicitly articulated by Oskar in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* when he expresses anger towards his mother's sentimentality towards his father's grave: "Dad isn't even there! ... His body was destroyed...It's just an empty box ... Just because Dad died, it doesn't mean you can be illogical, Mom."[385] Oskar's insistence on being logical indicates that rather than reinstating the corporeality of the lost body, the indiscriminate remains gathered at Ground Zero only serve to mask the trauma and violence of death with symbolic meaning. The third example I want to draw attention to is the Pulitzer Prize winning series of obituaries entitled 'Portraits of Grief' which were published in the *New York Times* in the weeks following the attacks. The very use of the term 'portrait' to describe this process of representation is indicative of a desire to make the body somehow visible. As Nancy K. Miller argues, the anecdotal style of the 'Portraits' allowed 'each minibiography [to become] a synecdoche for the lost whole.'[386] However, the use of sentimental narratives and idealised constructions of heroic identity which typically marked this process of memorialisation only served to further subsume them into the symbolic grand-narrative of cultural trauma.[387]

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[382] Diana Taylor quoted in Sturken, *Tourists of History*, 225.
[383] Ibid.
[384] See ibid., 164-65.
[385] Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, 169.
[386] Nancy K. Miller, ""Portraits of Grief": Telling Details and the Testimony of Trauma," *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 14, no. 3 (2003): 129.
[387] See Tanner, *Lost Bodies*, 227-29. See also Simpson, *9/11: The Culture of Commemoration*, 23.

By refusing to address the visceral nature of the human loss of 9/11, and by assimilating individual narratives of loss into a broader ideological narrative of the collective trauma, the broadcast media is unable to effectively represent the corporeality of the events. Despite this representational absence, the vicarious experience of 9/11 was an intensely corporeal one and it is by addressing this phenomenon that the trauma aesthetic achieves a more effective, and affective, form of representation. Chapter one outlined how the pervasion of trauma within contemporary culture presents trauma fiction with the additional challenge of representing something familiar and widely understood as something strange and incomprehensible (and therefore traumatic). This chapter argues that the body is used within the trauma aesthetic to deconstruct familiar notions of traumatic experience and develop a form of representation which speaks directly to the individual experience of trauma which can be interpreted in multiple ways. It does this by engaging with the questions of collective and vicarious experience posed by Tanner and by exploring the complex relationship between the body of the victim and the body of the witness.

In the first section I examine how texts such as *Falling Man*, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* foreground the body of the witness and the uncannily corporeal nature of vicarious experience. Drawing on the work of Jill Bennet, Roger Caillois and José Gil this section identifies how this corporeality is aligned with the sense of falling, disorientation and the transcendence of physical boundaries. This forms the basis for section two, 'Turn it into Living Tissue,' which examines in closer detail how the mechanisms of representation enable an embodied experience of trauma in the trauma aesthetic and the problematic role the body plays in the interpretation and representation of traumatic memory. Section three then explores the ways in which the trauma aesthetic approaches the spectacle of the body through the visceral and the corporeal. This final section argues that texts such as *A History of Violence*, *In the Valley of Elah* and *The Road* depict the body as kind of anti-spectacle in order to engage with the ethics of looking and the responsibility of bearing witness.

Babbette Rothschild's 'basic premise' of traumatic is: 'Trauma is a psychophysical experience, even when the traumatic event causes no direct bodily harm.'[388] It must be acknowledged, however, that while this is a widely accepted phenomenon amongst clinicians and theorists, the precise nature of this process of embodiment resists any fixed or formulaic understanding.[389] The problem posed by this potential for multiple variations in the somatisation of traumatic experience is further compounded by issues of analysis and representation. For example, Setha M. Low highlights the challenges that arise from 'the limitations of disciplinary techniques and epistemological traditions,' as well as the difficulties of observing and discussing the 'physical aspects of the sensing body' in any academic discussion of embodiment.[390] Both Rothschild and Low demonstrate how the representation of psychosomatic trauma is already a challenge due to the individual and, sometimes, abstract nature of our experience of our own bodies and the arbitrariness of the limited language available to articulate that experience. However, these theories are based on the representation of the direct bodily experience of trauma. Therefore, this challenge is magnified in the trauma aesthetic which seeks to represent the corporeality of an event of which the witness has no direct experience.

The problem of the body of the witness and its somatisation of mediated affect permeates the trauma aesthetic through the consistent depiction of the body in a state of what I term 'suspended sensation'. My use of this term draws on Jill Bennett's description of '*a body sustaining sensation'* which she sees as acting as an intermediary that 'impels the flows of translation' between inside and outside, self and other. Drawing in turn on the work of Edward

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[388] Rothschild, *The Body Remembers: The Psychophysiology of Trauma and Trauma Treatment*, 5.
[389] Rothschild highlights in the introduction to *The Body Remembers* that 'for better or worse, at least on the topics of trauma and memory, science seems to be a matter of opinion.' She then goes on to add that there are 'no clear-cut truths [are] to be found among these pages because they do not, yet exist.' ibid., xvi.
[390] Setha M. Low, "Embodied Metaphors: Nerves as Lived Experience," in *Embodiment and Experience: The Existential Ground of Culture and Self*, ed. Thomas J. Csordas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 139.

Casey, Bennett highlights how the '*body sustaining sensation*' is thus able to function as a decoder of external traumatic affect which could only otherwise be represented as metaphor.[391] It is with this 'capacity ... to translate metaphor'[392] that the body functions in the examples discussed below and my adaptation of Bennett's terminology is an effort to highlight the intensely spatial way in which corporeality is constructed in the trauma aesthetic. In chapters two and three I examined how metaphors of disorientation and placelessness worked to re-present the specificity of vicarious traumatic experience. In this present chapter it is the corporeal implications of such spatial configurations—a kind of suspension—which forms the focus of my analysis. In what follows I illustrate the various ways in which the body suspended in sensation is used to translate the spatial metaphors outlined in previous chapters into corporeal affect.

The trauma aesthetic's creative response to the corporeal sensation of vicarious trauma can be categorised as what French philosopher Roger Caillois identifies as *ilinx*. *Ilinx* is the fourth main type of game identified by Caillois in foundational work *Man, Play and Games.* Caillois uses *ilinx* to describe the kind of games which,

> are based on the pursuit of vertigo and which consist of an attempt to momentarily destroy the stability of perception and inflict a kind of voluptuous panic upon an otherwise lucid mind. In all cases, it is a question of surrendering to a kind of spasm, seizure, or shock which destroys reality with sovereign brusqueness.[393]

The language used in this conceptualisation of *ilinx* is echoed in the responses to 9/11 which emphasised the powerful immediacy of the mediated events, their ability to transfix the spectator in a state of shock and, as Žižek observes, their profound disruption of the boundaries between fantasy and reality. I must emphasise however, that by employing this theory I do not intend to categorise the spectatorship of 9/11 as a game but rather suggest, as Roger Silverstone does, that the concept of play, as it is defined by Caillois, is a useful 'tool for the analysis of media

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[391] Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, 77.original emphasis
[392] Ibid., 75.
[393] Roger Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, trans. Meyer Barash (Chicago and Urbana: The University of Illinois Press, 2001 (1958)), 23.

experience.'[394] Silverstone argues that, like games, processes of mediation create 'a space in which meanings are constructed through participation within a shared a structure space, a place ritually demarcated as being distinct from, and other than the ordinariness of everyday life.'[395] This spatialisation of mediated experience is precisely how the trauma aesthetic beings to interpret the experience of 9/11 and by using Caillois's theory of *ilinx* we can begin to see how certain characters' participation in these 'sites of play' is embodied as traumatic affect.

The relevance of Caillois' conceptualisation of *ilinx* is perhaps most strikingly illustrated by the image of the falling man which pervades the trauma aesthetic in various explicit and implicit ways. As an image of death falling man makes the spectator aware of their own survival and, thus, the continued presence of their body within the world. It is in this corporeal recognition that *ilinx* comes in to play. Firstly, the vicarious witness is subjected to a moment of speechless disorientation in which previously stable perceptions of the world around them and the relationship between sign and signifier are profoundly disrupted metaphorically producing a sense of vertigo analogous to that described by Caillois. Secondly, and more significantly in this context, the image of falling confronts the spectator with their own capacity to fall, and in turn the somatic sensations this would involve: a quickened heart rate, a gasp of breath, the force of gravity working against the body's upward drag (a sensation which has produced expressions such as "my heart went into my mouth").[396] This recognition may not, of course, always occur on a conscious level but I would argue that is nonetheless latent within the widely articulated sense of shock and disgust that dominated responses to the images of falling produced on and about 9/11.

The function of the body within the discourse of looking and not looking will be examined in detail in the following section. Here it suffices to observe that Caillois defines the experience of *ilinx* as simultaneously compelling and repelling in its total submission of the body in a kind of

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[394] Roger Silverstone, *Why Study the Media?* (London: Sage, 1999), 59.
[395] Ibid., 60.
[396] This particular sensation is illustrated by Oskar's use of the metaphor 'heavy boots' in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* which evokes the sense of a strong downward force which produces a sinking feeling in Oskar at moments of stress or unhappiness.

'visceral fear.'[397] This is evidenced, for Caillois, by the invention of the fairground ride which, despite its nausea inducing effects, draws people back again and again: 'the majority of [people], before even recovering, are already hastening to the ticket booth in order to buy the right to again experience the same pleasurable torture.'[398] It is interesting then to observe that in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* it is the experience of a rollercoaster ride that implicitly evokes the memory of 9/11 for Oskar.

> Obviously I'm incredibly panicky about roller coasters, but Abe convinced me to ride one with him. "It would be a shame to die without riding the Cyclone," he told me. "It would be a shame to die," I told him. "Yeah," he said, "but with the Cyclone you can choose." We sat in the front car, and Abe lifted his hands in the air on the downhill parts. I kept wondering if what I was feeling was at all like falling.
>
> In my head, I tried to calculate all of the forces that kept the car on the tracks and me in the car, There was gravity, obviously. And centrifugal force. And momentum. And the friction between the wheels and the tracks. And wind resistance, I think, or something. Dad used to teach me physics with crayons on paper tablecloths while we waited for our pancakes. He would have been able to explain everything.[399]

The alignment of Oskar's experience of the rollercoaster and 9/11 is only made implicitly through the reference to falling but it is the economy with which the affect of the vicarious experience of 9/11 is evoked that makes it so striking. Rather than offering a detailed metaphorical comparison, the significance of Oskar's embodied experience is contained within the single, simple sentence 'I kept wondering if what I was feeling was at all like failing.' The necessity of this is underscored by Oskar's attempt to rationalise, and make sense of, his experience by turning to the language of physics which only confuses him. As I have cited elsewhere, Caruth observes how referential language is unable to effectively represent the kinds of forces at work in Oskar's rollercoaster ride.[400] Therefore, it is not just a failure of knowledge that prevents Oskar from producing a neat scientific equation for his experience (if it is this at all), but a fundamental failure of language.

