

Tales of Ash:
Phantom Bodies as Testimony in
Artistic Representations of Terrorism

Tali Lavi
(Master of Arts)
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RMIT

ABSTRACT:

This paper delves into the realms of tragedy, memory and representation. Drawing upon the phenomenon of the Phantom Limb and extending it towards a theory of Phantom Bodies, various artworks - literary, theatrical and visual - are examined. After the conflagration of the terrorist attack, how are these absences grieved over and remembered through artistic representation? The essay examines this question by positioning itself amongst the scarred landscapes of post-September 11 New York and suicide bombings in Israel (2000-2006). Furthermore, it investigates whether humanity can be restored in the aftermath of an event in which certain individuals have sought to eradicate it. The fragmentation of the affected body in these scenarios is understood as further complicating processes of grief and remembrance.

Artists who reject political polemic and engage with the dimensions of human loss are seen to have discovered means of referring to the absence caused by the act of terrorism. Three such recurring representations present themselves: ash and remnants, presence/absence and memory building. Phantom Bodies are perceived as simultaneously functioning as a reminder of the event itself, insisting upon the response of bearing witness, and as a symbol of the overwhelming power of humanity. Challenges arise when individuals or sections of the affected society deem these artworks to be inappropriate or explicit.

Works considered include: Neil LaBute's play *The Mercy Seat*, Sigalit Landau's art installation *The Country*, Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, Spike Lee's *25th Hour*, Daniel Libeskind's architectural plans for the World Trade Center site, Eric Fischl's sculpture 'Tumbling Woman', Honor Molloy's *autodelete://beginning dump of physical memory* and A.B.Yehoshua's *A Woman in Jerusalem*.

The accompanying play, *Tales of Ash: A diptych for the theatre*, is set in Melbourne, New York and Tel Aviv and deals with life in the face of and after terror. It veers between naturalism, poetic monologue and the epic. *Tales of Ash* contains two plays. The first centres on Mia, a young sculptor living in New York, who loses both her lover and her creativity on September 11. Upon returning to her home in Melbourne, she finds familial bonds still entwined with guilt and family trauma. The second play revolves around Ilana and Benny, two people living in Tel Aviv, who find themselves suddenly thrust together after a devastating bombing. As they attempt to resume rhythms of life, in the face of all the inherent ferocity of a modern existence in Israel, the struggle between The Ash Woman and The Ash Takers escalates.

Tales of Ash:
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Artistic Representations of Terrorism
(Volume One – Creative Work)

Tali Lavi

(Master of Arts)

2007

RMIT

Tales of Ash:
A diptych for the theatre

A play submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts

Tali Lavi
B.A. (Hons.)

School of Creative Media
Design and Social Context Portfolio
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February 2007

One Tale

LIST OF CHARACTERS

THE ASH WOMAN

THE ASH TAKERS

MIA

LILY

SERGE

Another Tale

LIST OF CHARACTERS

THE ASH WOMAN

THE ASH TAKERS

BENNY

ILANA

MIA

LILY

Tales of Ash:
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Representations of Terrorism

(Volume Two-Exegesis)

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*'So much
ash to bless'*

Paul Celan

One Tale

LIST OF CHARACTERS

THE ASH WOMAN
THE ASH TAKERS
MIA
LILY
SERGE

ONE: ASH

Dim light on an empty, nondescript space.

THE ASH WOMAN *appears. She talks as she makes her way around the stage in a ritualistic motion, circling it, sprinkling ash on the ground in front of her (the action is almost as if she is planting seeds), each circle smaller until she reaches the centre of the stage.*

Pause.

She makes her way over to the back of the stage and mounts her platform, standing, as if surveying her work.

In the growing light, we discover THE ASH TAKERS, each on their own raised platform, either side of her. She stands in a still pose.

THE ASH WOMAN: And so it begins.

A conflagration that deafens
revealing a wrath
of godlike proportions.

Flesh cleaves from resisting sinew,
howls emerge from bodies made mute,
faces eternally frozen into endless
replicas.

Closely stitched seams of lives are
hacked apart,
as if gardener's shears have managed
to unhook gossamer webs.

This story plays out again and again
with infinite variations,
changed words in conversations,
a step to the right instead of the left.

Two tales,
two cities with different tongues.
Two implosions echoing with
silent sounds of the fall of ash. (MORE)

(directly to the audience) I beseech you —
if you do not wish to bear witness
to these stories
close your eyes, stop your ears,
still your hearts.
For once it enters . . .
the ash remains.
Always.

THE ASH TAKERS: No!

(to the audience): Fear not.
Ash shifts,
so light,
borne on winds
or our breaths
until it becomes
imperceptible
undetected
a memory
that arises
in dreams
on anniversaries.
We apply the sweet
to the bitter.
If you allow it.

THE ASH WOMAN *(to THE ASH TAKERS):* It is not your time.
This is not your place.
Go.

THE ASH TAKERS *exit behind stage.*

(to the audience): Two tales
bound by suffering.
But do not forget!
These are but two. *(Pause.)*
And so it begins.

Lights out.

TWO: PATIENCE

The following fragments shift quickly from one to another with the use of lighting to indicate a change in space and time.

MIA stands talking on the phone.

MIA: Now I understand why I've stayed here!
... I know you would have come back.
But imagine, invited to exhibit in their show! ... Of course I've wanted it, but it's bloody terrifying. I actually thought she might withdraw the offer after she heard me shriek. She was very cool. I was *very* undignified ... I couldn't help it! I'm not like you ... Haven't I told you yet? September! Only three months away ...

Lights out momentarily.

LILY is sitting next to a window, shadows play over her and the sound of birds grows louder.

LILY: They're back.
The birds.
Settling back into their place.
Our silver gum opens her branches to them;
she is always welcoming.
We planted her when Mia was born.
Although the birds are back,
they're not exactly the same.
There are additions to the flock
and no doubt,
some have died during their flight.
I can't tell who's who -
I'm not a birdwatcher.
It's just ...
there's a sense of comfort in waking up
to their presence in the mornings.
In their faith that the gum will be there
waiting for them.
As I wait for her. *(Pause.)*
It won't be till after September now.

She looks out. The birds have settled, are less noisy.

Lights out.

THREE: FALLING

MIA talks to the audience, sitting on a bar stool.

MIA: A month ago
the world was passing me by.
Now, things are unfolding
at a furious pace . . .
It's all so surprising.
A head spin.
As if I've let myself slip into that place.
You know the one:
when you're a child, you spin round and
round
and just when you're about to fall over
you stand there all wobbly with
excitement and wonder.
Riding those waves of dizziness.
Everything seems out of place but in a
better position.
People loom in and out of your focus.
Mostly they seem to vanish.

Lights up on SERGE sitting next to her on another stool, loud music.

We're in a local bar,
crowded with the city's
emerging and emerged artists.
Music's up loud,
almost yelling at each other,
bodies everywhere,
no space to pick up your drink.
And then . . . whoosh.
He's the only one there.
Asking . . .

SERGE: Are you OK?

MIA: OK?
No.
Not the word to describe *this*, THIS . . .
I'm drowning,
plunged into a pool of his being.

SERGE: Mia, are you alright?

MIA: As I almost fall off the stool.
These seats are just not made for falling
in love on.
They're too high.
You could develop vertigo instantly in
such a scenario.
Or end up
with a broken back
after falling head over heels from this
height.

(to SERGE): Yes. I just realized something.

SERGE: What was that?

MIA: That I want you desperately.
That my body's about to break with
longing.
That if you don't kiss me now
I will have to pounce
and then we'll both be nursing broken
backs.
Although that could be quite romantic.
As long as our hospital beds
are pushed up close enough
and we can hold hands.
You'll recite French love poetry to me
and I'll paint red paintings
with the brush held in my teeth.

Pause. They are gazing into each other's eyes as if about to kiss.
But I don't say that of course.
I ask him instead

(to SERGE): How do you get your shoes so shiny?

SERGE: You are a strange girl.

MIA: I think I have him puzzled.
An eccentric enigma.
When all I want is to be
the object of his lust.
I imagine
that he laughs at my ridiculous
comments -
like the shoes one -
only to stop himself
from leaning over
and taking my tongue between his teeth.

SERGE: You say such strange things.
I wonder where your head is.

MIA: In your grasp.
Anywhere you want it to be.
I can arrange for it to be cut off
if you'd like to nail it to your wall,
or place it on your shelf.
Just as long as
you'll kiss me goodnight
each evening.
And you won't bring
other women to your bed.

(to SERGE): Did your mother ever sing you lullabies
when you were a child?

SERGE: Yes. She had one I used to love.

*He sings a few notes of a French lullaby; it is exquisitely sad, full
of longing.*

MIA: Yes, you can sing me that.
You can chain me up,
ignore me,
just as long as you'll sing me that.
Slowly, gazing into my eyes.
Once a day.
That's all.

MIA gazes at SERGE.

Lights out.

FOUR: THE WATERMELON

LILY stands cutting up watermelon on a board.

The surroundings are bare, minimal, verging on the sterile.

She is graceful, measured, precise.

*There is a particular method involved here, one that is obviously of
her own making. First she slices it into chunks and whittles them
away into slivers, holding them up to the light.*

*She speaks as she enacts this bizarre drama, throwing them aside,
one by one, until a single fragment is left gleaming on the board.*

LILY:

I have always detested the seeds of fruit.
Particularly these putrid ones.
Maybe not detested.
More like feared.
I wake up from dreams
in sweats of terror
just as one is about to slide down my
throat.
Glowing with malice.
Threatening to slide down the
oesophagus
and nestle in my belly.

Yet watermelon is, perversely, my
favourite.
Sensual.
Sweet.
It holds the taste of love.

I've tried to understand why I possess
this horror.
The most rational theory I've come up
with,
is that I heard the phrase 'seeds of evil'
one too many times,
when I was young.
Immediately it became clear what these
were —
the pips of the watermelon became my
enemy.
If one of them were to enter my system
I would be scarred for life.
If a surgeon cut me open, made a clean
cut,
he would see only black.
Mud coursing through dark chambers.
Years of ingesting and never talking
about it.

My family communicated through
silence,
whispers which entered through gaps
at the tops of windows and banging
doors. (MORE)

All this I ingested with my mother's
milk,
and yet still I look at this
She holds it up to the light
and think, 'I can't possibly digest it.'

Before each delivery
I was petrified,
certain that after nine months
what would appear
would be cancerous cysts.
This womb couldn't nurture life.
I would give birth instead
to my parents' fears
and recurring nightmares.
Each nighttime wail of theirs
would emerge
with each shout of my own labor.
Bring the darkness forth into light.

All this from a watermelon . . .
I would laugh if I thought it was funny.

*She stands back contemplating the remaining sliver. Pops it into
her mouth.*

THE ASH WOMAN *becomes visible on her platform, looking
down at LILY.*

THE ASH WOMAN: It is rare,
but not unheard of,
for ash to freeze.
Locked in its original form
it maintains its power
to devastate
and paralyse the living.
Their lives are pulled
along by its magnetic current.
Embodied by pain.

Lights out.

FIVE: GYPSIES

MIA *enters and walks across the stage.*

MIA: We're both adventurers in New York.
He's the swashbuckling Errol Flynn
- the problem is -
Serge is *much* sexier than Errol
and it isn't just because of his accent.

*SERGE is discovered sitting on a bench, MIA sits next to him.
They are in Central Park, both focussing on something, MIA is
taking photos.*

MIA: Shameless, isn't she?

SERGE: It's obvious she's a New Yorker.

MIA: Why do you say that?

SERGE: She talks fast, walks even faster.

MIA: Not exactly the French way of doing
things?

SERGE: Not exactly.

MIA: What do you miss the most about Paris?

SERGE: Well, I always choose to be here.

MIA: So do I.

SERGE: Not in the same way. Physically, I have
a foot in both cities.

MIA: Doesn't sound too comfortable.

SERGE: You could never do it.

MIA: That's for sure. My mother would deem
it much too unsafe. What would happen
if I fell through the middle?

SERGE: For you it's too far, impossible to do.
But for me, it is exactly as I wish it to be.
Slightly stretched. A few months here, a
few days there. Or the reverse. If I
wasn't so seasick I probably would have
been a sailor —

MIA: I can't see you as a sailor. You don't swear enough—

SERGE: But you are forced, through the immense geographical distance between here and your birthplace, to be committed to stay.

MIA *directs the camera at SERGE.*
What are you doing?

MIA: I told you. I'm putting together an ideas scrapbook for when I finish *The Dancers*.

SERGE: I mean, what are you doing now?

MIA: Taking your photo. You know, you have a very classical bone structure. I'm thinking of doing a series of classically themed sculptures.

SERGE: Sorry, Mia. I'd prefer if you didn't.

MIA: It's only a second. Pretend I'm not here.

SERGE: It's not you, it's the camera. My cousin's a photographer and she used to make me pose for hours. It makes me extremely uncomfortable.

MIA *(pointing her camera away):* Don't you ever get a cramp?

SERGE *is puzzled.*

From standing with a foot in two different places?
What actually happens to your torso when you're in such a position? Or your heart?

SERGE: Oh, my heart belongs to Paris. Or so the song goes. I don't think it's good for a person to be completely comfortable in a place. It breeds complacency and arrogance. Or, even worse, a self-satisfaction.

MIA: Ah, the tortuous existence of the French!

SERGE: You might laugh but think of the difference between you and the rest of your family.

MIA: It doesn't apply. I don't know anyone from my family who has lived in a country long enough to feel complacent or safe. I was meant to be part of the first generation who experienced a secure life.

SERGE: We're both gypsies. Maybe the idea of home makes us unhappy. Caged.

MIA: Is that why you became an art dealer?

SERGE: A mixture of reasons. Not coming from a community of gypsies, I needed to have a legitimate reason to travel . . . I was also a failed artist.

MIA: Serge, 'failed' is not a word that attaches itself easily or believably to you.

SERGE: It's true. I had such powerful images but they always seemed to lose themselves in the passage of my brain to the canvas. Miniature shipwrecks. Another proof of my lack of seaworthiness. They were so beautiful in here (*he points to his head*) but boring once they made it out here. I thought if I surrounded myself with artists there was a chance I would grow to understand how it worked. How I could keep the image intact. I haven't yet succeeded but still hope that I will in time to create them . . . Perhaps you'll tell me the secret.

He lights up a cigarette. MIA lifts her camera but he shakes his head. She waves away the smoke.

MIA: You know, smoking can kill . . . Do you still —

SERGE: Paint? Occasionally when I'm in a particularly sadistic mood.

MIA: I don't believe your paintings could be boring. You're probably ridiculously self-exacting. Can I see one?

SERGE is hesitant.

Or do you set fire to them immediately after they're painted?

SERGE: Who do you think I am? Renoir?

MIA (not directed at SERGE): Actually the bees' knees. Or, as Cole Porter would have it, 'the tops'.

SERGE: I don't paint when I'm in New York. The urge never arrives.

MIA: How apt. Paris is your muse.

SERGE: It's just sometimes I think this city is so new and obvious. Like that woman with the shiny lipstick

He gestures towards the area they were looking at

I can almost hear her asking him if he wants to fuck her.

MIA (not directed at SERGE): Oh, I don't even want to sleep with him. I want to stay awake with him. I'll talk slow and age overnight, if that's what he prefers.

(to SERGE): And Paris?

SERGE: It's a place where the subtlety of a glance can be appreciated. But even though I love these expressions I find they've become blurred because my walk has quickened to New York time . . .
(MORE)

Pause. SERGE is reflective, smoking, whilst MIA is transfixed, watching him.

She lifts her camera again and is just about to take a photo of his pensive pose when he turns to smile at her. The camera clicks.

Mia, you are too . . . headstrong!

MIA: You weren't uncomfortable, you had no idea I was taking it till it was all over! This way your head can still contribute to the development of modern art. Will you show me your work?

SERGE: Alright! I'll bring one of my little failures back with me next time. As long as you don't lie and tell me it's wonderful.

MIA: I won't lie. How's this for a deal? You bring it over and I'll tell you exactly what I think of it . . .

(not to SERGE): and you. If you're on New York time and walking too quickly to decipher my expression, I might strap you to a chair till you can recollect just how seductive a look can be.

SERGE: It's a deal.

Lights out.

SIX: TAKING RISKS

Lights up on LILY sitting by the window. The sounds of birds are gentle.

LILY: You have to let them go.
Grow wings and fly
to wherever they choose.
But what if they have no sense of
navigation?
It's such a meaningless analogy, Lily.
Birds fly in flocks,
they follow very certain flight paths.
(MORE)

This is our family's route.
Safe and tested.
It makes no sense to turn your back on
it.
It's the only one that's worked so far.
Not that anything's ever absolutely
certain.
But why risk the journey?

Don't mistake me.
I'm not afraid to travel.
In fact Dan and I do it often and
I never understand those people
who sit next to you on flights
white-knuckled, gasping for air.
I want to shake them,
telling them how ridiculous they look.
'You're an adult, for goodness sake.
Do you look this way every time you get
into your car?
Collect yourself.
You have no idea what real fear is.'

Anyway, birds don't just decide one day
to move cities because the new one has a
better art scene,
or in their case, tastier crumbs.
It's all about rhythms.
You leave, not for long,
and you always return.

But maybe it's different with her -
the gift is sacred.
It follows its own laws.

SEVEN: NAKED

Lights on MIA.

MIA:

I've never really understood
when friends reveal
with wide-eyed trepidation
that they had THAT nightmare
the night before
and that they can't shake off the feeling
of absolute vulnerability the next day.
(MORE)

The dream where
they appear naked,
in front of people they know
or they don't.

To me, the fear of being naked
is to be seen as I am.
Energy radiating
as I summon a new form
into creation,
whittling away shavings so fine
only I know they are creases in elbows,
smile lines in the corners of mouths
that refuse to be serious.
It's just me and IT
in the room then,
no space for another.
And I'm not talking about Leonard
Cohen
who wails in the background.
Even *he* knows that although he's
singing to me,
I'm absent.
Preoccupied with
the magical role of transformation.
That's being naked.
Filling up the room with this
indescribable process
when someone crosses the threshold.

So when I look up from my
nearly-finished lovers
consumed by each other's gaze,
I think, 'This is what it's like,
this is why they're so rattled.
Earth swallow me up now.'
But it won't budge
and I'm forced to confront
his cocked head
assessing US.
Because I know right away
that he is conscious of IT
and not at all inclined to leave
or get shoved out the door.
In fact, he looks *comfortable*
propped up by the door frame
as if he's going to stay forever.

We discover SERGE in her apartment, the sounds of Leonard Cohen's 'Take This Waltz' play loudly. It is at the point of the Chorus and Cohen sings 'I want you, I want you, I want you . . .'

SERGE tries to say something but the music is too loud. MIA goes to turn it down.

SERGE: I was at an appointment around the corner but the artist didn't have much to show me. Your keys were in the door . .

He hands them to her, smiling. She is even more embarrassed.

MIA: I must have been thinking of something else when I came in.

SERGE has moved up to the sculpture, which is invisible to the audience. It is a large work and he circles it carefully, looking at it closely.

SERGE: I can see what.

He continues his inspection.

MIA has stepped back and unconsciously holds her breath.

SERGE touches the sculpture carefully, almost caressing it and then stops, pauses and looks at her.

SERGE: It's magnificent.

MIA: You don't have to say so —

SERGE: I never give false praise. If it was bad, or even mediocre, I would have changed the subject.

MIA exhales deeply, relieved.

SERGE: It's very clever. The way the viewer's understanding of it is forced to change when you look closer.

MIA: How so?

SERGE: Well, at first you are sure that he is in control. He has her in the position that he wants but then you notice this

He follows the line of the dancer's back with his hand

and you realize that she has first moved backwards. She's laughing at his surprise at her sudden move.

MIA laughs with pleasure at his understanding.

SERGE: But I don't understand something . . .

MIA: What's that?

SERGE: Why doesn't she wait for him to do it himself? Presumably, they are dancing the same dance.

MIA: Maybe she's lost her patience . . .

She realizes that this might be interpreted as referring to them and becomes flustered.

But who knows really? They just emerged out of the block, I do nothing else but help them out . . .

SERGE appears to begin to say something and then decides otherwise.

MIA: Actually, this one's taking me ages. It only clicked a week or so ago. In the meantime I'm continuing to torture the poor thing.

SERGE looks at her with incomprehension.

I read once that African carvers believe the wood remains alive through the process and so each cut causes it pain. To ask the tree for forgiveness they observe different rites. But I don't know what they are, so instead I try to hurry the whole thing along. The music's for the wood, to take its mind off the whole experience.

SERGE (*laughing*): I see. You were singing sweet things to the sculpture. It takes hugging trees to a completely different level.

MIA: Sweet things?

SERGE: 'I want you. I want you. I want you.'
You were very convincing. If you said it as you carved out pieces of me, I wouldn't be thinking about anything else. [*Pause.*]

MIA looks at him. Lights out on SERGE as he stands there, teasing.

MIA: So here I am.
Naked.
He's not even flinching.
In fact,
he seems to be enjoying himself.
And the space has gotten bigger
to let him in.

Lights out.

EIGHT: SWIMMING

LILY enters wearing a tracksuit and towel around her shoulders.

LILY: I just spoke to her again.
She sounds so excited
about the exhibition.
Only three weeks to go now.
As I was telling her to be careful,
I was hearing my mother speak. (*Pause.*)
I'm not like my parents.
They were timid people.
Never heard them raise their voices
except in their sleep.
My voice rises before I even know it.

Never saw them step foot in the water
not even to skim a toe.
They used to watch me
slide through the water
picking up medals as I emerged
but it was always with stressed brows,
knit tightly together out of fear. (*MORE*)

'Careful!' they'd call softly,
'Don't run,
you might get a cramp!
Close your mouth,
you may swallow too much!'
I'm sure they thought it was possible
that sharks might find some way into
the pool.
It was Australia, after all.

Their fears curdled the air
but couldn't reach me
under the water.
I can still swim almost half a lap
without taking breath.

It's my favourite time of year now.
Starting to get almost warm,
no more goose pimple parade
and frenzied shivering.
Summer's approaching
and it all gets so much easier.
Dan and the kids think it's mad,
swimming in an outdoor pool all year
round,
but it's my sanity.
Mia says, 'It's masochistic, mum.
At least put on a wetsuit.'
Living in a shoebox
with police sirens sending you to sleep,
or being constantly told to 'Have a good
day!'
by people you don't know,
is masochistic.