The specific use and critique of language in this passage thus suggests that it is only through Oskar's corporeal experience that he can begin to transcend the boundaries between his experience as a vicarious witness of falling and the experience of the falling victim. The moment

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[397] Caillois, *Man, Play and Games*, 26.
[398] Ibid., 26.
[399] Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, 147.
[400] See 102, this thesis.

of *ilinx* provided by the rollercoaster recreates the horror that is simultaneously captured and produced by the images of people falling from the World Trade Center and reminds Oskar of his grief over the loss of his father. This analogous relationship between the bodily experience of *ilinx* and the embodiment of spectatorship is further emphasised by the insertion of a full page photograph of a rollercoaster travelling almost vertically downwards with the people aboard raising their hands into the air, directly after the above passage. By reproducing an image of Oskar's experience, in the same way that it reproduces images of the falling man in the final pages, the novel seems to be attempting to provoke a bodily reaction from the reader: a moment of corporeal engagement with their own vicarious experience of 9/11 rather than an explanation of it.

The potential for the body to translate metaphors for trauma into a particular kind of corporeal sensation can also be identified throughout *Falling Man*. In one particular passage towards the end of the novel when Keith is spending increasing amounts of time at casinos, away from home, DeLillo describes an intensely corporeal scene in which Lianne and Keith lay awake at night.

> Words, their own, were not much more than sounds, airstream of shapeless breath, bodies speaking. There was a breeze if they were lucky but even in the damp heat on the top floor under a tar roof she kept the air conditioner off. He needed to feel real air, she said, in a real room, with thunder rumbling just above.
>
> On these nights it seemed to her that they were falling out of the world. This was not a form of erotic illusion. She was continuing to withdraw, but calmly, in control. He was self sequestered, as always, but with a spatial measure now, one of air miles and cities, a dimension of literal distance between himself and others.[401]

As in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close,* articulated language loses its meaning, becoming merely 'sounds' and 'shapeless breath.' Meaning is instead contained within (and between) the bodies of Lianne and Keith: it is through the bodily perception of the 'real air' and the 'real room' that they are able to acknowledge the traumatic impact of 9/11 on their already tense and troubled relationship. Again this traumatic affect is aligned with the experience of falling but it is here that the text inevitably moves away from an embodied encounter. That the body suspended

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[401] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 212.

in sensation becomes, through its literary inscription, a metaphor in and of itself reveals the limitations of trauma representation with which the trauma aesthetic is constantly trying to negotiate.

While this recourse to metaphor is problematic in the construction of an embodied experience of trauma it should not be seen as an outright failure of the trauma aesthetic. Drawing on José Gils *Metamorphoses of the Body* Jill Bennett asserts that 'the body's capacity to translate depends on a process of exfoliation in which it constitutes itself as it folds out into space, and enfolds what is, in some sense, outside, then it may at any point impose limits on these transactions – both physical and metaphorical. Or, indeed, limits of translation might suddenly become apparent when a boundary or limit point reveals itself to be in play.'[402] In both the examples cited above, language is presented as such a limitation: its reliance on the arbitrary relationship between sign and signifier inhibits the effective representation of embodied affect. The body suspended in sensation, then, cannot be seen as a fixed or constant figure within the experience or representation of trauma. Rather, the body is constantly shifting between affective and non-affective states.

The fragile state of the body suspended in sensation is registered in the trauma aesthetic through the continual acknowledgement and blurring of the kind of boundaries discussed by Bennett and Gil. Consider, for example, the following passage from *Falling Man*:

> After the first time they made love he was in the bathroom, at first light, and she got up to dress for her morning run but the pressed herself naked to the full-length mirror, face turned, hands raised to roughly head level. She pressed her body to the glass, eyes shut, and stayed for a long moment, nearly collapsed against the cool surface, abandoning herself to it. Then she put on her shorts and top and was lacing her shoes when he came out of the bathroom, clean-shaven, and saw the fogged marks of her face, hands, breasts and thighs stamped on the mirror.[403]

This paragraph follows a description of Lianne's obsession with the newspaper coverage of 9/11, specifically the profiles of the victims. Lianne recognises her consumption of the profiles as part of her responsibility as a witness –'not to read them, every one, was an offence, a violation of

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[402] Bennett, *Empathic Vision: Affect, Trauma, and Contemporary Art*, 76-77.
[403] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 106.

responsibility and trust'[404] – but it is also driven by a need to connect with the victims in some physical way. This internalisation of the connection between Lianne and the direct victims of the attacks is suggested by her inability to articulate what is, essentially, a form of desire. It is this desire which is played out in the paragraph above as Lianne experiments with, and begins to transcend her bodily boundaries. It is significant that this process of 'exfoliation,' to use Gil's terminology, is initiated by the act of making love which is also driven by internal desires and has cultural connotations of blending the boundaries between self and other. Once alone, Lianne presses her naked body against the mirror in what can be understood as a kind of Lacanian moment in reverse.

In his seminal work in the field of psychoanalysis Jacques Lacan identifies the child's recognition of his or her own mirror image as central to the formation of their sense of self as a unified whole and their relationship to the world around them, developing a mode of self-perception that continues to shape their experiences into adulthood. Central to this 'mirror-stage' is the establishment of 'a relationship between the organism and its reality--or, as they say, between the *Innenwelt* and the *Umwelt.*'[405] This recognition of the separation of the innerworld and the outerworld is quite the opposite of what occurs in Lianne's confrontation of her mirror image in the passage above. Instead, the mirror becomes a kind of liminal threshold which allows her to transcend her bodily boundaries and 'abandon' herself to the outerworld. The 'fogged marks' that are left on the mirror are evidence of this as they signal the kind of bodily fragmentation that Lacan sees the mirror-stage as working to overcome and it is through this fragmentation that Lianne achieves, even if only momentarily, a state of suspended sensation in which she is able to embody external affect.[406]

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[404] Ibid., 106.

[405] Jacques Lacan, "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the *I*," in *Ecrits* (London: Routledge, 1977 (1966)), 3.

[406] This rejection of Lacanian theory is also suggested in an earlier moment in the novel where Lianne looks at herself in the bathroom mirror and feels that the moment is somehow 'false,' like 'a scene in a movie when a character tries to understand what is going on in her life by looking in the mirror.' (47)

It should be noted however that the representation of fragmentation within the trauma aesthetic does not result in a definitive separation of the individual into various, disconnected parts. Rather, this process is perhaps better described by Gil's term 'exfoliation' which describes the body unfolding into external space and enfolding what is outside itself: a process of incorporation or amalgamation rather than separation.[407] This is illustrated in the passage above as Lianne does not leave a part of herself on the mirror so much as she becomes, simultaneously, both her physical self and the self represented by her mark on the mirror. A similar process can be identified in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* which presents the psyche as a series of spaces with unstable boundaries which Joel continually, and almost uncontrollably, slips through as he fights against the erasure of his memory. The spatial representation of Joel's mind is itself, a process of exfoliation as his psychological interior unfolds as external space. Furthermore, as Joel moves through the 'forever spinning ... wheels' of his psyche, he is forced to acknowledge (and enfold) the various versions of his self from different moments in his life. It is only through this process of exfoliation that Joel is able to confront the affect of his psychological trauma. It is also worth highlighting again, as I did in chapter three, that one of the key spaces of Joel's memory is the beach which is itself a site of the continuous ebb and flow of boundaries. In both these examples it would seem that the trauma aesthetic attempts to construct an alternative, and more affective, way of perceiving the world metaphorically that is able to account for the phenomenon of the corporeal experience of psychological trauma.

In keeping with Lacan's psychoanalytic theory Lakoff and Johnson observe how our experience of ourselves within the world, and our organization and articulation of the world around us is based on an understanding of the limits of the body: 'We are physical beings, bounded and set off from the rest of the world by the surface of our skins, and we experience the rest of the world as outside us. Each of us is a container, with a bounding surface and an in-out orientation. We project our own in-out orientation onto other physical objects that are bounded

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[407] José Gil, *Metamorphoses of the Body*, trans. Stephen Muecke (Minneapolis: University of Minesota Press, 1998 (1985)), 126.

by surfaces. Thus we also view them as containers with an inside.'[408] It is from this understanding that Lakoff and Johnson observe the construction of ontological metaphors which allow not only the self and external objects to be perceived as bounded entities but also work to contain more abstract concepts such as the visual field and emotional states. In both *Falling Man* and *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* however, the body in sensation transcends literal and metaphorical boundaries, fundamentally disrupting the organised, ontological framework of perception. As we have already seen, however, it is not possible to completely reject established familiar representational metaphors and still retain some kind of meaning. As a result the trauma aesthetic effectively turns metaphors inside out in order to draw attention to their arbitrariness and begin to explore the affective potential of an alternative mode of perception.

To clarify what I mean by this turning inside out of ontological metaphors, consider the following passage from *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close.* It is necessary to quote the novel at some length as the prose itself illustrates the blurring of boundaries between the body and the external world through its fluid style which is punctuated primarily by connective commas rather than terminating full stops. This passage begins mid-sentence as Oskar's grandfather Thomas describes how, from the beginning of his marriage to Oskar's grandmother, their lives were dictated by a series of rules and boundaries which began with the demarcation of a 'Nothing Place' in their bedroom.

> ... it worked so well that we decided to create a Nothing Place in the living room, it seemed necessary, because there are times when one needs to disappear while in the living room, and sometimes one simply wants to disappear, we made this zone slightly larger so that one of us could lie down in it, it was a rule that you never would look at the rectangle of space, it didn't exist, and when you were in it, neither did you, for a while that was enough, but only for a while, we required more rules, on our second anniversary we marked off the entire guest room as a Nothing Place, it seemed like a good idea at the time, sometimes a small patch at the foot of the bed or a rectangle in the living room isn't enough privacy, the side of the door that faced the guest room was Nothing, the side that faced the hallway was Something, the knob that connected them was neither Something nor Nothing. The walls of the hallway were Nothing, even the pictures need to disappear, especially pictures, but the hallway itself was Something, the bathtub was Nothing, the bathwater was Something, the hair on our bodies was Nothing, of course, but once it collected around the drain it was Something, we were trying to make our lives easier, trying, with all of our rules, to make life effortless. But friction began to arise between

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[408] Lakoff and Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By*, 29.