Yesterday there was a photo
in the newspaper.
It made me do a double take
because the girl looked so like Mia.
Well, not on a second look
but there was something about her,
perhaps her dark features,
more likely the look of innocence
on her face.
But this girl was dead.
She'd been killed in a bombing
in Tel Aviv. (MORE)

Only twenty-eight.
Engaged.
A life taken so young.
I didn't tell Mia but
I wish she'd come home.
It's so much safer here.

I used to think the pavements outside
our childhood house,
were cracked because of my parents'
pain.
Today I noticed that the concrete
outside our front door
was cracked into spiderwebs,
like shattered glass,
and I forced myself not to think
that it was some kind of sign.
A symbol of bad luck to come.

I wish she'd come home . . .

Lights out.

NINE: THE KISS

Lights on MIA.

MIA:

This is my chance
to stop being the lily-livered lion
that I adore
from The Wizard of Oz.
After all,
lack of courage
doesn't look so sweet
on a girl of a certain age.

If I don't somehow
disclose the depth of my feeling,
the source of my ever-present blush,
the slight tremor in my hand
—I haven't lived in New York
long enough to develop its famous
neuroses—
before he steps back on the plane . . .
well, it's now or never.

And I'm sick of never. (MORE)

We discover SERGE following her into her apartment.

(to SERGE): So where would you like to go?

SERGE: I don't mind. Surprise me.

MIA: I might take my cue from her.

She gestures at The Dancers.

SERGE: You'd like to go dancing? But it's only early afternoon.

MIA: I meant, I was thinking of doing something daring.

SERGE: Such as? A heist?

MIA: No . . . I meant to be *like* her. To be forward, so to speak.

SERGE: I think we have lost something in translation.

MIA: I wasn't translating.

SERGE: No, but I was.

MIA: What I meant was . . .

SERGE (*now really teasing her*): In plain English please, Mia.

MIA: I thought we could stay in.

SERGE: What . . . and watch a movie before we enact the heist?

MIA: No movies.

SERGE: But what would we do?

MIA looks at him, completely at a loss. That's it. She's given up.

Mia, I thought you'd never ask. (MORE)

He goes up to her, and pushes her hair out of her eyes.

You know us Frenchmen, we're exceptionally timid.

She grabs and kisses him. They kiss slowly. Lights out momentarily.

Lights on MIA.

MIA: It's quite invigorating
this courage stuff.
Now I understand
why my dancer smiles
as she does.
We have a long night in.
No need to cut off my head,
thank you very much.
It does very nicely right here.

TEN: TAKING ASH

The light has darkened, LILY enters in a state.

LILY: The call came in the middle
of the night,
telling us to switch on the TV.
It was worse than any of those
early morning doorbell rings
I had dreaded hearing
when the kids were teenagers.

Light out momentarily. When it comes back on, it is dim and there is smoke in the air. Something terrible has happened.

THE ASH TAKERS descend. *They appear to be looking for something. Tentatively, they move around the stage, gathering up ash.*

They stop when THE ASH WOMAN appears on her platform.

THE ASH TAKERS: Where are they?

THE ASH WOMAN: Who?

THE ASH TAKERS: The living who have been stopped,
eyes transfixed by a portrait of horror,
brows furrowed in incomprehension.

THE ASH WOMAN: They are full with questions.
'Why me?' 'Why here?' 'Why today?' . . .
'Why?'

THE ASH TAKERS: We will erase their questions, smooth
their brows.

THE ASH WOMAN: They are too weary.

THE ASH TAKERS: Those left behind resemble cars in dead
yards,
windows missing,
robed in rust
realities bent out of shape.
We will repair them.

THE ASH WOMAN: They are too brittle.

THE ASH TAKERS: We have done this before.

THE ASH WOMAN: It is dangerous
to attempt it
before they are ready.
They might seep out from their wounds,
with no ash to protect them.

THE ASH TAKERS: We understand. Trust us.

THE ASH WOMAN: I have witnessed
crystal lakes of saline form
through a carnival of clowns let loose on
a city.
A surreal, silent circus
mimes its way around town,
mute with grief,
wandering snow-filled spring streets
oblivious to its sad beauty.

They will find their own way. The lakes
must first dry up.

THE ASH TAKERS: They might never dry. Give them to us
- what will you do with them? They are
not of your world. Leave the living to
us. We will scrub off their memories
with pumice stones.

THE ASH WOMAN: Not yet! They will bleed with nothing to protect their pain from unravelling.

THE ASH TAKERS (*angry*): We will not wait long. We will return.

THE ASH TAKERS *exit violently*. **THE ASH WOMAN** *waits till they leave, making sure they have gone before she spreads her ash around the stage from her platform. Lights out.*

ELEVEN: SNOWSTORM IN SEPTEMBER

The light has changed. It is as if MIA is standing in the midst of a snowstorm. At first the light is bright.

MIA: I've been here five years and never experienced a snowstorm in September. Never heard of one. I'm finishing off the lovers engrossed in their games, thinking all the while that I'm about to meet mine. Well, as far as I know there is no dictionary definition, no exact number of times one must sleep with them before one might call a lover . . . a lover. He rang off the night before with the magical phrase 'Je t'embrasse' and for the first time I realise the potency of the expression 'French Kissing'. Just a few more hours. In other words, the single-minded focus of creating is not making its presence felt very strongly today. But I worked through last night and am on my last legs which explains why I look up to the window and am struck by the beauty of a snowstorm in September.

Silver dust flakes are descending on Manhattan and my first reaction is to go outside and feel it in my mouth. (MORE)

I race downstairs, as if my pigtails are
swinging,
like it's little girl me, seeing snow for my
first time
and I'm envious of the view Serge is
enjoying.

She holds her hands out. The light darkens.

But the air isn't cold and people aren't
celebrating.

Long pause.

The Walking Dead.
They look like the walking dead.
Eyes unblinking, all hurrying in one
direction.
Covered in dust that I only find out after
is composed of people.

Almost breaking down

Remnants of people . . .
Hair, shoulders,
lines caressing soulful eyes . . .

Struggles to compose herself

I follow them, join in the muffled
hysteria.
What else can I do?
The studio, now that there is no snow,
seems to have disappeared.
The current wells from somewhere else
and travels all the way to the Brooklyn
Bridge.
Somewhere in the grey river I see an
island of stillness, a pavement statue.
A tall figure of a man I can't quite make
out.
JFK? Jefferson?
I stop, leaning myself against it,
the others bump into me until the
parting widens.
We become the centre of endless
movement.
Me and the statue.
Cold, grey, ancient. Indestructible.
But then it starts to move.
'Please don't collapse!' I shout through
clenched jaw.
The statue coughs and apologises.
'Sorry, it's just I've got a cramp.'

(MORE)

The day it snows in September
everything turns into ash.
My grandmother used to quote Paul
Celan's poems.
She always paused before the line
'So much ash. So much ash to be
blessed.'

She looks up and opens her mouth, lets some flakes in.

I can still taste it.
Still taste him.
Alongside the unending
metallic flavour of guilt.

*The snow stops falling. Stillness.
Lights out.*

TWELVE: THE RETURN

*Lights up. LILY enters wearing an apron and holds a mixing bowl
in her hand.*

LILY (talking sotto voce): She's home.

I hoped that she would come back
straight away
that she'd realise it was the only thing to
do
but it was if there was something
holding her there,
keeping her anchored
against her better judgement.
I can understand New Yorkers staying.
Of the need for some kind of outward
defiance
and I said that to Mia
who almost coughed out,
'It's got nothing to do with defiance
Mum.
It's got everything to do with living.'
The first time I've seen her animated
since she got back . . .
What I was trying to say,
even though it never comes out quite
right,
is that she can choose not to be there, not
to live like that,
so why would you?
She doesn't belong there, she belongs
here with us. (MORE)

Anyway, it's not important.
What is, is that she's home.
When she told us she was coming,
Dan wrote down a list of things he
thought she'd like to eat.
'Comfort food' he called it:
my apple cake - the one she ruins by
eating the top off
although I promised him that I wouldn't
tell her off for doing it -
the reliable standard, chicken soup,
- because if it worked for family
members in times of pogroms
and poverty, it must still cure all ills.
He even put down an order of his late
mother's cinnamon scrolls,
which is bordering on the ridiculous
because I'm not one to stand around
making complicated things with yeast
and I'm not even sure that Mia
remembers.
I ended up making them,
thinking it's probably Dan who needs
them.
We all crave something at times of
distress,
who's to say that Pearl's cinnamon
scrolls
are less effective than my extra laps at
the pool?

All the time I was cooking and baking
my way through the list,
I kept telling myself that her real
comfort
would be being home,
having her room exactly as she'd left it.
Not her bedroom,
her workroom.
We had it built when we realised how
serious she was about her sculpture
and when I'd had enough of trying to
remove wooden shavings from the
carpet.

(MORE)

The truth is that I'd actually realised
how good she was long before.
I recognised the gift even though I
hadn't ever actually witnessed it,
had only ever heard about it.

On hot days when she and her brother
were young,
I'd take them straight to the beach and
we'd stay there
until the temperature cooled.
They'd strip off their uniforms
and Jake would run into the ocean,
making us laugh by doing imitations of
me.

Mia was always distracted by the
sculptural possibilities.
All the other kids would
pack wet sand into their buckets
and place them down willy-nilly.
Mia would be creating art.
Her creations looked as if they moved,
little populations growing along the
shore.

Crowned with shells,
their twig necks waving precariously in
the breeze.

I used to hate leaving them stranded
there
to fend for themselves against the tide
but she'd reassure me,
'Don't worry, Mum. They can swim.'

Pause.

She hasn't entered her room yet
but then, she's only been back a week.
Maybe she needs a trip to the sea.

Lights out.

THIRTEEN: HALLELUJAH

MIA enters, pacing nervously.

MIA: I look for him.
Of course I do!

(MORE)

After my first foray into the madness of
the snowstorm,
I think I'd better stay in my studio,
just in case he turns up a few hours
early.
Hoping it's the place he'd think of first.
Hoping I am the person he'd think of
first.
Because *he* is.
Instead I'm left with some
incomprehensible picture
of what has happened, pieced together
from shards of words
spoken on the radio.

So much for his view.
The absurd horror of the thought
flashes like electric storms
across my mind.
But even with this thought,
his life and vitality
bestow upon him superhuman powers,
allowing him to bound down fiery
staircases,
propelled by his love for me.

Everything else dissolves.
Then the phone begins to ring,
family and friends hysterically checking
to see I'm OK
as I hurry them off the phone line
leaving it open for his call.
Not that any one who lives here
wants long conversations,
'You OK? I'm OK. Good.'
I even play Jeff Buckley
sending his plaintive tones of desperate
beauty
into the still, tortured air
whilst the particles fly into my room.

It doesn't make him open the door.
I close my eyes and call his name,
silently, quietly, loudly, insistently.
The door handle doesn't turn.
The lovers keep on dancing.

(MORE)

I wait for twelve hours,
and then decide
that in having sent him
only I can bring him back.
I leave the keys on the outside of the
door.
Just in case.
It's dark and ashen,
people walk the streets aimlessly,
some thrust photos into faces
frozen into death mask stares.
I am different.
I am focused.
I am finding him and bringing him back.
Kicking and screaming if need be.
My resolve is turning me into my
mother.
Steely, measured.
An inner compass pulls me towards the
inferno
but I can't get close to it,
don't have the right passes.
Anyway, he won't be here.
He hates the heat.
He's probably lost somewhere
disoriented by the air
unsure of the date or time.