Nothing and Something, in the morning the Nothing vase cast a Something shadow, like the memory of someone you've lost, what can you say about that, at night the Nothing light from the guest room spilled under the Nothing door and stained the Something hallway, there's nothing to say.[409]

In this passage ontological metaphors still structure Thomas's experience of the world around him: the nothing spaces are literally marked out as containers. However, these spaces do not have a simple in-out orientation. Instead to be 'inside' a Nothing space is, paradoxically, to be absent, nowhere. This becomes problematic because the transition from Something to Nothing (and vice versa) is not as easily comprehended as the movement between inside and outside. This creates what Thomas describes as 'friction,' and causes what were previously conceived as fixed boundaries and sealed territories to become mutable and leaky. Interestingly, Thomas illustrates this experience with the example of the 'memory of someone you've lost' in which the shadow of that person and the traumatic experience of their loss continues to intrude into lived reality. This specific reference to grief and bodily loss emphasises the tension between absence and presence that marks the body suspended in sensation.

The significance of these depictions of bodies transcending boundaries in the context of the vicarious experience of 9/11 begins to be revealed by Anna Munster's discussion of 'embodiment in information aesthetics.' In *Materializing New Media* Munster argues that the development of new media has produced a world saturated in digital information which continually reconfigures the relationship between the body, materiality and the mediated image.[410] In contrast to theories of posthumanism Munster sees the body as in a continual process of differentiation and integration with both the material and virtual worlds in which it is situated and she illustrates this relationship with the concept of the fold which she describes thus: 'The fold in a piece of paper or fabric is both confluent and dissonant: it joins sides and marks the difference between them.'[411] Developing this definition further, Munster employs the

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[409] Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, 110.

[410] Anna Munster, *Materializing New Media: Embodiment in Information Aesthetics* (Hanover, New Hampshire: Dartmouth College Press, 2006), 184. Although Munster uses examples of interactive media such as virtual reality as the basis of her analysis, the vicarious affect of 9/11 arguably positions its mediation as an example of 'living through media' and invites a similar understanding of the process of its embodiment.

[411] Ibid., 31.

mathematical theory of the differential to argue that the concept of the fold represents 'the tendency to discount gaps – seamlessness and continuity – and the ongoing production of intervals or differences that underlies the making of seamless connections.'[412] The passage above is a very literal depiction of this process as the boundaries marked out by Tom and his wife form a series of physical folds, creating spaces which are both distinct and connected.

Throughout the novel it is traumatic events, including 9/11, which draw attention to these folds and make the characters aware of the troubling discontinuity of the world around them. For Oskar this is symbolised by his quest to find the lock which fits the key he found among his father's possessions. The key is a symbol of the many boundaries which divide space in our everyday lives. When planning how he will solve the mystery of the key Oskar calculates that there are approximately 162 million locks in New York City that it could belong to, making him implicitly aware of how disconnected seemingly 'ordinary' life is. Oskar links this image of disconnection with the loss of his father when he comments that 'the lock was between me and Dad.'[413] Significantly, however, the key also holds the possibility of transgressing these boundaries, creating a metaphor for the simultaneous possibilities for connection and disconnection that mirrors his grandfather's creation of 'non-places.' As Oskar explains, 'every time I left our apartment to go searching for the lock I felt a little lighter, because I was getting closer to Dad. But I also became a little heavier, because I was getting farther from Mom.'[414] This metaphor allows the novel to explore how traumatic events transform the experience of everyday life from seamless to chaotic and resists resolving the fragmented memory of trauma into linear narrative memory. Indeed, at the end of the novel Oskar discovers that the key was in his father's closet purely by accident and does not bring Oskar any closer to him: '"I found it and now I can't look for it ... looking for it let me stay close to him for a little while longer.""But won't you always be close to him?" I knew the truth. "No."'[415]

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[412] Ibid., 31-32.
[413] Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, 52.
[414] Ibid., 52.
[415] Ibid., 304.

The metaphor of the fold is also used in *Falling Man* during a passage where Lianne contemplates her perception of the world and how she distinguishes the ordinary from the extraordinary. Like Oskar and his grandfather, Lianne, becomes increasingly aware of the way in which people attempt to construct a comforting sense of continuity in their lives: 'But then she might be wrong about what was ordinary. Maybe nothing was. Maybe there was a deep fold in the grain of things, the way things pass through the mind, the way time swings in the mind, which is the only place it meaningfully exists.'[416] Echoing the metaphor of the wilderness discussed in the previous chapter this sense of timelessness points to how experience is grounded in the body and it is this process of embodiment in relation to the trauma of 9/11 to which I now turn.

Turn it into Living Tissue

Tanner suggests that an embodied encounter with the spaces and processes of mediation limits the individual's ability to make sense of a traumatic event such as 9/11. Borrowing Marianne Hirsch's example of a man who commissioned a tattoo of the collapsing twin towers on his body, Tanner highlights how responses to the visceral corporeality of 9/11 reproduce the trauma of representation rather than gaining any kind of access to the traumatising event itself. Comparing the tattoo with the formulaic 'Portraits of Grief' discussed above Tanner argues that 'the observer's attempt to penetrate the images of September 11 by drawing closer to the reality of corporeal loss is limited to an embodied encounter with the mechanisms of representation.'[417] This is an interesting observation that speaks to the sense of detachment and lack of agency which characterises the experience of 9/11 but it fails to make two key distinctions. The first of these is the distinction between different kinds of representation, specifically visual and literary. Although issues of representation have historically formed the foundation of trauma studies, the specificity of 9/11 as an intensely visual mediated event intensifies these concerns and raises new questions regarding the effectiveness and affectiveness of different modes and styles of

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[416] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 105.
[417] Tanner, *Lost Bodies*, 230.

representation. Consistently within the trauma aesthetic, visual modes and styles (even within the literary texts) offer more effective forms of representation by being less bound by the arbitrariness of language and somehow more closely aligned with the visual spectacle of 9/11. This distinction is lost in Tanner's evaluation of the (visual) tattoo and (literary) 'Portraits of Grief' as having equally limited access to the experience of trauma. Within the trauma aesthetic there is a persistent interrogation of different forms of mediation and representation that offers a more complex understanding of vicarious trauma and embodiment.

The potential for the mechanisms of mediation to enable the transmission and embodiment of affect is integral to a number of texts including *Falling Man*. When re-watching the television coverage of 9/11, Lianne experiences the knowledge of the many deaths as a 'deep pause' within her body.[418] Later in the novel she visits an exhibition of still-life artist Giorgio Morandi where she has a similar psychophysical experience which is described in more detail:

> She examined the drawings. She wasn't sure why she was looking so intently. She was passing beyond pleasure into some kind of assimilation. She was trying to absorb what she saw, take it home, wrap it around her, sleep in it. There was so much to see. Turn it into living tissue, who you are.[419]

Although Lianne's mediated experiences are not analogous to direct experience they are still able to evoke intense bodily reactions. This suggests, as I have observed elsewhere in this thesis, that while vicarious experience is distinct from direct experience it is nonetheless authentic. This question of authenticity raises a further problem with Tanner's summary of mediation and embodiment and that is the distinction between the kind of experience being represented and the kind of claim being made to the ownership of that experience.

The trauma aesthetic addresses the problem of ownership and authorship by placing the profound sense of vicarious trauma in relation to the direct experience of 9/11. Although direct experience is never positioned in definitive opposition to vicarious experience, there is recurring concern regarding the nature of vicarious experience and the appropriateness of describing it as a

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[418] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 134.
[419] Ibid., 210.

kind of trauma. For example, Lianne is troubled by her own traumatised reaction to the attacks, saying (almost confessing) to Keith that 'you were the one in the tower but I was the beserk.'[420] This does not dismiss Lianne's feelings as inauthentic or unethical, but instead signals a self-awareness within the trauma aesthetic of the particular kind of traumatic experienced being represented and the tools being used to produce that representation.

In the 'Portraits of Grief' the trauma of direct victims is narrativised for the vicarious witness. Although this narrative is constructed within a shared ideological framework there remains a clear segregation of direct and vicarious trauma. This in turn becomes a separation of the visceral and the virtual which, as we have seen, does not account for the mediated yet intensely corporeal experience of 9/11. In contrast the tattoo can be understood as a recreation of the vicarious witnesses' own experience of the events rather than an attempt to claim the trauma of the direct victims for themselves. This act embraces the limitations of representation as central to the individual's experience of trauma rather than trying to overcome or mask them. Thus, the tattoo acknowledges its relationship with the direct experience of trauma but does not attempt to substitute one with the other, revealing 9/11 as a complex matrix of individual experiences which are connected not only by shared cultural values but also by technologies of mediation. This contrast is perhaps most effectively summarised by the distinction made in chapter two between the representation *of* trauma and representation *as* trauma. In the first category the 'embodied encounter with the mechanisms of trauma' limits the understanding of the traumatic experience by creating an impassable distance between the individual and the traumatic event. In the second category this form of embodiment defines the experience and allows it to be transmitted and shared between individuals.

The latter model of representation *as* trauma, is illustrated in some detail through Lianne's experience of the Morandi exhibition. While at the gallery Lianne transforms the disembodied act of seeing into a kind of somatic witnessing which allows her to 'assimilate' and 'absorb' the representations she encounters. Although it is not as explicitly articulated, the same

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[420] Ibid., 215.

process of embodiment can be identified in Lianne's viewing of the television coverage and, significantly, during her encounter with the performance artist suspended above a railway line. While standing in the crowd watching the Falling Man's re-presentation of the trauma of 9/11 Lianne experiences and affect which belongs both to her individual, corporeal self, and to the crowd: 'This was too near and deep, too personal. All she wanted to share was a look, catch someone's eye, see what she herself was feeling.'[421] Here the collective nature of the experience not only serves to validate Lianne's individual trauma but allows the event to be experienced as traumatic in the first place. More focused on the other witnesses than the Falling Man himself Lianne bears witness to the act of witnessing itself and contemplates the intimacy of their shared experience.

The sense of the community that accompanies this process of embodied mediation brings to mind Merleau-Ponty's discussion of what he terms 'an intercorporeal being.' Merleau-Ponty posits that the body is in constant communication with other bodies and the surrounding environment in a way that allows for the transmission and communication of affect. Describing this concept in *The Visible and the Invisible* he writes:

> There is a circle of touched and the touching, the touched takes hold of the touching; there is a circle of the visible and the seeing, the seeing is not without visible existence; there is even an inscription of the touching in the visible, of the seeing in the tangible – and the converse; there is finally a propagation of these exchanges to all the bodies of the same type and of the same style which I see and touch – and this by virtue of the fundamental fission or segregation of the sentient and the sensible which, laterally, makes the organs of my body communicate and founds transivity from one body to another.[422]

In *Falling Man*, and indeed throughout the trauma aesthetic, the 'mechanisms of representation' work to literalise this concept of the intercorporeal, not only enabling aural communication but also the more visceral transference of traumatic affect. Thus, the trauma aesthetic's understanding of vicarious witnessing expands on the notion of an 'ethereal community' of media

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[421] Ibid., 163.
[422] Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwest University Press, 1968), 143.

users, which denotes 'airy' and 'impalpable',[423] presenting instead a collective which is united by something significantly more corporeal and even tangible.

It should be noted, however, that in foregrounding the intercorporeality of vicarious witnesses, the trauma aesthetic does not produce a clear or simple representation of mediated, collective trauma. Indeed, within the trauma aesthetic, it is possible to identify shifts between the kinds of limited and affective embodied encounters outlined above. *Falling Man* is a particularly clear example of this as the two central characters represent both the direct and vicarious experience of the attacks. Crucially, however, this complex layering of different forms of experience is not simply glossed over but is highlighted at certain moments in the narrative. For example, when Lianne attempts to work through the anger and frustration she feels towards her neighbour's Arabic music in the days immediately after the attacks she expresses the sense of having 'thoughts I can't identify, thoughts I can't claim as mine.'[424] Here Lianne is unable to resolve the separation between her own sense of being traumatised and the direct experience of the attacks. Her need to 'claim' certain traumatic thoughts suggests that she is unable to assimilate her psychological trauma with her experience of bodily affect: to claim them would make them a part of her corporeal self. This brief but poignant comment in the novel also marks a moment of self-reflexivity which adds another dimension to the matrix of experience and representation for we implicitly hear the voice of DeLillo as the author trying to lay claim to the trauma of 9/11. In this way the text demonstrates what Caruth describes as 'the paradox of [a] writing system [is] that [it] produces the human figure of the author in the very elimination of authorial referentiality. Precisely when the text appears most human, it is most mechanical.'[425] By drawing attention to this, texts such as *Falling Man* avoid a mimetic re-presentation of the vicarious, corporeal trauma of 9/11. Instead the trauma aesthetic preserves the abstract quality of trauma which is open to the nuances of individual experience and interpretation.

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[423] "Ethereal" Def. 1 and Def. 4""Annihilate"."
[424] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 125.
[425] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 82.

A more explicit example of how the role of the body emphasises the inherent paradox of trauma fiction can be found in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* where Oskar 'invents' a chemically treated shower that would allow people's skin to change colour depending on their mood.

> Everyone could know what everyone else felt, and we could be more careful with each other, because you'd never want to tell a person whose skin was purple that you're angry at her for being late, just like you would want to pat a pink person on the back and tell him, "Congratulations!" [426]

Other inventions include microphones that people could swallow so that you could play "the sounds of our hearts through little speakers," and "you could hear everyone's heart beat, and they could hear yours, sort of like sonar."[427] This particular narrative device has received considerable criticism for its simplistic and unsophisticated approach to the trauma of 9/11. For example, Ross G. Douthat for the *National Review* describes Oskar's inventions (along with several other of his quirky characteristics) as "whimsy with a sledgehammer."[428] Benjamin Markovits also uses the term "whimsy" in his review for the *New Statesman* and argues Foer's "adopted naivety highlights rather than obscures the holes in his storytelling."[429] For these, and a number of other reviewers, the 'mechanical' metaphors of embodiment stand out as contrived and lacking in the kind of nuance that is required of an effective post-9/11 text. However, rather than evidencing an outright failure of the trauma aesthetic, the more familiar and simplistic evocations of the body in Foer's novel present the body as a site where issues of representation become most visible.

Oskar's fantastical imagination signals the impossibility of truly representing or understanding the phenomenon of a trauma which is experienced on both an individual and collective level. His childlike desire to simplify the way in which people interact with one another emotionally, resonates with the complexities of understanding the psychological impact of a collective trauma such as 9/11: there is a problem of how to negotiate between the symbolic trauma 'felt' by the social body and the psychological affect experienced by the private, individual

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[426] Foer, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, 163.
[427] Ibid., 1.
[428] Ross G. Douthat, "After Tragedy," *National Review* 57, no. 11 (2005): 49.
[429] Benjamin Markovits, "The Horrors of History," *New Statesman* 134, no. 4743 (2005): 50.

body. The difference between the experience of individual and collective trauma is discussed by

Arthur Neal who notes how variations in the communication of trauma typically result in

contrasting experiences of alienation and intimacy:

> Communication patterns associated with trauma at the individual level differ from communication patterns associated with trauma at the national level. At the individual level, there is particularly a reluctance to communicate negative information to the persons that are affected by it ...
>
> In contrast, news of a national trauma tends to be communicated very rapidly...in this respect national traumas tend to have cohesive effects within interpersonal networks in ways in which trauma of a highly personal nature do not.[430]

Neal suggests that the language of affect is central to establishment of a link between the

'psychological and psychocultural levels'[431] of a trauma and from this emerges a set of established

'modes of coping [which form a] part of everyone's experience.'[432] However, as I have argued

throughout this thesis, the reliance on a shared system of language and signs often results in an

oversimplified understanding of the traumatic event which, as Neal suggests, 'overlooks the

intricacies and complications of human tragedy, while providing for an immediate resolution of an

encounter with chaos.'[433] Oskar's invention is an example of this kind of language that moves the

individual away from the corporeality of their personal trauma and diluting them into the

ideological framework of a collective psyche. The result is a dissonance between the individual

and collective experience of trauma which is expressed by Lianne in *Falling Man* during a public

march to mark the birthday of the late Jazz musician Charlie Parker:

> These three years past, since that day in September, all life had become public. The stricken community pours forth voices and the solitary night mind is shaped by the outcry. She was content in the small guarded scheme she'd lately constructed, arranging the days, working the details, staying down, keeping out. Cut free from rage and foreboding. Cut free from nights that sprawl through the endless waking chains of self-hell. She was marching apart from the handheld slogans and cardboard coffins, the mounted police, the anarchists throwing bottles. It was all choreography, to be shredded in seconds.[434]

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[430] Arthur G. Neal, *National Trauma and Collective Memory: Extraordinary Events in the American Experience* (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, 2005), 13.
[431] Ibid., 41.
[432] Ibid., 47.
[433] Ibid., 17.
[434] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 182.

In this passage Lianne is unable to find comfort or a sense of cohesiveness within the collective outpouring of grief at the march. Instead, she remains somehow alienated from the people around her and sees the framework of cultural trauma as artificial and fragile. Like Oskar's inventions, the placards, police presence and violent expressions of anger have only arbitrary functions and are, therefore, impotent forms of 'acting out.'

A similar feeling is expressed (although perhaps unconsciously) in the mirror monologue scene of *25th Hour* during which Monty unleashes a tirade of verbal abuse against the 'melting pot' of New York. During the sequence which runs to just over five minutes, Monty attacks various cultural groups represented in New York, paying particular attention to the ways in which their ethnicity, sexuality, religion, political and social standing are written on, and expressed through their bodies. For example, he lambasts the 'Chelsea boys' with their 'waxed chests and pumped-up biceps ... jiggling their dicks on my channel 35.' Social and cultural notions of beauty and style are also highlighted through the references to the Italians with their 'pomaded hair,' and the 'Upper East Side wives' with their 'overfed faces getting lifted and stretched all taught and shiny.' Monty then gives examples of the ways in which certain identities are constructed around the violation and wounding of bodies through references to the police and their 'anus violating plungers,' priests who 'put their hands down the pants of innocent young boys,' and perhaps the most familiar image of the wounded body in western culture, the crucifixion. Monty even offers a reference to his own embodiment of Irish identity in his invitation to kiss his 'royal Irish ass.' These verbal references are supported by the accompanying montage which is dominated by facial close-ups which, as David MacDougall suggests, offer a kind of 'quasi-tactility'[435] to the image, emphasising the corporeality of cultural and ethnic identity. Furthermore, by drawing on the capacity of the face to function as 'a receptacle for our feelings about the body as a whole'[436] this sequence illustrates the ways in which the body can become the locus for various racial and cultural stereotypes.

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[435] David MacDougall, *The Corporeal Image: Film, Ethnography, and the Senses* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), 22.
[436] Ibid., 22.

Monty's "fuck you" monologue has received mixed reviews from critics and this in itself points to the problem of the body as a medium of representation. Patricia O'Neill suggests that, in spite of the anger Monty directs towards New Yorkers, his ultimate affiliation with them serves to illustrate an intersection between the global and the local that begins to address 'questions of responsibility and fate.'[437] Amy Taubin, by contrast, describes the sequence's use of close-ups as 'crude' and 'confusing': 'If the meaning of the scene is that no matter how hard Monty tries to blame his predicament on everyone else in the world, he can't escape his own reflection, then why does Lee show us all these cutaways and from what point of view are we seeing them?'[438] This returns us to the question of laying claim, or having ownership of a traumatic experience raised at the beginning of this section. The ambiguous perspective of the montage in *25th Hour*, and the confusion between personal and collective trauma in texts such as *Falling Man* and *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* suggest an uneasiness, or at least an uncertainty, as to whose trauma is being communicated and to whom. This in turn raises a number of questions regarding the ethics of representation and the authenticity of traumatic memory: Can one trauma be directly aligned with another without compromising its specificity? Is it acceptable to investigate the intimate personal trauma of another in order to understand one's own sense of traumatisation? If an event is experienced both directly and vicariously, as 9/11 was, to whom does the trauma ultimately belong? Where does one draw the boundaries between 'my' trauma, 'your' trauma and 'our' trauma?