Or else he's back at the apartment.
I return.
The keys are still there.
He's not inside.
Jeff's still singing on continuous loop.
I'm not sure why he keeps repeating
'Hallelujah'.
There was never a more inappropriate
word.

The lovers dance.

Lights out.

FOURTEEN: WAITING

LILY enters, looks harried.

LILY:

How long does one wait before one says anything?

I've never been too good at judging that. I seem to pick the worst possible timing. Dan calls it an alternate death wish. He says I must, on some level, understand that now is not the time to ask but still I run headlong into sure death by hands of the firing squad; otherwise known as Mia and Jake.

She hasn't set foot over the threshold of her room, has barely set foot out of the house. Jake's the only one who can make her laugh, but it's nothing like her usual enthusiastic responses to his silly humour.

She hasn't even seen Ellen. I know this because I spoke to her today. Actually rang her. Huge, scary, brilliant Ellen. My daughter's mentor who understands her infinitely more than I ever can. I get that. And so I've decided to go to the source, the oracle, the deity even though I'm petrified of it. Ellen speaks differently, and makes me feel so damn mediocre as if she's constantly wondering how it was that I gave birth to a prodigy. I know she's always judged us. She'd probably have called social services on Dan and I years ago, citing philistinism and complete lack of talent as reasons for why they should have placed our daughter with her instead. This is the woman I have volunteered to visit tomorrow. (MORE)

Maybe the heat of the oven
is melting my brain
as Dan's list making continues to grow,
becoming more quietly frantic with each
day
his little girl's brightness can't be found.

Yesterday I looked over at Mia on the
couch,
she looked physically diminished
and perched next to her on the table
was one of her figures.
It's. . . it's very bright and optimistic
- sorry, I'm not very good at explaining
these things -
it's not literal, as in it's not a male or
female recognisable form,
but it communicates this wonderful
light.
Often I look at it and it manages to make
me feel lighter -
which is no small task.
So I'm looking at my daughter,
who seems to have shrunk into herself
and at this statue,
which seems to have become only
brighter
and it's almost as if it's laughing at her,
no, ridiculing her
and I want to smash it.
For a moment.
Only a moment, then it passes
and I think, she needs a little time
and then she'll be back to making
things like that again.
Things that catch and celebrate the light.
There is no choice.

I'm ignoring my 'alternate death wish'
and respecting my knowledge, on some
deep level.
Now is not the time to ask.

Lights out.

FIFTEEN: FRIEND, HUSBAND, LOVER?

Spotlight on MIA holding pieces of paper.

Tales of Ash: A Diptych for Theatre © Tali Lavi

MIA:

The next day I put up signs.
They have his name and a short
description.
It takes me a lot of time
because I can't remember if he's thirty-
eight or thirty-nine,
don't remember if I ever knew.
I can write how many life lines he has
on the sides of his eyes and I do
but then take it out.
I write that he's French, just in case
people are confused by the accent.
That he's an art dealer and nearly
list his favourite artists
but stop myself.
I want to write how he makes me feel
but decide that's not possible.
It has my name and phone number on it,
just in case he's forgotten what it is.

I include the photo I took of him that
day in the park.
The one where he's smoking,
smoke plumes caressing his head,
his eyes and mouth curling
into his beautiful smile
and if I look at it long enough
I can imagine that it's just me and him in
the room.
But there's no time for that.

She crosses to the other side of the stage

I go with one of the paper signs
to the Missing Persons Register
and with all the crowds and panic in the
air,
the words in my head disappear.
Suddenly I'm in front of this harried
looking man
who asks me all these questions.
I hand him the sign. (MORE)

She offers out one of the papers

He asks me if Serge is my
'Brother? Husband? Cousin?
Employee? Lover? Friend?'
I want to tell him that he is my
responsibility.
That this is my doing.
But I don't.
He asks me if I have anything of his.
Hairbrush, toothbrush, pillow?
I don't.
What I do have
is the brush of his lips
against my collarbone.
How can I provide this to the man?
Are there any swabs
any microscopes
to collect these traces?

David, Serge's father arrives the next
day.
I have to stop myself from leaning over
and kissing the corner of his eye.
He is so much like Serge,
more lines there (*feels next to her eyes*)
but almost as if I'm looking at Serge
in thirty years time.
I think David misses him more than I do.
I thought that was an impossibility.

Lights fade on stage.

SIXTEEN: ASH LEGACY

Lights up on the raised platforms and **THE ASH WOMAN and
THE ASH TAKERS.**

MIA remains on stage in the darkness.

THE ASH TAKERS: The girl doesn't understand
that this is their destiny,
cast to the four winds
citizens of the world.
Ashes to ashes, dust to dust.
Flesh, sinew and souls
burnt away.

THE ASH WOMAN: She doesn't yet understand because
she has been left behind.
Wherever the ones who remain step or
make love
they are interrupted by these presences.
Infinitesimal, they scratch at the air
ensuring they are not forgotten.

THE ASH TAKERS: She must be made aware
that the ash phantoms attain a kind of
freedom,
nestled in the gust of our breath.
Destination unknown.

THE ASH WOMAN: She does not know this
because she is among the living.
One of those who are awakened
by the brushing
of an invisible hand on eyebrows.

THE ASH TAKERS: Now and again,
the pearly phantoms
visible in their grey forms
fight their way against the airflow
and lodge themselves in tearducts,
producing grey tears.

We must make her understand,
they are not hers to keep.

THE ASH TAKERS *start to descend.*

THE ASH WOMAN: You will wait.
Until the comfort that comes
with his presence
wears thin.
Until the warmth of the ash
that she takes to her bed fades
and makes her shiver at night.
You must wait.

THE ASH TAKERS *stop.*

Lights out.

SEVENTEEN: HER SWIMMING

LILY stands dressed in bathers, goggles perched on her head, wrapped in a towel.

LILY: Mia doesn't understand
that it's not something she can hand
back,
reject with a 'thank you,
it was nice whilst it lasted
but here's where we part ways'.
Maybe I'm somewhat to blame
for leaving certain things . . .
information, details,
out of our family story.
Maybe she said it as a throwaway line,
a bit of provocation.

I'd waited so long and thought
that it had probably passed,
that it was safe to
direct a sentence towards her
with a question mark on its end.
Something stable, blunt —
unable to transform itself into a
combustible,
dagger of a question
once it entered the air.
'Do you think you'll do some work
today?
Your studio is exactly how you've left it.
I haven't moved anything . . .'
and then stopped as her face closed up.
'You should have turned it into
something useful,' she said.
'Your own space.'
As if the rest of the house
isn't my own space already.
To do *what* in exactly?
But I didn't say this.
Instead, I explained very reasonably
that I knew how much she needed that
room
when she visited.

(MORE)

She told me that
it's not quite the same anymore.
And to reassure her, to lighten the air,
I told her that 'it was probably just a
block or something.
Do they call it sculptor's block? (*Pause.*)
It would be quite funny if they did . . .'
But she wasn't laughing.

She is so unlike herself.
Standing there saying
she was thinking
of doing 'something different',
of 'exploring other opportunities'
in this other person's body,
so rigid, so unrelenting.
'But how?', I asked
'would you find time for your own
work?'
And then,
she laid it out before me.
'You haven't been listening, Mum.
I've decided not to sculpt anymore.'

Pause.

As if it was her decision to make,
when it was never a choice.
And then she turned to the sculpture,
the one next to the couch,
and picked it up.

Now! I thought,
now
sitting there in her hands,
it will remind her.
But she was looking at it
like it was a foreign object.
I told her she might need a break
to reconnect.
'It's dried up. Disintegrated.'
As if she was ancient
at the age of thirty-one.
This note of cynicism
happened to slip out of my mouth.
(MORE)

'Mum, I am. Ancient.
I've seen the end of civilisation.
I'm like Methuselah.
The images in my mind now
wouldn't look out of place in Dante's
hell.
I don't want to construct them.
That's for others to do.'

It takes a lot more than what she's seen
to lose this . . .
If I had it,
I wouldn't allow this fall,
this bruising,
to cast it aside.
I would understand that it was
my responsibility to continue —
because who else would?

She places her goggles on.

Anyway,
it's her swimming.
It's how she moves through the world.
(Pause.)
I don't know what I'd do if she gave up.

*She drops the towel and moves towards what is the edge of a pool.
Takes a diving position.
Lights out.*

EIGHTEEN: SMOKING

*Lights up on MIA standing, eyes closed, breathing in deeply. She
opens her eyes.*

MIA:

How is it that the first thing
you miss about a person
is the thing you initially liked
least about them?
In this case, the whiff of a Gauloise.

I loathe smoking.
Can feel it congesting my airways
immediately upon spotting
a streamer of smoke
unfurl itself towards the sky.

(MORE)

And yet my deepest love
is reserved for a smoker
of the most serious kind.
This is the natural,
almost organic pairing
of a great couple.
Bonnie and Clyde.
Liz and Richard.
Serge and his Gauloise.

In the beginning, I protest.
He plays dirty,
smiling his wry smile.
It helps that the indentations
it leaves around his eyes
only make him more lovely.
His beauty lies in his flaws
and the confidence with which he wears
them.

Gradually, I surrender.
When I take his coat from him,
I pass it over my face
hoping it will leave its imprint of smell.
As he smokes I inhale deeply,
his exhaled air
enters my body.
Very occasionally after he leaves,
I wrap my lips
around a used cigarette butt
and savour the taste.
I don't allow myself to do this often,
there's something humiliating about it,
much like the wan heroines
I used to read about as a child,
who pined away for their loves
until they expired.
The shame comes
from understanding them.

So I long for the smell
because no one else can produce it.
I crave the perfume of his exhalation.

SERGE sits on a bar stool, lights up a cigarette.

SERGE:

All these tears.
All this longing.
Is it for me
or just a man named Serge
who looks like me?
On what has she based her induction
into widowhood?
Maybe I pushed her hair away from her
eyes . . .
But then it always fell in the way
when she was working.
I used to wonder
how she made her art
with strands making lines
across her vision.
Maybe they contributed to its
composition.
And to her image of me as a Gallic God.

Perhaps I used certain phrases too
lightly,
finishing off our phone calls
with 'Je t'embrasse'.
An innocent phrase
evolved into an image of a passionate
clinch.
Why did French become the language of
love?
Such a heavy responsibility to endure.
I'm not always romantic.
Sometimes I am incredibly mundane.
I take on the monochromatic hues
of a Lucien Freud portrait.
My sweat stinks as much as the next
man's.

She's given me a halo of smoke.
At this rate, I'll be canonized.
Funny . . .
I came upon her once in her studio.
I'd forgotten something,
can't remember what it was . . .
There she stood with one
of my cigarette ends
between her lips.
She looked beautiful. (MORE)

As though caught between
a state of rapture and dream.
I wanted to push her hair away
and join her wherever she was.
Perhaps I sensed
there was only space for one.

Why is she wearing sackcloth and ashes
for me?
What made her think it was her role?
I don't understand. *(Pause.)*
Actually, I'm quite frightened.
I'm not the man I used to be.

Pause, a laconic lift of the eyebrow.

That's an understatement.
I don't even know if it's me talking
or if it's her thinking this is what I'd say.

The cigarette glows and there is the sound of a long exhalation.

Lights move to MIA inhaling.