These questions, to an extent, can be summarised as a problem of 'appropriation'; the use of a historical memory by a group or individual who has no direct connection to that memory. Discussing the ways in which Holocaust narratives been appropriated by different social groups at different moments throughout the last 50 years, Arlene Stein argues that the process of appropriation is inevitable in order to sustain a trans-historical memory of its atrocities. It is

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[437] O'Neill, "Where Globalization and Localization Meet," 5.
[438] Taubin, "Going Down," 15.

important to remember however, that 'all acts of appropriation are not equivalent;'[439] there is always the potential for such an act to 'trivialise' the impact of the original traumatising event by creating a universal narrative which 'undercuts the specificity and uniqueness' of an event such as the Holocaust.[440] Although those vicariously affected by the events of 9/11 can claim what might be thought of as a 'legitimate' connection to the attacks (i.e they watched it in real time) there remains, as we have seen, a troubling sense of distance and detachment from the event itself which problematises any claim to ownership of its traumatic memory. In order to make sense of this, the narrativisation of vicarious experience must always, somehow, incorporate the trauma of the direct victim (as *Falling Man* does through the character of Keith). This becomes problematic for, as Stein asserts, 'if everyone is a victim, then no one is.'[441]

Within the examples cited above from *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* and *25th Hour* the body functions as part of a system of visual signs which, as we have seen in previous discussion of the representational potential of language, moves away from the affective experience of trauma. In Foucauldian terms, the body gets absorbed into the same familiar frameworks of cultural and social memory that the trauma aesthetic attempts to deconstruct. This contrasts with the examples discussed earlier in this chapter where the body is depicted as the medium through which affect is experienced and translated. This apparent contradiction demonstrates how the embodiment of cultural experience and memory is, to adopt a phrase from Rafael Narvaez, 'a *structure of possibilities*,' which can 'vary in terms of oppressiveness or usefulness, or anomie or altruism.'[442] Expanding this point Narvaez outlines three main possibilities for cultural embodiment. Firstly, there is the possibility that 'the past manages to grow a strong grip upon embodiment so that unfair spectres of tradition will thus have an incarnate presence in the body and this become organically present in life.' In contrast to this, embodiment could 'carry the good virtues of the polis, so that cherished shared principles

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[439] Arlene Stein, *Shameless: Sexual Dissidence in American Culture* (New York and London: New York University Press, 2006), 130.
[440] Ibid., 148.
[441] Ibid., 149.
[442] Rafael F. Narvaez, "Embodiment, Collective Memory and Time," *Body and Society* 12, no. 4 (2006): 66, original emphasis.

become transubstantiated in us and in the body polity.' Finally, there is the possibility that 'social actors will overturn predominant forms of embodiment ... so that the new is thus called forth.'[443]

The broadcast media's reaction to the events of 9/11 sits precariously between the first two of these possibilities: the use of historical narrative tropes such as the Western served to reinforce a sense of national identity and unity at an intensely traumatic moment but in so doing excluded and demonised certain people based on particular cultural and racial stereotypes. Through its rejection of such simplistic constructions of embodied identity, it would perhaps follow that the trauma aesthetic would attempt to bring about the third possibility of a new, alternative form of embodiment. However, as we have seen, the trauma aesthetic repeatedly falls back on representations of the body which are ideologically coded and are unable to present a stable, effective form of embodiment. The body, then, functions within a fourth, liminal category, where it is at once powerful and powerless, meaningful and meaningless. In *Falling Man* this is illustrated through the ontology of the photographic image.

In the following passage Lianne's mother Nina and her boyfriend Martin discuss the relationship between the experience of the self, the image of the self and the socio-cultural inscription of the self.

"I look at the face in the passport photo. Who is that woman?"

"I lift my head from the washbasin," Martin said.

"Who is that man? You think you see yourself in the mirror. But that's not you. That's not what you look like. That's not the literal face, if there is such a thing, ever. That's the composite face. That's the face in transition."

"Don't tell me this."

"What you see is not what we see. What you see is distracted by memory, by being who you are, all this time, for all these years."

"I don't want to hear this," he said.

"What we see is the living truth. The mirror softens the effect by submerging the actual face. You face is your life. But your face is also submerged in your life. That's why you don't see it. Only other people see it. And the camera of course."[444]

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[443] Ibid., 68-69.
[444] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 114-15.

Here the liminal status of the body is made explicit through Nina's description of 'the face in transition.' Martin is unsettled by the suggestion that the image he sees in the mirror is not himself, or at least not the self that others see and Nina even goes so far as to suggest that a literal self may not even exist. The threat this poses to his experience and understanding of himself and the world around him is traumatic for, how is he to construct an identity if he is unable to effectively bear witness to his own body?

Nina's understanding of the corporeal image of the self is analogous to the performative aspect of collective memory which Narvaez illustrates with the Latin verb *'per-sonare,* "to speak through a mask", a mask that is given by a collective past and performed individually in the present, a mask that is thus present and past individual and collective, unique and common.'[445] The historical narrative that accompanies Martin's self-image distorts his perception of it creating a disjuncture which mirrors the tension between the individual and collective experience of trauma.

Significantly, Nina adds that the camera has the ability to set the individual free from the interpretive framework of memory, ideology and history, an idea which is explored further when Lianne describes her fascination with Martin's collection of old passport photographs that are hung in her mother's apartment:

> Pictures snapped anonymously, images rendered by machine. There was something in the premeditation of these photographs, the bureaucratic intent, the straightforward poses that brought her paradoxically into the lives of the subjects. Maybe what she saw was human ordeal set against the rigor of the state. She saw people fleeing, there to here, with the darkest hardship pressing the edges of the frame. Thumbprints, emblems with tilted crosses, man with handlebar moustache, girls in braids. She thought she was probably inventing context. She didn't know anything about the people in the photographs. She only knew the photographs. This is where she found innocence and vulnerability, in the nature of old passports, in the deep texture of the past itself, people on long journeys, people now dead. Such beauty in faded lives, she thought, in images, languages, signatures, stamped advisories.[446]

In this passage we see the inevitability of the inscription of historical narrative and ideology on the body. Adopting a similar theory to Walter Benjamin in 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical

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[445] Narvaez, "Embodiment, Collective Memory and Time," 54.
[446] DeLillo, *Falling Man*, 142.

Reproduction,' DeLillo suggests that the technology of their production has rendered the images neutral.[447] Lianne substitutes this neutrality by 'inventing context'—identities, relationships, motivations—which allow them to become affective.

The Frailty of Everything Revealed at Last

Thus far this chapter has focused primarily on representations of the body that are intensely corporeal but also, in one way or another, 'clean' or cerebral. Although they attempt to understand 9/11 as a profoundly visceral experience, these texts do not directly address the violent and horrific image of the body that haunts any contemplation of the attacks and their aftermath. Within the trauma aesthetic there are a number of examples of dead, sick and injured bodies which speak to this preoccupation with the visceral more explicitly. Several of these have been discussed in slightly different contexts in earlier chapters such as Oskar's narration of the horrific injuries suffered by the citizens of Hiroshima and the beheading of Titus broadcast on the internet. Both Foer and Auster's novel feature a protagonist who displays what would generally be classed as abnormal affect in response to violent situations: Oskar is undisturbed by the description of torn and broken bodies which upsets his classmates and August is so consumed by violent thoughts that he imagines his own violent death. The centrality of these characters to their respective narratives foregrounds, and begins to question, the ways in which violence is represented and understood in society. Where violence is typically regarded as socially unacceptable and something to be controlled or erased the trauma aesthetic begins to explore the desire, and even necessity for violence. As we shall see, this has a significant impact on the ways in which the body, specifically the wounded body and the corpse is represented within these texts. By disrupting the representational codes associated with violence established notions of what these bodies mean, and what it means to witness them, also become disrupted.

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[447] I am thinking here of Benjamin's assertion that 'that which withers in the age of mechanical reproduction is the aura of the work of art.' (794)

The role of violence within society and the ways in which it is manifested in and displayed upon the body is a central theme of *Man in the Dark*. The novel is described by Jesús Ángel González as 'a deep critique of the logic of war and violence' developed through a complex 'hypodiegetic' narrative comprising three central strands each narrated by August Brill.[448] For clarity it is useful to distinguish between these strands on the basis of their temporality and for this reason I shall refer to them as 'the present', 'the past', and 'the imaginary'. In the present August is an elderly man living with his daughter Miriam and granddaughter Katya after being injured in a car accident. As a distraction from the pain he still suffers in his damaged leg August spends sleepless nights narrating the past—primarily the story of his troubled relationship with his late wife—and the imaginary. The central character of this third narrative strand is Owen Brick, a magician from New York who wakes up in a hole in the ground wearing a military uniform. When Owen makes it out of the hole he discovers he is in an alternative America where Al Gore won the 2000 Presidential election, 9/11 never happened and the country is now in a state of civil war. These narrative strands alternate throughout the novel but a further level of complexity is added when Owen discovers that his alternative America is being written in the mind of a man called August Brill and it is his mission to assassinate him in order to bring an end to the war.

The narrative complexity of *Man in the Dark* rejects any possibility of a fixed reality and instead creates a matrix consisting of multiple realities each able to influence, and be influenced by, each other. In order to understand how the novel interweaves different realities it is worth revisiting the passage discussed in chapter three where the man who claims to be Owen's commanding officer explains this to him: 'there are many realities. There is no single world. There are many worlds, and they all run parallel to one another, worlds and anti-worlds, worlds and shadow-worlds, and each world is dreamed or imagined or written by someone in another world. Each world is the creation of a mind.'[449] González draws on Rimmon-Kenan's theory of concentric

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[448] Jesús Ángel González, "'Another History': Alternative Americas in Paul Auster's Fiction," *Comparative American Studies* 9(2011): 30.
[449] Auster, *Man in the Dark*, 69.

narratives to identifiy the 'explicative' function of the past and imaginary narratives.[450] However, it is important to note that this layering and overlapping of different realities is not merely an elaborate literary device used to mirror and illuminate August's troubled psyche. In addition to this it offers a much broader commentary on the social construction of violence and the role this plays in the experience and interpretation of trauma.

To understand this commentary in greater detail it is useful to consider Robin Fox's discussion of the way in which violence is typically framed as a social problem. For Fox, this understanding ignores the fact that violence is a natural part of human behaviour and displaces it from the underlying issues to which it is a response. Instead, Fox asserts that 'the problem is not in any way one of violence, but one of imagination.'[451] It is this perspective which is adopted in *Man in the Dark*, as is evidenced in a short passage following August's memory of his witnessing the Newark race riots in 1967: 'That was my war. Not a real war, perhaps, but once you witness violence on that scale, it isn't difficult to imagine something worse, and once your mind is capable of doing that, you understand that the worst possibilities of the imagination are the country you live in. Just think it, and chances are it will happen.'[452] Significantly, throughout the novel the scale of violence is measured by the visibility of wounded bodies. August's experience of the race riots is centred on the wounded prisoners he visits, 'blood trickling from their heads, their faces swollen.'[453] The spectacle of the wounded body is also presented in the murder of Owen who is shot through the eye, and the graphic beheading of Titus. At these moments, both August and the reader are confronted with the devastating potential of violent imaginations. Throughout the novel the wounded body symbolises the inevitable failure of political causes which justify the systematic use of violence, a perspective which is poetically captured in August's description of 'the weird world, the battered world, the weird world rolling on as wars flame all around us: the

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[450] González, "'Another History': Alternative Americas in Paul Auster's Fiction," 31.
[451] Robin Fox, *The Search for Society: Quest for a Biosocial Science and Morality* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1989), 134.
[452] Auster, *Man in the Dark*, 82.
[453] Ibid., 81.

chopped-off arms in Africa, the chopped-off heads in Iraq, and in my own head this other war, an imaginary war on home ground, America cracking apart, the noble experiment finally dead.'[454]

Like the body of the witness, the wounded body becomes a site of conflict between systems of representation. With the wounded body this is specifically a conflict between the ideological coding of the victim and the perpetrator of violence. August himself is symbolic of this tension between victim and villain. He bares the physical wounds of a car accident and the psychological scars of events in his past. However, it is difficult to sympathise with August as he narrates his autobiography and recounts his infidelities and the abandonment of his wife; the emotional impact of which is reflected back to him by his daughter Miriam who was similarly abandoned. August also reveals how Katya is devastated by the death of her former boyfriend Titus in large part because she feels responsible for him going to Iraq in the first place. Emphasising again the visceral quality of suffering the family are described as 'grieving, wounded souls,'[455] but they are also all guilty souls. Consequently the novel takes on what reviewer Tom LeClair describes as 'a flat, chronicling style,' which 'discourage[s] emotional engagement from anyone not a blood relative.'[456] This flatness and lack of narrative affect is most notable in the presentation of violence throughout the novel.

Reflecting on his choice of ending for Owen's story August is unapologetic, commenting that 'it wouldn't be difficult to think of a less brutal outcome. But what would be the point? My subject tonight is war, and now that war has entered this house, I feel I would be insulting Titus and Katya if I softened the blow. Peace on earth, good will toward men. Piss on earth, good will toward none.'[457] August does not feel the need to justify his (imagined) use of violence beyond the fact that his world is already filled with violence and suffering. This brings into question the ideologies which we use to differentiate between the victim and the perpetrator of violence, adopting a similar position to Fox who stresses that justification should not be an issue when it

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[454] Ibid., 49.
[455] Ibid., 71.
[456] Tom LeClair, "Sleepless in Vermont," *The New York Times* 2008, n. pg.
[457] Auster, *Man in the Dark*, 118.

comes to the interpretation of violence for 'this is part of the elaborate symbol system. To some people violence is never justified. But this is nothing to do with violence. This is to do with schemes of abstract ideas.'[458] With this in mind it is worth considering again the moral framing of Tom's violent behaviour in *A History of Violence*. At the beginning of the film when he is believed to be an upstanding member of the community protecting his customers he is labelled a hero when he kills Billy and Leland. Later, as questions regarding his true identity begin to emerge and he kills two of Fogharty's men when they visit his home, his family begin to question both his morality and his justification. Significantly however, as Amy Taubin observes, the cinematography does not isolate the violent action sequences from the rest of the narrative by using the same 27mm lens to shoot the whole film.[459] As a result the graphic images of the murders in the opening sequence, of Leland with half his face blown off gurgling his last breaths on the floor of Tom's diner, of Fogarty's brains being blown out and splattering all over Tom, of Tom's skilled and brutal killing of his old associates and his own brother, take on the same 'flat' aesthetic of Auster's novel. By avoiding making a spectacle of violence as something unequivocally wrong, these texts also begin to question what is right.

The implication of the narrative and visual styles of *Man in the Dark* and *A History of Violence* is more explicitly articulated in the opening sequence of *25th Hour*. While the Touchstone Pictures logo is still on the screen the sounds of a dog barking and being severely beaten can be heard. The film then begins with a car driving through a deserted area of New York at night. The car stops and reverses then Monty and his associate Kostya get out to inspect the limp and bloodied body of a dog laying by the road in a pile of rubbish. Realising that the dog is still alive Monty asks Kostya for his gun so that he can put the dog out of its misery. Kostya doesn't want to get involved but Monty is insistent, arguing that 'they left him out here to suffer and die like that. They throw him out the fucking window and just kept on driving.' Monty then approaches the dog who bares his teeth, snapping and growling. Kostya sees this as a further reason to leave the dog alone but Monty then decides that the dog has 'got a lotta bite left in him' and should be allowed

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458 Fox, *The Search for Society: Quest for a Biosocial Science and Morality*, 139.
459 Taubin, "Model Citizens," 28.

to live. Still trying to persuade Kostya, who thinks the dog is simply dangerous and not worth their trouble, Monty argues that his aggressiveness is a sign of strength and resilience: 'He's a good dog, I can see it in his eyes. Look at him, he wasn't lying down for nobody.'

In this opening scene Monty and Kostya demonstrate how different frames of reference are able to produce opposing interpretations of the same image or event, blurring the boundaries between good and evil and setting the scene for Monty's own moral evaluation. Later in the film Monty says that saving Doyle's life was the best thing he ever did because 'every day that he [Doyle] has had since, that's because of me.' The kindness and empathy that Monty shows towards Doyle is juxtaposed with his career as a drug dealer that has damaged the lives of many: as a character he simultaneously signifies good and bad. At the end of the film this tension between good and bad, right and wrong becomes so intense that it is literally acted out on Monty's body. Before Monty leaves for prison he asks his friend Slaughtery to 'make him ugly,' arguing that if he goes to prison with his 'pretty boy face' he will not survive. Slaughtery refuses but Monty tells him that it will prove his friendship and goads him by saying that he has probably always wanted to hit him anyway. After a relatively brief argument Slaughtery punches Monty in the face, leaving him sprawled on the floor. He then continues to punch him, crying and screaming until Jacob tells him to stop. This scene is unsettling because it uses editing and framing to illustrate what Scarry terms 'the complete fluidity of referential direction' that characterises the wounded body.[460]

The scene comprises a combination of close-ups and mid-distance shots. In the latter, the scene is framed within the shadows of the stone arch under which the fight takes place. In these shots the violence is removed from its narrative complexity. As a result the dominant ideology is the only frame of reference for the viewer and the scene becomes, even if only momentarily, a vicious assault of one man by another. In contrast, the close-ups reveal the emotional pain displayed on Slaughtery's face, bringing in to question his categorisation as the villain. However, this is not just a case of simple misinterpretation for although Slaughtery claims to be reluctant

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[460] Scarry, *The Body in Pain*, 115.

the strength he uses suggests that Monty wasn't completely wrong about him being able to fulfil a long held desire. Furthermore, Slaughtery delivers another punch after Jacob tells him to stop and raises his fist to deliver another before he is pulled off his friend. Meanwhile Monty lies passively on the ground as if receiving a punishment that at least begins to atone for his sins.

Within the trauma aesthetic, then, the visibly wounded body is not simply a marker of a victimised identity and does not construct a clear opposition between the victim and the perpetrator of violence. Instead it highlights trauma's lack of referentiality and the responsibility of the witness who must undertake the task of interpretation. This is no more apparent than in the trauma aesthetic's use of the corpse. In both *The Road* and *In the Valley of Elah* the corpse plays a central role in the representation and interpretation of trauma. This is somewhat surprising in texts which respond to an event which is marked by the absence of human remains and could potentially be read as an attempt to reinstate the lost bodies of 9/11 and provide a site for the rituals of mourning and the working through of trauma. However, these texts do not approach the corpse as full of meaning or explanation but rather as a symbol of emptiness, absence and meaninglessness. Indeed, the many corpses depicted in *The Road* have denied the ritual of burial which would offer some kind of therapeutic experience. Similarly, the unrecognisable remains of Mike Deerfield do not offer his mother an effective object on which to project the memory of her lost son. This contributes to a framing of the corpse as abject.

In *Powers of Horror* Julia Kristeva posits that 'the corpse, seen without God and outside of science, is the utmost of abjection ... Imaginary uncanniness and real threat, it beckons to us and ends up engulfing us.'[461] This function of the corpse is evidenced throughout *The Road*. Consider, for example, the following images: 'A corpse in a doorway dried to leather. Grimacing at the day;'[462] 'The mummied dead were everywhere. The flesh cloven along the bones, the ligaments dried to tug and taught as wires. Shrivelled and drawn like latterday bogfolk, their faces of boiled

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[461] Julia Kristeva, *Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 4.
[462] McCarthy, *The Road*, 11.

sheeting, the yellow palings of their teeth;'[463] 'Human bodies sprawled in every attitude. Dried

and shrunken in their rotted clothes;'[464] 'In the first bedroom a dried corpse with the covers about

its neck. Remnants of rotted hair on the pillow;'[465] 'A corpse floating in the black water of a

basement among the trash and rusting ductwork;'[466] 'A man sat on his porch in coveralls dead for

years. He looked a straw man set out to announce some holiday;'[467] 'Inside the barn three bodies

hanging from the rafters, dried and dusty amongst the wan slats of light.'[468] For the man and his

son these corpses are a constant reminder of their struggle for survival. In addition, uncanniness

that is created by the recognition of their own mortality is emphasised by the quotidian situations

in which some of the corpses are discovered. As Douglas James Davies outlines, rituals which

involve the open display of a corpse position it on 'the margins of human life,'[469] thus, the corpses

in *The Road* which are almost life-like in appearance most dramatically symbolise the threat of

death. This blurring of the boundary between life and death is also extended into the descriptions

of the man and boy's living bodies which are themselves almost corpse-like.[470]

It is important to note, however, that the abject corpse of the trauma aesthetic is also, to

an extent, banal. While Kristeva describes the abject as something which engenders revulsion and

horror, the images of death and decay which pervade *The Road* are presented with a matter-of-

fact tone. In the same way that *A History of Violence* avoids isolating the spectacle of violence

from the rest of the narrative, *The Road* does not dwell on the kinds of images cited above. The

novel also makes a number of references to how such images have become a normal part of the

landscape. For example, when confronted with a corpse floating in the sea close to the shore, the

man 'wished he could hide it from the boy but the boy was right. What was there to hide?'[471] This

is in line with Mirzoeff's suggestion that images of death and violence become banal through their

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463 Ibid., 23.
464 Ibid., 48.
465 Ibid., 84.
466 Ibid., 137-38.
467 Ibid.
468 Ibid., 66.
469 Douglas James Davies, *Death, Ritual and Belief: The Rhetoric of Funerary Rites* (London and New York: Continuum, 1997 (2002)), 26.
470 For example, 'ghostly pale and shivering. The boy so thin it stopped his hear.' McCarthy, *The Road*, 39.
471 Ibid., 253.

sheer proliferation within visual culture, resulting in the active witness being replaced by a passive observer. However, there is a persistent sense that the banality of images of death is the result of an active choice made by the witness. For example, after saving his son from an attacker the man tells himself 'this is my child ... I wash a dead man's brains out of his hair. That is my job.'[472] Almost a chant, this indicates that it is his responsibility to sanitise the horror of their situation in order to survive.