MIA:

. . . caught between
a state of rapture and dream.
Only there's no rapture.
Just a suspended state
where he visits
and for a delicious moment
he's *here*,
or rather we're *there*.
I succeed in retrieving him
out of the collapsed building
I'd sent him into that morning.
But then the haze lifts,
separated by my parents'
attempts to pull me back
to the land of the living.
Mum strangely single-minded
in her desire
to get me to work.
You'd think she was
commandant of a
work camp
somewhere in Siberia.
Only more charming
and better dressed. (MORE)

Meanwhile,
the burden remains.
I've tried to apologise
but if I ask his forgiveness
with accompanying explanation
it will mean conceding that he's not here
that he never made it out
that he's disintegrated . . .
and how could that be possible?

Lights out momentarily.

NINETEEN: PLAIN-SPEAKING

LILY enters, determined.

LILY: I've had enough
of silently watching her in that state.
Dan and I used to say that Mia moved
as if she was carried on clouds.
Now she seems to be bearing something.

Anyway, the oracle has spoken.
I went to see towering Ellen,
she wasn't as overwhelming
as I remembered her.
Maybe she physically shrank
at the same time that her role
in my daughter's life
became smaller.
It's probably only temporary
but Mia hasn't even *spoken* to her yet.

I told Ellen about the change in Mia,
she didn't understand
why I didn't *just* ask my daughter what
it's all about.
As if there is ever a 'just'
without loaded subtexts and
poisonous darts of misunderstanding.
Ellen comes from the world of plain-
speakers.
It's so much clearer than mine.
Frightening, really, in its clarity.
I grew up with parents whose secrets
brimmed over at night.
I hear Mia crying . . . (MORE)

I can understand that sometimes
the terror of not knowing
is actually worse than knowledge itself.
It's only . . .
I think if I knew what's wrong with her
it will only be myself I can blame.
For not protecting her more.
For allowing her to follow her own
untried path.
For not having been able to take up
the family talent myself. (*Pause.*)

I did try when I first found out
but I didn't really know where to
place my hands
and struggled with the
introduction to sculpture classes
I enrolled at.
It was humiliating.
To have been completely
missed over like that.
If I had succeeded
and taken up the mantle
maybe I could have taken
some of Dad's pain away . . .
But to see Mia like this,
I wonder for the first time
if it's not the artistic inclination
that exposes them to the pain.

When I left Ellen's studio
she embraced me
in a bearlike peace offering.
And it must have slightly disoriented
me,
pushed me into the world of the plain-
speakers
because I actually confessed to being
jealous
of her relationship with my daughter.
She grimaced and said,
'Lily, I grew up with enough Madonnas
and Child to realize that is the bond that
transcends all.'
Imagine that! (MORE)

I'm going to try more of this plain
speaking thing.
Mia might not be able to recognise
her mother
but she might tell me what's happened
out of pure shock.

Lights out.

TWENTY: THE CALL

Soft lights up on MIA.

MIA:

I might have found
a way to piece them together.
My lovers.
The dancers.

It is nearly a week after
the eleventh.
David leaves New York
before I can gather up the courage
to ask for his forgiveness.
He is so like his son,
overflowing with generosity.
In his shrunken grief,
pressing a paper with the family's
details
into my hand and telling me
that I will always be welcome.
I give him the black and white
photo of Serge
which makes his hands tremble
with emotion.
It is little substitute for his
vibrant, charismatic son.
The one I have taken away.

Lights up on her studio. She moves inside.

I return to the studio
seething with anger
at myself . . . because
who else is there really to blame?
And there they are,
The Dancers,

She faces the invisible statue

still whirling around the room,
they seem . . . (MORE)

THE ASH WOMAN *is on her platform and she sheds ash over the statue*

to be waltzing through
a haze of ash.
Oblivious to anything
other than their desire.
They are vacuous and
show no remorse.

Pause. Glowers at them.

How could I have sacrificed Serge to
them?
What else have I done?

Lights off THE ASH WOMAN

If only . . . I could rewind time,
I would not have reached for
my phone

she reaches for a phone

would not have dialled his number,
would not have said

she is now speaking into the phone

Serge? Hi, it's Mia . . .
Well, just in case you didn't . . .
Are you packed? . . .
Listen, could you come round tomorrow
afternoon instead? I'm working on The
Dancers all night and think I'll probably
need to catch a couple of hours sleep
before I see you . . .
Are you sure it's OK? . . .
Definitely not! You know I'd rather see
you earlier but they're being selfish and
demanding attention . . .
Yes, I think you *should* speak to them
(*laughs*). OK, as long as I'm not putting
you out . . .
You might have to put up with your
favourite views for a breakfast meeting
instead? . . . I've ceased to feel bad now.
OK, I'll let you go. Safe flight.
(*Laughing again and as if trying it out
for the first time.*) Je t'embrasse.

She moves the phone away from her ear and stares at it.

But I do.
If I hadn't,
we would be here 'embrassing'. (MORE)

That's what happens when you
put your art first,
when you allow it to make demands.
So here they are,
mocking the suffering around them,
their self-involvement
rendering them grotesque.
There is nothing else to do
but to get rid of them.
If they too are reduced to ash
at least they won't
have the pleasure of gazing
into each other's eyes.
Why should they?

Fifteen months work,
my energy, soul
and all that unrequited passion
burns down slowly
leaving smoke and ashes.
I've chopped them up first,
like firewood,
dissembled them,
wiped out their smiles.
A friend of mine
who lives upstate
tells me I can
use his property,
as he stands perplexed nearby
watching them burn.
I bury their remains
under the shade of elm trees.
In the absence of a funeral for Serge.

And then I fly home to my parents.
But it doesn't feel like home.
It has become a space
of limbo
where I dream of Serge
and then wake up to his loss
every day.
I'm exhausted by the act
of rediscovering him gone
each morning,
of attempting to pull him down
from the building
with my declarations of love. (MORE)

I need to hear his voice
or something like it.
So I ring David.

I think, now is the time . . .
but he asks me
whether I will come to Paris
for Serge's memorial service
in two days time.
It will mark thirty days
from when the family gave up hope
in recovering him alive.
And I understand
that The Dancers
might find a place
for their hope to reside,
if I look David in his eyes
that are so like Serge's
and ask for his forgiveness.
Maybe . . . then
I will also have an answer
to the question that sears me
every waking moment.

If Serge were asked that day
by the defeated looking man
at the desk;
'Sister? Wife? Cousin? Employee?
Lover? Friend?'
What would he have answered?

She exits.

TWENTY-ONE: THE MEMORY KEEPER

THE ASH WOMAN and **THE ASH TAKERS** *descend from their platforms, making their way across the stage.*

THE ASH TAKERS (*looking off to the side from which MIA has exited*):

Sometimes they attempt
to still their lives
but their beating hearts
betray them. (MORE)

Rhythms of nature
defeat their intent.
The onset of summer
exposes their skin
to light
and ash fades
to a translucent sheen.
Winter's gusts
shift the ash
which coats their being,
transforming the skies
to a darker grey.

They cannot avoid
these natural processes
unless they wrap themselves
in air-tight gauze –
mummies of remembrance.

They cannot avoid us.
We wait.
Silently.
Only sometimes
we are too late.

(to THE ASH WOMAN): Do you wish for us to be too late?

THE ASH WOMAN *stares at the same space offstage.*

Pause.

THE ASH WOMAN: Go then.

THE ASH TAKERS *exit, following MIA's direction.*
The sound of strong winds can be heard.

The guardians of memory
conserve its remains.

Lights out.

TWENTY-TWO: LEAVING

LILY *sits by the window, listening to the birds.*

LILY:

She's off again.
To Paris this time.
I took Ellen's advice and asked her.
Strangely enough she answered,
telling me about Serge, her friend,
although something about her face
revealed he was more than that.
She was almost like her former self,
so determined,
when she spoke about needing to go
to a ceremony,
when there had been no funeral.
If there hadn't have been that
glimmer,
I would have barred the doors
and never have let her leave again.

She turns around.

It didn't seem to be the right moment
to talk about her role in the family
heritage.
To tell her that
I look at her at work sometimes
and think
'This is what my father would have been
like before I knew him'.
Maybe I thought it's too big a burden,
too much guilt if she chose to walk away
from it.
I'm not quite sure I believe she has yet.
The secret, as I have allowed it to
continue to be,
evokes too much.
There is a gap in our family history
and it has razor-like teeth,
threatening to destroy us all.

My father, apparently,
was an impressive young sculptor
building his reputation before the war,
whose work was filled with passion.
He was an idealist with many young
women
who fawned over him,
attracted by his energy and strength.
A woman who presumably had been in
love with him once,
told me this. (MORE)

There is something different about
sculptors.
Perhaps it is the hardness of the
forearms.
I think it has to do with a different way
of seeing,
of being able to convert something real
into a version animated differently.
I don't remember my father like this.
He was a broken man
whose other sight had been destroyed.
He no longer believed in the power of
transformation
or the endlessness of possibilities.
These are things Mia has always had.
They might be blunted now but they're
still there.
I've lived with broken people who are
beyond repair,
she's had her ribs cracked.
Not unable to be fixed.

Maybe I've always been a little bit angry.
Why did she get passed this gift and not
me?
Wasn't I worthy?
But I was missing the ability to fall in
love
with countless objects and people
and want to recreate versions of them.
I never even fell in love with Dan.
There was absolutely no falling.
It was a gradual arrival.
How complete can it be
when I leave most of myself to the
waterworld?
Only when I'm fully submerged,
can I open my lungs and expel all the
pollution
I've been carrying around since birth.
No need to expose it to those I love;
they wouldn't be able to deal with it.
(MORE)

The problem is,
you get so used to keeping secrets
sometimes your love for them
becomes just another. *(Pause.)*
But I think she understood
that in letting her go again,
it was a declaration of my love.
I just need faith
that one day
she'll return . . . and stay.

LILY turns back to the window. The sounds of birds become louder.

Lights out.

END OF FIRST PLAY

Another Tale

LIST OF CHARACTERS

THE ASH WOMAN

THE ASH TAKERS

BENNY

ILANA

MIA

LILY

ONE: ANOTHER TALE

Dim lights up on an empty, nondescript space.

THE ASH WOMAN *appears, sprinkling ash before her.*

THE ASH WOMAN *(to the audience):* And so it begins.
Another tale of conflagration.

Time and space alter,
pain remains constant.

Layers of scorching ash
descend on unsuspecting mortals,
shrouding them with grief.

These ashen cloaks
worn close to the skin,
absorb into bloodstreams.
Fragments of grey move along
internal red currents.

If you have had your fill
of bearing witness,
remember –
they have no such choice.
Turn away if you must,
but spare a thought
for those who have vanished
and those who remain.

Lights out.

TWO: AND FIRST THERE WAS LOVE

The following fragments shift quickly from one to another with the use of lighting to indicate a change in space and time.

Lights on BENNY, standing as if rehearsing a speech. He is something of a fast talker.

BENNY: Thank you for coming tonight
to celebrate with Michal and me.
(MORE)

I know what you're thinking . . .
'Here's Benny, the guy
that good things happen to.
Lucky bastard,
look who he's ended up with!
But you're also thinking,
that you can't be too jealous.
After all, I'm not the average
Israeli-born prick,
who expects everything
because he's God's gift to earth.
For one thing I'm cultured
- I actually open up doors
for women and old people;
even though many of you here
have laughed at me for this.

Well, you're all right -
I *am* a lucky bastard.
From a very early age
I knew that I was going to have
the perfect life.
In fact, I told my mother as a child
that one of my ambitions
was to settle down with a beautiful
woman
who doesn't talk too much
and have some kids.

And Michal is definitely beautiful.
Look at her!
She's not hard looking
like some of the girls here
- not at this table! -
who crack a smile
like it's a precious commodity.
My wife-to-be gives her smiles
willingly and often. (*Long pause. He
stops smiling.*)

It's a big year for us (*Again upbeat*)
we're getting married.
I'm not nervous.
I realised it was . . . right
when we went up to Sinai together.
It was just us
and this expanse;
endless space.

(MORE)

And it felt good
being just the two of us.
You know what I'm like . . .
Usually, I need my friends around.
But it was then I knew I loved her
and that I wanted
to wake up to her every day.
She was more quiet than usual
but I think she was just feeling
the same.
Overwhelmed. (*Pause.*)

Were you Michal? Is that what you
were feeling?

He stops smiling.

*Lights move to ILANA sitting curled up on a chair, talking on her
mobile.*

ILANA: Sweetie, I know you shouldn't talk for
long but I don't think I'm going to make
it till you get home . . . (*Giggles*) It's
ridiculous . . . Not even eleven o'clock!
How does it feel to be married to an old
lady? . . . (*Laughs*) Beautiful, my
backside! An ancient woman is never
beautiful, so don't wish it upon either
me or you . . . Isn't the restaurant meant
to be closing now? . . . Tell them to stop
celebrating then! Tell them my
sweetheart wants to get back to his wife
who waits for him with drooping eyes
and feet that need his expert massaging
technique . . . What do you mean the
guy's leaving his own engagement?
What, just walking out? . . . OK, then!
Tell me when you get home. No, tell me
when I wake up . . . Just one more thing .
. . . No, I've forgotten . . . Easy for you to
laugh . . . Like a sieve! . . . What do you
mean 'wait'? Who are you talking to? . . .

*She pauses, stares out in horror and lurches out of the chair.
Screams progressively louder.*

Yoni? Yoni? Yoni!

Lights out.

THREE: THE EXPLOSION

Lights up on THE ASH WOMAN and THE ASH TAKERS, standing on their platforms.

The light is dull and there is smoke in the air.

THE ASH WOMAN: Molten surfaces become images
borrowed from nightmares.
Contorted into dart boards,
sprawled on beds of nails,
bodies line up along metallic streets.

Colossal vehicles of steel humbled,
puncturing holes into skylines
as if gesturing to passers-by.
'Drowning not waving.'

Ash cracks underfoot
brittle with pain.

THE ASH TAKERS: Even red-hot metal
subsides in intensity.
Its singeing temperature
escapes into the air,
taking on the coolness
of a crust forming
over open flesh.
Technicolour memories
of horrors
fade into black and white.

THE ASH WOMAN (to the audience): But first
it must be witnessed
with every fibre
of your being.

Lights out.

FOUR: VENGEANCE

Lights on ILANA holding a lit candle. It is the night after the attack. She is standing outside the bombed restaurant. It is the first time the audience can see that she is in the early stages of pregnancy.

ILANA:

I need to be here.
It's as if tonight
some primal urge
has taken over
my body which failed me
for the first time ever,
collapsing like a doll
whose stuffing had been removed,
when they confirmed
the news of Yoni's death.

So I - we - (*She passes her hand over her
stomach*)
stand here
and, strangely,
we're not the only ones
giving into these impulses.
Drawn to the place of horror . . .
to do what?
Maybe just to be here. (*Pause.*)
I wonder if they too,
are so unlike themselves.

For some reason,
a man with a voice
that is too loud,
insists on revealing to us
his political aspirations,
calling for vengeance.
'And have no doubt,
we shall redeem their blood.'

What rubbish he talks!
Redeem Yoni's blood?
How does he expect to do that?

Such sweet blood,
it's as if honey
courses through his veins . . . (*She
smiles.*)
On summer evenings,
mosquitoes come
to quench their appetites,
seeing through his skin
to golden streams.

(MORE)

'Why do they always come to me?'
he asks.
'They can't help but love you too'
I tell him
as I suck on his wounds.
'And they're right;
they've been informed
by their relatives
that not only are you tasty
but you don't
have the heart
to strike those that bite you.' *(Pause.)*

Yoni, where are the insides
of your wrists,
your hair-lined calves now?
Already my lips ache for them.
Your honey has been spilt
and seeps black
into the pavement.

Who are these other people?
They must be here for you.
Only the loss of you
could make tears flow like this.
How come I'm not crying,
my sweet?
It would be a pale act of grief.
Not for us my love. *(She stands silent.)*

BENNY enters and stands in front of ILANA holding an unlit candle.

He struggles to light it, his hands are shaking.

ILANA moves towards him, takes a box of matches out of her pocket, and lights it for him.

BENNY: Thank you.

ILANA: Is it for Yoni?

BENNY looks at her blankly.

Were you one of the guys on his
basketball team? He talked about you
all the time. Nadav, right? You're the
short one, the secret weapon.

BENNY: No.

ILANA: Yossi? You're not quite as good looking as I imagined.

BENNY: No. Benny.

ILANA: Benny?

BENNY: I don't play basketball. Who are you?

ILANA: Ilana, Yoni's wife.

BENNY: I'm here for Michal.

Pause.

ILANA: Oh.

BENNY: Michal Azrieli. Twenty-eight years old. Actress. Daughter of Nava and David. Sister of Alon and Yigal. Loved by all.

ILANA: All?

BENNY: They wrote it in the papers.

ILANA: Oh. I see.

BENNY: But they didn't write about the way her voice changes whenever she's excited about something, just a little higher than usual.

ILANA: No, they wouldn't.

BENNY: Or how when she's learning her part, she makes sure she knows everyone else's too. Just in case.

ILANA (quietly): Learnt.

BENNY: She should have been identifiable!

ILANA: To who?

BENNY: To me.

Lights out on BENNY, lights shift to ILANA.

ILANA (*laughing bitterly*): He's worrying
over a little square
of newspaper print . . .
I wish Yoni's *body*
could be identifiable,
never mind
what they write about him.

We stand here,
outside of ourselves.
His hands shake,
a woman stares screaming
at the rubble.
The noisy guy wants
to redeem their blood.
Honey!
I tell you.
There will never be blood
or soul
like that, to walk this earth.
There's no way to redeem that.

Lights out.

FIVE: GUARDIAN ANGEL

Lights on BENNY.

BENNY: Somehow, we've been
helping each other
get through
these past few days.
Me and my guardian angel, Ilana,
who's actually
stark raving mad.
Her with lots of words
and me with none.
They seem to have disappeared
the moment I found out. . .

Yesterday was Michal's
funeral. (*Pause.*)
Her family asked me if I wanted
to say something,
but how could I?
What words would
be appropriate?
None of these scathing ones
which burn my insides. (MORE)

Tonight, I don't think
I'm such a great help.

We discover ILANA standing, ironing a men's white shirt. She is in a state of high anxiety.

BENNY stands by watching her, silent. She irons the same panel over and over again. As she talks, she avoids BENNY's gaze.

ILANA: He loves this shirt. Keeps . . . kept it for special occasions. He looked like a schoolboy in it. Kind of silly. But cute. Maybe the sleeves were too short.

She demonstrates this, holding her arms out and smiles.

Looks up and catches BENNY's eye. Looks away and continues to iron.

This goes on for some time in silence and she becomes increasingly agitated.

Please don't watch me. I need some time
. . . alone with him.

ILANA meets BENNY's gaze this time with a fierceness. He holds it and then moves away towards a window.

She continues her ironing. Stopping, biting her lip as if to prevent herself from crying, ILANA's hands move over the fabric.

BENNY tires of looking out the window and makes his way towards the centre of the room. The movement distracts her.

ILANA. Please, please . . . You keep interrupting me.

BENNY: I don't get it.

ILANA: What?

BENNY: Why are you doing this?

ILANA (as if explaining to a small child): It needs to be done. The shirt needs to be ready for the service tomorrow. Look how creased it is.

She holds it up showing the creases in half of the shirt.

BENNY (*softly*): Ilana.

ILANA (*sharply*): What?

She looks up at him and then more imploring

Please, just let me do it.

BENNY moves into another room lighting up a cigarette as he goes. The sound of a deep exhalation is heard.

ILANA stands still, her hands tentatively feeling the fabric until she suddenly holds it up to her face, breathing it in. She buries her entire face in the shirt.

THE ASH WOMAN sheds ash from her platform.

BENNY (*still offstage*): Ilana, do you remember what it's for?
The service . . .

ILANA lowers the shirt back on to the board, talking to herself.

ILANA (angry but quiet): What does he take me for? He thinks I've lost it. Not even there yet and he thinks I've lost the plot. Not yet standing next to the mound of earth. No skin left to hang off. He'll need his shirt.

ILANA continues ironing with increased vigour.

BENNY enters into the room again, smoking.

BENNY: Maybe you should think about not going.

Long pause.

ILANA: Pass me the starch.

Instead BENNY walks up to her and places his hand on her belly, resting it there, not looking at her.

After a long moment, he moves across the room and brings her the starch. She fumbles.

Yoni always used to give me the wrong one.

BENNY (*gesturing at the shirt*): What about the suit?

ILANA *gasps at the audacity of such a comment until deep laughter escapes and she can't stop, moving away.*

Lights shift to BENNY who sprays the shirt and takes over the ironing.

I'm not sure why those words
chose to be said.
I just want some kind of escape
for both of us —
from these horrible deaths.
From tangled bodies,
sleepless nights,
eyes raw from dryness.
Maybe I want to see her smile
but her laughter
is pure pain.
Another, more brutal,
form of weeping.

Lights out.

SIX: GUILT

ILANA *enters holding a letter in her hand.*

ILANA: They sent me a letter.
The restaurant. (*Pause.*)
'Dear Mrs. Katz,
We are writing to convey our sadness
over your husband, Yonatan's, death
and to express our gratitude over his
brave actions which helped save
countless people.'

Imagine!
Writing to *me*.
The woman
who begged her husband
to leave the shitty security job
he had decided to take on
for extra income
when we found out
I was pregnant.
Only while
he finished his studies,
he said. (MORE)

Writing to me –
the woman who wouldn't
get off the phone with her husband
that night,
because I needed to tell him
what I couldn't possibly
remember the next day.
What about writing it down
on paper instead?
If I had listened to him,
about keeping the calls short
whilst he was at work . . .
But I must have thought
that after a certain hour,
suicide bombers didn't come out.

As if they had to be tucked
into their beds by ten.

Adina, Yoni's mum,
nearly tried to tuck *me*
into my bed last night.
As if I can't take care of myself!
She means well,
but she's more than
a little overbearing.
It's probably her way
of coping.
When she's around
I'm stifled,
as if the air in the apartment
is disappearing.
It's different
when Benny comes over,
you almost can't tell he's here.
He doesn't get in the way.
We don't talk much
but it's comforting
knowing that he's just . . . here.

He was sitting on the couch
when Adina came over,
and the look of surprise on her face –
it was like watching a bad vaudeville
actor!
'Who might this be?'
she almost yelled.

(MORE)

'I don't believe we've met.
Isn't it late?
She needs her sleep, you know.'
Benny just mumbled something
and left.
I wouldn't be surprised if
he didn't come back.