Within the trauma aesthetic, then, the symbolism of the corpse is not fixed but shifts between the abject and the banal. In order to fully understand the responsibility this places on the witness it is useful to consider Anne Cubilé and Carl Good's discussion of the cultural symbolism of the corpse:

> As opposed to testimony that is based on rhetorical effect, on the one hand, and community/communal discourse on the other, the corpse is a cipher that places the burden of interpretation on its viewers. The corpse thus plays a very different kind of witness as a text, one that is heavily weighted as bearer of documentary truth, and its burden in this sense easily overwhelms any other historical relationship it might witness of quotidian life and daily existence.[473]

Cubilé and Good posit that there are potential alternatives to this if one approaches the body, not as an overdetermined figure, but as a member of the human, a different effect might result. Two particularly striking examples of this can be found in *The Road* and *In the Valley of Elah* in which both father protagonists are confronted with the image of their son laid out on an autopsy table. In *The Road* this experience occurs as a nightmare in which 'he'd seen the boy in a dream laid out upon a coolingboard and woke in horror. What he could bear in the waking world he could not by night and he sat awake for fear the dream would return.'[474] The recognition of his own son forces the man to see the corpse as 'a member of the human'[475] as opposed to reducing it to a series of cultural signs.

The challenge of delivering testimony which at once acknowledges the awful presence of the visceral and corporeal effects of trauma while preserving the individual specificity of loss is

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[472] Ibid., 77.
[473] Anne Cubile and Carl Good, "Introduction: The Future of Testimony," *Discourse* 25, no. 1 (2003): 10.
[474] McCarthy, *The Road*, 37.
[475] Cubile and Good, "Introduction: The Future of Testimony," 10.

directly addressed in *The Valley Of Elah* during the scenes where Hank and his wife Joan are confronted with the body of their son Mike. Initially, Hank goes to see the body alone, and standing in the corridor outside the Medical Examiner's office Lt. Kirklander asks him if he is sure he wants to go ahead, reminding him that it 'isn't necessary,' and advising that 'this isn't how you want to remember your son.' Here Kirklander highlights the common desire to avoid the visceral reality of death but Hank replies that 'this is how [Mike] left the world so I don't see as I have any choice,' actively acknowledging his responsibility as a witness. Once in the laboratory Hank stands next to the autopsy table as the coroner reads off his list of findings. As he continues in a matter-of-fact tone the film cuts between close-ups of Hank's face, a printer churning out crime scene pictures detailing where the various pieces of Mike's dismembered body were discovered, and brief shots of a burnt and severed head and what looks like a piece of charred leg on the autopsy table. As the coroner explains that much of the flesh has been eaten by scavengers in the desert, Hank interrupts to ask how many stab wounds his son received and whether they were inflicted by a single weapon. As the coroner replies that a total of 42 stab wounds, delivered by a single weapon, were evidenced on the remains it is clear from his facial expression that he begins to realise the enormity of what his scientific report means to the man standing in front of him.

Later in the film Hank returns to the hospital with his wife who is also determined to see her son's remains. As the blind opens in the window of the viewing room the camera cuts to the opposite side of the glass, revealing Joan's wide-eyed face in close-up. Through this use of editing the film quite explicitly shows how 'the power of the active gaze rests with the viewer.'[476] In a dramatic role reversal the cinema spectator becomes aligned with Mike's passive corpse, the object of Joan's gaze, and thus experiences the powerlessness of the corpse as spectacle.

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[476] Ibid., 11.

Conclusion

Summarising the Trauma Aesthetic's Response to 9/11

In order to summarise the trauma aesthetic, how it functions and why it is an important concept

in contemporary trauma studies it is useful to return to Farrell's *Post-traumatic Culture*: one of

the key texts that helped me to construct my understanding and definition of "post-9/11" which

underpins this thesis. In chapter one I referred to Farrell alongside other theorists who had also

addressed the central role played by trauma in contemporary American culture such as Mark

Seltzer who coins the term 'wound culture,' and Frank Furedi who discusses what he terms

'therapy culture.' Although I ultimately argue that the cultural atmosphere of 9/11's aftermath

does not fit neatly within any of these models, Farrell's methodology provides a useful framework

which allows me to illustrate how and why I posit the trauma aesthetic as a means to understand

post-9/11 film and literature. In his introductory chapter Farrell makes a very convincing

argument regarding the importance of examining the ways in which a culture responds to,

mediates and represents trauma.

> Whatever the physical distress ... trauma is also psychocultural, because *the injury entails interpretation of the injury*. I emphasise that phrase because terror afflicts the body, but it also demands to be interpreted and, if possible, integrated into character. In an effort to master danger the victim may symbolically transform it, compulsively reexperience it, or deny it. And those interpretations are profoundly influenced by particular cultural context ... A culture may make terror and loss heroically meaningful and so diminish its damage, but a culture may also contribute to psychic ruin. For exactly this reason – because trauma can be ideologically manipulated, reinforced, and exploited – it calls for critical analysis as well as psychiatric intervention.[477]

By positing the concept of the trauma aesthetic this thesis responds to the call for critical analysis

identified by Farrell as it allows for the interrogation of both the dominant cultural narrative of

9/11 and an exploration of some of the alternative ways in which this particular trauma has been

interpreted.

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[477] Farrell, *Post-Traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties*, 7.

Chapter one outlined the ways in which the dominant cultural narrative of 9/11 attempted to imbue the events with the kind of heroic meaning highlighted by Farrell. For critics like Faludi who have condemned the broadcast media's response to the attacks as 'a bogus security drill that divided men from women and mobilized them to the defence of a myth instead of the defence of a county,'[478] 9/11 exemplified trauma's potential to be 'ideologically manipulated, reinforced, and exploited.' If, as Farrell argues, there are 'three principle modes of coping with traumatic stress: social adaptation and relearning, depressive withdrawal or numbing, and impulsive force (berserking),'[479] then the broadcast media seemed to adopt the latter of these. In contrast, the trauma aesthetic seems to fit somewhere between the other two modes as is illustrated in chapters two and three. The examination of the trauma aesthetic's spatial dimension in chapter one reveals a series of structuring metaphors which quite explicitly signal a kind of 'depressive withdrawal or numbing.' The male protagonists of *Falling Man*, *25th Hour* and *In the Valley of Elah*, for example, are all physically and emotionally detached from the people around them, and are either unable or unwilling to effectively 'work through' their psychological trauma. The examples examined in chapter three lean more towards a mode of 'social adaptation and relearning.' This chapter demonstrates the ways in which the trauma aesthetic breaks down linear time and disrupts binary oppositions of good and evil, hero and villain which have underpinned constructions of American national identity. In so doing texts such as *The Road* and *A History of Violence* begin to question narratives of American exceptionalism and, by extension, America's culpability in its experience and infliction of trauma.

The themes of spatial and temporal detachment, and the ways in which these destabilise notions of personal and national identity were brought together in the final chapter. Here we saw how the trauma aesthetic attempts to understand the profound corporeal experience of vicarious trauma and the tensions it creates between presence and absence, immediacy and belatedness. Through this examination it became clear that there were limits to what the trauma aesthetic could achieve in its (re)mediation of the specific qualities of vicarious experience. The profound

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[478] Faludi, *The Terror Dream*, 298.
[479] Farrell, *Post-Traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties*, 7.

corporeal quality of vicarious trauma serves to underscore its authenticity but simultaneously contradicts the sense of absence and emptiness which the previous chapters demonstrated as central to the trauma aesthetic. This was particularly noticeable in texts such as *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* where Oskar bruises himself when he becomes distressed or upset. Similarly, in *In the Valley of Elah*, Hank is unable to outwardly express his emotions about his son's disappearance and cuts himself shaving. The cut then begins to bleed again as he sits in a diner looking through his notebook unable to solve the mystery of what he now knows to be his son's brutal murder. In these examples the trauma aesthetic seems to fall back on more traditional modes of writing trauma on the body which seems at odds with the more complex and nuanced variations of trauma representation discussed earlier in the thesis.

Although I acknowledge the problematic nature of these more simplistic representations of psychological trauma in chapter four, I argue that the trauma aesthetic typically constructs what I term 'the body suspended in sensation' as a means of negotiating the tensions which arise between its spatial, temporal and corporeal dimensions. Drawing on Jill Bennett's work on corporeal affect and mediation, I demonstrate how the trauma aesthetic constructs the body suspended in sensation as a figure through which the limitations of representation can most effectively (even if not definitively) be explored. Furthermore, the body suspended in sensation functions as a metaphor for the resistance of narrative and/or psychological resolution which chapters two and three demonstrate as central to the trauma aesthetic: by blurring the boundaries between presence and absence, individual and collective, representation and experience the body in sensation is continually opened to interpretation and avoids presenting a fixed understanding of traumatic experience.