The way she looked at me!
You'd think she'd caught us
rolling around in bed.
As if I could even look
at another man!
Yoni and I started going out
when we were fifteen.
Sometimes I think that
Avner and Ruti
– the old couple,
who were killed strolling by
the restaurant
on their late night walk –
sometimes I think
they were lucky.
They died holding hands. (*Pause.*)
That's how Yoni and I
should have gone.
But then, no one deserves
to die like that.

If I had just said
'Goodnight, my sweet',
Yoni . . . (*she looks down to her belly*)
– your father –
would have been here.

He had so many more
lives to save.
Not as a security guard,
as a psychologist
working with damaged children.

Now I'm going to produce
another bruised one
but Yoni's not around
to make it right.

Lights out momentarily.

SEVEN: A DIET OF ASH

*We discover THE ASH TAKERS standing on their platforms,
ILANA is still on stage but in darkness.*

THE ASH TAKERS: This is not conducive
to the life she carries.
A diet of bitter ash
and memories
does not nourish.

Sometimes others like her
attempt to still their lives
but their beating hearts
betray them.

Rhythms of nature
defeat their intent.
The onset of summer
exposes their skin
to light
and ash fades
to a translucent sheen.
Winter's gusts
shift the ash
which coats their being,
transforming the skies
to a darker grey.

They cannot avoid
these natural processes
unless they wrap themselves
in air-tight gauze.
Mummies of remembrance.

They cannot avoid us.
We wait.
Silently.
Only sometimes
we are too late.

Lights out.

EIGHT: YOUR PAIN

ILANA's apartment.

BENNY *is sitting, watching ILANA as she uncovers a large mirror. From this action it can be inferred that the 'shiva' period, the Jewish tradition of seven days of mourning, is over.*

She walks offstage and changes her dark top to one of colour.

ILANA (*not looking at him*): You think I'm stupid, don't you?

BENNY: Why would I think that?

ILANA: Making up my own rules of mourning. It's just . . . seven days . . . people who don't love the people they're mourning for, do it for seven days because they're told to. How could I possibly mourn for Yoni for the same time as they do? Even double isn't enough. What does it show that I mourned for fourteen days? But at least I made my point. This is my love. A week is not enough. A year is not enough. If I live to a hundred and tear my garments every day, that wouldn't be enough.

She looks over at BENNY who is sullenly playing with his shoelaces.

You think I'm a hypocrite?

BENNY: No.

ILANA: You do. I don't blame you. This woman is raving about the death of her great love and another man is sitting on their bed. Fourteen days after his funeral.

BENNY: I wasn't thinking that.

ILANA: So what were you thinking?

BENNY *continues to play with his shoelaces.*

You're thinking about her, aren't you?
(MORE)

She moves to sit next to him.

You know, you haven't told me much about her. I talk about Yoni constantly but you don't speak about her. Is it too painful? (*She sighs.*) Maybe it's a sign of stronger emotion.

BENNY *stops playing, looks up.*

BENNY: I don't say her name because it makes me want to spit.

ILANA *looks confused. Pause.*

I wasn't there at that moment. Did you ever wonder why? We were, after all, celebrating our engagement. So where was I?

ILANA: Saying bye to someone in the restaurant?

BENNY: No, I wasn't there. I was speeding through the streets calling her every swear word I could think of. I didn't limit it to Hebrew either.

ILANA (*recoiling*): I don't understand.

BENNY: At the moment her blue eyes with green specks were shattering and the beauty spot at the middle of her back was becoming a memory with no physical trace, I was calling her a slut. In fact, I was wishing her dead.

ILANA: What are you saying?

BENNY: That I might have wished it upon her.

ILANA: Why are you saying this?

BENNY: Because it's the only explanation that seems to make sense. The woman who rocked my world got her pleasure from someone else. A fact I was stupidly oblivious to for over a year. I find out and BOOM!, along comes a terrorist to avenge me.

ILANA: That's terrible. Take it back.

BENNY: I wish I could. I never knew the power of thoughts before. It's not like I thought of her death . . . But essentially it's Michal and my fault. We started it off.

ILANA: What about Yoni?

BENNY: What do you mean?

ILANA: What part did he have to play in your domestic drama? Sorry Benny, I don't buy it. What about Avner and Ruti? Where did they enter into your troubles?

BENNY: I don't know. I don't understand it, but I had a part to play. *(Pause.)*

ILANA sits down, silent. BENNY starts to shake.

I miss both Michals so much. Even the one I'd just met. There wasn't enough of her skin . . . The bastard. She had such beautiful skin. *(Pause.)* How can you mourn them when they've vanished? Wiped off the earth, leaving streams of blood. Twenty-eight years old and no future. For what? For nothing. Nothing. How do you face that every morning? That that's all there is. I can't do it anymore.

He manages to reach into his back pocket for a cigarette and attempts to light it but once again he is shaking too much.

THE ASH TAKERS move down towards them but THE ASH WOMAN motions for them to stop. They do.

ILANA clasps her hands around BENNY, in a maternal embrace.

BENNY (not to ILANA, still in embrace): It's the first time the tears come.
And I'm crying
for Michal –
both the one I loved
and the one I despised.

(MORE)

I'm crying for
broken promises
and the person
I am no longer.
All my life
I've thought
I was blessed
with luck,
when really life
was just waiting to
unveil this horrible
suffering.
Maybe I deserve it
but Ilana doesn't.

Lights out.

NINE: BOMBS

The light is dim, murky.

ILANA is standing nervously.

ILANA:

It's happened again.
Not the same, not here
but to so many.
They think that thousands
disintegrated in the fires.
People on planes . . .
I can't even begin to think . . .
Didn't think such a thing
could happen there.

Here . . . here it's different.
Sometimes I think I'm going insane.
Chinese Water Torture except
with every drip
people are being killed.
Drip. 3 dead, 9 wounded.
Drip. 11 dead, 180 wounded.
Drip. 6 dead, over 50 wounded.
Drip. 30 dead, 140 wounded.
Gush.

(MORE)

Pause.

Each time there's a high alert in your
area,
the bombs seem to be coming nearer to
you
but that day you sleep in
or cross the road
and you're safe . . .
For the moment.
When you hear on the news
that one went off on the bus
you usually take to work
you think:
it had your name on it.

None of us believe
that we can evade this forever.
You catch on TV the funeral of a girl
who was in your year at school . . .
We don't believe
there's any reason,
why that woman died instead of you.

We don't breathe out too deeply because
. . . we know they will be back.

The therapists on the radio and TV
tell us to speak to someone.
Not to carry the stress around.
Who should I speak to?
We're a country of traumatized people.
I should pay a psychologist who jumps
every time a balloon pops
at his son's birthday party?
To tell me that I'm imagining things?

So another drag on the cigarette,
another gulp of a double-shot coffee
because what else is there to do
when you're waiting?

The last one reached Yoni. Am I
prepared? I think the right word would
be . . .
Terrified. I could shit in my pants.

Lights out.

TEN: THE KISS

BENNY *enters the stage.*

BENNY:

I've taken to sleeping over
a few nights a week.
Sometimes I turn up
at her apartment late,
after trying to fall sleep
in my empty bed,
which has grown substantially
ever since Michal . . .
Ilana answers the door
as if she's still asleep.
There's nothing improper
about it.
She's not playing the role
of the merry widow.
I sleep on the couch.

She's exasperating
and yet I realise that she's
also beautiful
with all of her neuroses. *(Smiles.)*
Especially when she
needs to eat,
even though she
doesn't want to,
but the baby inside her
seems to have
a will to match her own.
I think she'd stop
eating altogether
if she could.
Freeze her life
until it came time
for her to die
and be reunited
with her love.
I admire her . . .
and want her.
I'm not sure
which is the greater.

BENNY *walks over to sit next to ILANA who is slumped, deflated.*
She breathes heavily.

ILANA: Benny, you're going to have to do some talking for a change. I'm all talked out.

BENNY: What do you want me to say?

ILANA: That's beside the point. I just want you to speak so that I don't have to. See, already I'm defeating the purpose.

BENNY: But why does anyone have to speak? Can't we just sit here and be silent?

ILANA: No.

BENNY (*doggedly*): Why not?

ILANA: This is a conversation. I don't want to be involved. I want to sit here with my mouth shut but in order to do so I need you to open yours and make some sound.

BENNY: I still don't understand. We can both keep them closed.

ILANA: No we can't. It might be OK for you but it just isn't.

BENNY: What if I put on the radio?

ILANA *jumps*.

ILANA: Please don't. If you put on the radio, I'll hear of more explosions or deaths. I just want some silence. A bit of hush. When it's quiet I hear Yoni. Saying my name. Asking me who this man is sitting next to me. . .

BENNY: What's he saying now?
Pause.

ILANA (*looking at BENNY*): He's saying, 'Why's this guy looking at you with such pity? I've never known you to want or need it. Why now?' (*She looks away.*) And he's right. I don't want or need it. If you're here, do something useful. Talk.

BENNY looks at her intently for a long moment.

He slowly takes ILANA in his arms and kisses her deeply. When he stops, he extracts himself and looks at her for a long while.

BENNY: What's he saying now?

Long pause.

ILANA: Nothing. Nothing.

Pause.

BENNY: Well, there's your silence.

ILANA: Why did you do that?

BENNY: I'm not sure.

ILANA: Are you stupid?

BENNY: Maybe I felt sorry for you.

ILANA: Don't. (*Holding her stomach and turning away.*) We're just fine –

BENNY (getting up): But I think it more likely that I was sick of wanting to be a dead man and wishing that I had met a girl called Ilana not Michal.

ILANA: Don't talk like that.

BENNY: Before you wanted me to talk.

ILANA: I prefer his voice.

BENNY: I can't compete with a man who doesn't breathe and tells you exactly what you want to hear.

ILANA: Who's talking about competing? The only words I want to hear him say are that it's all a mistake as he walks through that door.

BENNY: It's not going to happen.

ILANA: Benny, I think you should go.

BENNY: For how long?

ILANA (*laughing suddenly*): Would you like to know what he's telling me now?

BENNY: No Ilana, I'd like to know what you want.

Pause.

ILANA: To feel less alone.

Silence. After a moment BENNY sits down next to her again.

Lights on BENNY.

BENNY: Her and me both. (*Pause.*)
It's particularly lonely
when you're the third presence
in the room
and the competition
is invisible.
This business
is not great for the ego—
being beaten
in the romance stakes
by a dead guy.

Lights out.

ELEVEN: THE PHOTO

ILANA enters holding a newspaper.

ILANA: It was a moment
of madness
and bad judgement
on his part.
Men find it difficult
to express themselves
in ways that are other
than physical.
Still . . .
he shocked me.
It wasn't like
it was the first time
we were alone. (MORE)

What would Adina think?
She'd probably die on the spot
if she knew about his sleeping over.
She'd definitely stop
talking to me.
But it's not like that . . .
I understand the need
to have another body
in the next room,
to hear their breathing
even though it doesn't belong
to the right person.

I'm furious actually
- what right does he have
to touch me like that? -
but too tired
to really tell him.
He stops
coming by to sleep
after that.

It's strange
because even though
it doesn't seem like he's here
even when he is,
I can't sleep
without him in the other room.
I become an insomniac
for the first time.
But of course
I can't tell him
that the apartment
rings hollow without him,
and that I fall asleep
every morning
on the bus to work,
because at least
there are people around.
He might get the wrong idea.