Trauma Aesthetic as Critical Intervention

From the outset this thesis has emphasised the specificity of 9/11 as an intensely mediated and vicariously experienced event, and has argued that this is not sufficiently accounted for within existing trauma studies. For example, Caruth's Freudian model defines trauma as something which cannot be known in the moment of its occurrence. As a result, its traumatic affect only becomes evident at a later moment as the victim is compelled to sub-consciously repeat the original event.[480] This understanding of trauma is useful in the examination of certain aspects of 9/11 and its aftermath. For example, the continual replaying of the events within the broadcast media can quite clearly be understood as a kind of repetition compulsion. However, there are two aspects of 9/11 as a traumatising event which are not accounted for in Caruth's pre-9/11 definition. These are: the immediacy with which the attacks were experienced and that, for the vicarious witness, 9/11 was an event that was already mediated in the moment of its occurrence. The effect of these two aspects is that the belated repetition of trauma occurs almost simultaneously with the event itself. Therefore, although the trauma of 9/11 remains 'unknown' in the sense that it seems to be without meaning, it is very much 'known' in the sense that it was vicariously experienced by an entire nation within minutes.

In light of these particular aspects of the experience of 9/11, it has been necessary, through the concept of the trauma aesthetic, to develop an understanding of trauma which is able to address the specificity of 9/11 more effectively. Central to this is a focus on the identity of the victim of 9/11 who has been putatively cast as white, American and male. As chapter one highlights, this is atypical of trauma fiction which is usually created by victims of trauma who are politically or culturally oppressed or marginalised. This shift in the identity of the victim has a number of significant effects on the (re)representation of 9/11. Perhaps the most notable of these is the way in which the trauma aesthetic confronts popular understandings of trauma through the rejection of its associated language of 'pop-psychology.' For example, in *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close*, Safran Foer draws attention to this kind of language in order to reveal its ineffectiveness. In addition, the novel lacks sympathy towards its victims of trauma. Oskar in

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[480] Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience*, 1-5.

particular has been criticised by reviewers for being intensely unlikeable. For example, John

Updike, reviewing the novel in the *New Yorker,* remembers the moment his 'heart slightly sank

that he was going to spend more than three hundred pages in the company of an unhappy,

partially wised-up nine-year-old.'[481] That Oskar does not invite unquestioned empathy, however,

is precisely the point. Like Tom Stall in *A History of Violence* who is both a dedicated family man

and a murderer; Hank Deerfield in *In the Valley of Elah* who is seen as contributing to his son's

murder as much as he is responsible for solving it; Keith Neudecker in *Falling Man*, who survives

9/11 and returns to his wife and son but never really heals their relationship and begins having an

affair with a fellow survivor, the victims of the trauma aesthetic are not sympathetic characters

and are effectively held accountable for their actions. This inhibits the process of testimony

which, Dori Laub, suggests requires an emotional connection with the victim in order for the

reader or spectator to 'feel the victim's victories, defeats and silences, know them from within, so

that they can assume the form of testimony.'[482] That this empathic relationship is absent within

the trauma aesthetic underscores the way in which these texts are able to (re)mediate ideas

around individual and national identity in more complex and nuanced ways.

In addition to building on and expanding existing trauma studies to account for the

vicarious experience of 9/11, it has also been necessary in this thesis to construct a new, more

focused approach to post-9/11 film and literature in general. Until quite recently academic studies

on the impact of 9/11 on film and literature have used the concept of 'post-9/11' as a kind of

umbrella term which incorporates a wide variety of texts. For example, titles of monographs and

edited collections such as *After the Fall: American Literature Since 9/*11,[483] *Literature After 9/11*,[484]

and *Film and Television After 9/11*,[485] suggest that the analysis conducted by their authors can

account for post-9/11 texts in their entirety. This work is a useful starting point for the

examination of how such a significant cultural event has shaped subsequent cultural output: it

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[481] John Updike, "Mixed Messages," *The New Yorker*, 14 March 2005, n. pg.
[482] Laub, "Bearing Witness, or the Vicissitudes of Teaching," 57.
[483] Richard Gray, *After the Fall: American Literature since 9/11* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011).
[484] Ann Kenniston and Jeanne Follansbee Quinn, eds., *Literature after 9/11* (London and NEw York: Routledge,2008).
[485] Dixon, ed. *Film and Television after 9/11*.

highlights the importance of considering how 9/11 has been thought through in American culture and identifies a number of key trends and shifts in representation. However, the aim of this thesis has been to unpack 9/11 in more detail and hone in on a specific aspect of its (re)mediation in film and literature. To underscore the necessity of this type of project I return again to Farrell who writes:

> Narratives are not the same thing as raw experience, although what we like to call raw experience is also an imaginative construction. As a result, criticism is always a negotiation among inexhaustible variables. In fiction, signs of trauma can change shape, function, and coloration with any shift of perspective.[486]

To analyse post-9/11 film and literature as an undifferentiated body of work, then, would be to miss these changes. Therefore, the concept of the trauma aesthetic limits certain variables in order to provide a clear and focused analysis from a particular perspective.

By focusing my study of post-9/11 film and literature on the specific time period between September 2001 and September 2008, I have been able to identify the ways in which the trauma aesthetic responds to a particular understanding of 9/11 that is differentiated from economic and political concerns that infiltrated American culture after the collapse of the Lehman Brothers. This means that certain issues which have been seen by other scholars and commentators as central to the post-9/11 cultural atmosphere have not been addressed. Most notable among these are: the issue of surveillance and national security, issues of race and ethnicity, and issues around the War on Terror more generally. This is not to say that the trauma aesthetic never acknowledges or attempts to manage such issues; *Man in the Dark* and *In the Valley of Elah* make clear references to the War on Terror and *25th Hour* explicitly highlights issues of racial prejudice in Monty's mirror monologue. Nor is it to say that texts in which these issues are more centralised do not adopt certain aspects of the trauma aesthetic; for example Thomas McCarthy's 2007 film *The Visitor* uses spatial metaphors in a very similar way to the trauma aesthetic but directly confronts the issue of post-9/11 racial profiling rather than the mediated experience of 9/11 itself. There is certainly scope to explore how the trauma aesthetic is used alongside these more explicitly

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[486] Farrell, *Post-Traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties*, 27.

political subjects, particular because the texts examined in this thesis do not attempt to offer an alternative voice to that of the white, American male in its (re)mediation of 9/11. However, in order to develop a detailed understanding of how the trauma aesthetic is constructed it has been necessary to exclude such examples from the thesis.

By limiting my analysis to texts which utilise a similar series of structuring metaphors this thesis has been able to explore in greater detail how the perspective of 9/11 as a vicariously experienced trauma has led to a particular aesthetic response. In the process I have been concerned to avoid making the claim, as Richard Gray does in the introduction to *After the Fall*, that some texts "get it right" and other texts, by implication get it wrong.[487] While I have argued that certain aspects of the trauma aesthetic are more effective than others in their representation of 9/11, this should not be understood as equating to an argument that the trauma aesthetic is the 'right' kind of representation. Rather, this thesis offers a unique and detailed perspective on a select group of texts and identifies an aesthetic which shows how post-9/11 texts can be seen to respond to 9/11 and use 9/11 as a means of addressing more general cultural anxieties regarding gender, culpability and national identity. For this reason, the trauma aesthetic is a concept which can be drawn on and applied to texts outside those examined here.

The Wider Relevance of the Trauma Aesthetic

In an article published in the *Wall Street Journal* on February 24, 2009, Bret Stephens comments that 'the election of Barack Obama and the financial crisis have now ushered us into the post-post-9/11 world' characterised by a different socio-political atmosphere which requires a name which distinguishes it from post-9/11. In response to this Stephens offers the name "the Locarno Restoration" which refers to a series of treaties signed in 1925 between France, Germany, Britain, Italy and Belgium which 'ostensibly guaranteed the post-World War I borders

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[487] Gray, *After the Fall: American Literature since 9/11*, 17.

on Germany's western frontier with France and Belgium, but agree that Germany's eastern frontiers could be subject to revision.'[488] Ultimately Locarno failed and has been regarded by historians as a contributing factor in the instigation of World War II and Stephens employs it as an image of political failure and cultural uncertainty in his description of the post-post-9/11:

> Above all, Locarno failed because it combined wishful thinking with political weakness in a way that was bound to be tested and exploited by the fascist powers. If the 1930s were, per W.H. Auden's line, a "low, dishonest decade," it was mainly because the 1920s were so high-mindedly self-deceived.
>
> We are in a similar state today.
>
> As in the 1920s, we have emerged (if only partially), from several years of war -- scarcely anticipated, earnestly begun, bravely fought, often badly waged and, at least in the case of Iraq, ambiguously won. It was an emotionally exhausting war justified first on grounds of national survival, then for spreading democracy. The moral clarity and political unity that went with the war's beginning collapsed into political division and disillusion.
>
> From this there has emerged under the Obama administration a new kind of moral clarity. It is founded on conciliatory tendencies, a preference for multilateral solutions, a powerful desire to be on the right side of global public opinion, and an instinct for looking away from that which we'd rather not to see. This has put some political stress on our residual post-9/11 commitments, particularly in the case of Afghanistan, while creating an overwhelming aversion to possible confrontations, particularly against revanchist Russia and millenarian Iran.[489]

For Stephens, then, this post-post-9/11 era into which we are emerging is marked by moral ambiguity, 'division and disillusion,' qualities which underpin the trauma aesthetic as it has been elaborated in this thesis. I argue, therefore, that although American culture has shifted its focus in recent years from a preoccupation with trauma to more specific political and economic issues, the cultural atmosphere remains, in many ways 'post-traumatic.'

In addition to this continuation of particular themes outside the focus of 9/11, it is also important to note how 9/11 as an event marked the beginning of both an academic and popular interest in the way in which trauma is mediated. Over the last decade, events such as Hurricane Katrina (2005), the Mumbai terrorist attacks (2008)and the Japan earthquake (2011), not to mention the ongoing wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, have drawn significant attention to the ways in which trauma is mediated, consumed and experienced. Through its detailed examination of

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[488] Brett Stephens, "Post-Post-9/11 Looks Just Like Pre-World War Ii," *The Wall Street Journal*, 24 February 2009, n. pg.
[489] Ibid.

vicarious trauma, this thesis offers an important contribution to this area of academic interest by considering how and why individuals and collectives become traumatised (or not) in our intensely mediated society. The concept of the trauma aesthetic this has the potential to open up film and literature's management of issues of national identity, individual and collective responsibility and the vicarious experience of traumatic events even as the significance of 9/11 recedes into the background.

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