I don't see him for over
two weeks.
I'm like a wreck
from lack of sleep.
Then one night
he comes over
with food for dinner.

(MORE)

We sit there not talking,
just eating.
And that night,
although he doesn't stay over,
I sleep like a baby.

We're in a kind of routine now.
Four nights a week
we eat together.
On those nights
I make sure Adina doesn't visit,
tell her that I'm out
at girlfriends' houses.
I'm lying like some
kind of teenager
but it's too difficult to explain.
What would I say anyway?
'Adina, I can't sleep
unless he comes over.'
She'd check me into a sleep clinic.
I can't believe
I'm behaving like a secretive
fourteen-year-old daughter
with my mother-in-law!

We take it in turns cooking.
Benny surprises me
with light soufflés
and delicately cooked fish.
I scratch together
salad with eggs,
or pick up take-away
on my nights.
Four nights a week
I sleep properly.

She walks across the stage

It's his night to be chef tonight
and I'm sitting like
a stuffed duck
after one of his casseroles
with ingredients
fresh from the market.
And then he starts to laugh
and make these joyful sounds
so I go to look
at what he's reading
and I think –
he's gone mad.

She sits down near BENNY who is sitting reading a newspaper, shaking his head in disbelief and laughing.

ILANA: Benny, are you OK?

BENNY (incredulously): It's Serge! Serge! I can't believe it . . .

ILANA: I don't understand –

BENNY: We were best friends! In Paris, before my family moved here. I haven't seen him since I was fifteen but that's his face! He always was a heartbreaker . . .

ILANA continues to stare at him, speechless.

There is a long pause as BENNY continues to shake his head.

Then it begins to dawn on him, he drops the paper and starts to shout.

Shit! Shit! Serge . . . Serge . . . Serge!

He stands up, tormented and begins to sob. ILANA holds him.

Lights on ILANA.

ILANA: We were consumed
by our own grief.
So when September 11
happened,
it shook us,
but we had to
keep on breathing
for our own sakes.
And that meant
shutting most of it out.

He wasn't like this
when Michal died.
It's as if
something in him has
broken.
I don't know
how to help this time.
The words have left me.

Lights out.

TWELVE: JULES ET JIM

BENNY *enters clutching the newspaper.*

BENNY:

It wasn't like this
when Michal was killed.
Don't mistake me—
it was horrible . . .
the worst.
Only Serge . . .

It's such a joyous
moment for me
when I see his face.
There it is
smiling up at me,
more than twenty years older,
even more handsome
and it all falls away . . .
the bombings,
Michal,
Ilana and her ghost of a husband.
It all disappears.
And all that's left
is Serge and I

The light changes to a summer day, birds are chirping

walking in the park
with all the girls
at our feet.
We are formidable.
I talk, he smiles.

It's funny because
we are so different.
I chatter on
about Michel Platini,
football player supreme —
top scorer
of the European Championships
that year —
and Serge draws.
I make the girls laugh
and he makes them swoon.
Not because he tries,
it's just effortless.
We've been like this
ever since we met at
kindergarten.
He's the brother I never had. (MORE)

And even though it's been
over fifteen years since I've heard
from him –
we lost contact somehow
along the way –
it always felt like we were
Jules and Jim
without the girl in between.

The light dims, birds stop chirping.

But here he is,
part of the endless
patchwork of photos
on the cover of the newspaper.
There are so many of them.
He still stands out.
Not because
he's in black and white.
His energy bursts from the page.
Whoever took it
captured him perfectly.
Who took it?
Why was he in New York?
All these questions
burn me up at night.
I ring my parents,
who returned to France
five years ago,
and ask them to find
the Rosenberg family.
I need to find Serge.

THIRTEEN: LIFE GOES ON

Lights move to ILANA.

ILANA: He's on
some kind of mission.
I don't understand
but it has something to do
with his dead childhood friend.
These days
he only comes round
to eat about once a week.
But now,
even when he's here,
it's as if he's somewhere else. (MORE)

It's OK . . .
life goes on.
There's no reason
for me to tell Adina
I'm not home anymore.
She seems to have had a career change,
and become a caterer,
bringing over meals
most days.
Except she sits and watches
that I eat it all,
or most of it.
I never liked her food
but it's too late to tell her now.

Lights on the platforms where THE ASH WOMAN and THE ASH TAKERS stand. ILANA stands in darkness.

THE ASH WOMAN: It is rare,
but not unheard of,
for ash to freeze.
Locked in its original form
it maintains its power
to devastate
and paralyse the living.
Their lives are pulled
along by its magnetic current.
Embodied by pain.

THE ASH TAKERS: It is not only she
who will freeze.
The unborn child
will go rigid
with her grief and loneliness.
Do you wish for this to happen?

THE ASH WOMAN: What would you have me do?

THE ASH TAKERS: We will help her to sleep again. Let us
have her.

THE ASH WOMAN: She is not ready.

THE ASH TAKERS: Then allow us a sign.
Pause.

THE ASH WOMAN: A sign, then.

Lights out.

FOURTEEN: THE KICK

Lights on ILANA sitting down.

ILANA:

Last night
watching old home movies
I'm on the couch,
my body asleep
but my head
still going.
It's full
of talking pictures
of Yoni and I
glowing with
love and heat
on our honeymoon
in Turkey.
Even when my eyes
are closed,
I can see him
laughing with delight.
So I'm smiling
back at him
with my eyes closed
when I feel something.

It's so strange,
like when your heart
beats stronger than usual
and you become conscious
that it's beating at all.
But it isn't my heart,
It's some kind of movement
deep inside me . . .
and then I realise.
It's kicking!
The baby is kicking!
And I spring up
from the couch

She does this

and start calling for Yoni
because I don't
want him to miss it.
Not the first time.

(MORE)

And I call
for ages
until I realise
that he isn't coming.
Not now
and not the next time.
Truthfully,
I sink down
and think of
never getting up.
But it kicks again,
as if to say,
'Ilana, get yourself together.
You've got someone else
to think about.'

And I decide to listen,
not something I'm
great at doing,
but it's insistent –
this body growing inside me.

She smiles wearily and closes her eyes.

Lights out.

FIFTEEN: CALLING FOR SERGE

Lights on BENNY as he enters holding a piece of paper.

BENNY: My parents manage
to get Serge's parents' number –
David and Sylvie.
The paper holding it
is both comforting
and saddening.
It makes me closer
to Serge
as if I'm about to
ring and ask him if
he wants to come round.
Really, I know
that's not the case.

(MORE)

I go to Ilana's
to speak to her
so she can tell me
what I should say.
She doesn't answer
so I let myself in
and there she is —

He crosses to where ILANA lies in a darkened room, asleep to the sounds of home movies, which are projected onto her.

literally
enveloped by him. *(Pause.)*
It is the first time
I see him.
He's no longer a ghost
but a sweet-faced guy
who looks at her
with adoration.

I leave her with Yoni
keeping her warm,
entering her dreams,

Lights off ILANA. He moves across the stage.

and go home,
waiting for it to get light.

I ring the number
and David answers.
What do I say to him?
'It's Benny, Benny Malka'
and before I explain
he knows exactly
who I am.
In fact,
he is excited by my voice,
'Benny? Really?
Such a long time . . .'
and then there's silence. *(Pause.)*
All I want to say is
'Can I please speak to Serge?'
Instead,
I tell him how sorry I am
and we start to speak.

(MORE)

I'm so thirsty
for information,
'What did he do?
Why was he there?'
It emerges slowly,
painfully,
the photo starts to
flesh itself out
and now I'm able
to mourn not only
the fifteen year old Serge,
but the thirty-seven year old.

We speak for a long time.
Sometimes David talks
as if his son is still alive,
'He loves his work,
it allows him
to be surrounded
by his passion, art.'
But mostly,
there are holes.
He has, after all,
disappeared off
the planet.
How can he talk about this?
He talks around it
but it's there.

Before I hang up,
David tells me
that his son's consecration is
next week.
In Paris.
I don't tell him,
but in my head
I'm already on my way.

Lights out.

THIRTEEN: WATER HEALING

Lights on THE ASH WOMAN.

THE ASH WOMAN: Winds have changed,
the heat has evaporated,
cooling ash.
It falls away from their bodies,
layer by layer,
aided by single drops of water
which descend,
submerging the world in liquid.

Shivering bodies frigid with absence
are encased by salt-edged showers,
creating pools of reflection.
Distorting memory.

Ash dissolves in water
leaving a bitter taste.

THE ASH WOMAN *leaves, spreading ash as she goes.*

ILANA *enters.*

ILANA: The morning after the kick,
I wake up
and realise
I have slept for fourteen hours.
Without dreaming.

I shower
and as I stand under the water
scrubbing the sleep
out of my eyes,
the sweat off my body,
It's as if all the dead skin
is lifting off me
and my limbs aren't
so heavy anymore.

They are as light as gossamer
and for the first time,
me and you

It becomes apparent that she's talking to her baby

are so weightless,
we could fly away.
Just the two of us.

THE ASH TAKERS *slowly make their way down to the stage, approaching and then cradling ILANA, creating a rhythm of water lapping in and out.*

The light takes on a blue pallor.

Their voices are serene, hushed.

THE ASH TAKERS: She was washed up, washed out.
His blood had infiltrated
where blasted shards
pierced her consciousness.
Let us soothe her with our song.
Cleanse her with the water lullaby.

Oceans, seas, streams, rivulets.
A story of woman and water
when edges blur and melt.
Travel with us down this endless ripple
release your grief
and
flow . . .

They lift her so that she is held above them.

ILANA *takes the diving position.*

into your life.

Lights out.

FOURTEEN: A QUESTION ANSWERED

BENNY *enters.*

BENNY: Maybe I think –
I know it's ridiculous –
that I am actually
flying to see him.
That as I walk out the plane,
Serge will appear,
slap me on my back,
tell me off for not writing
and we'll
go for a walk
in the Jardin du Luxembourg.
Our old stomping grounds. (MORE)

The day is superb,
it's as if nature
has come out to honour him.
I stand at the cemetery,
next to my parents,
and look at his family's faces
crumbling with sorrow.
There is no more space
for delusions.

Afterwards we stand there,
none of us wanting to move
and David asks me how
I found out.
I tell him
about the photo
in the paper.
Of Serge smoking
and smiling his smile
and he knows
which one it is.
'It is beautiful, no?'

But then he tells me
that the girl who took it
is here -
would I like to speak to her?
He calls her name, 'Mia' . . .

MIA enters tentatively, red-eyed.

MIA: Yes?

BENNY: Benny.

MIA: Mia.

BENNY: I'm an old friend of Serge.

MIA: Hi.

BENNY: David says it was you who took the
photo.

MIA: Sorry?

BENNY: The one of Serge that was in the paper.

MIA: Oh, yes.

BENNY: It's black and white.

MIA: He didn't want me to take it at the time .
..

BENNY: He looks happy enough.

(Pause.)

I'm thankful you did take it.

MIA: Why?

BENNY: It helped me find him . . .

MIA: Find him?

BENNY: I hadn't seen him since we were fifteen.
When I left.

MIA: Where to?

BENNY: My family and I moved to Israel.

MIA: Not so far . . .

BENNY: Yes, but we lost contact . . . Do you live
in New York?

MIA: I'm not sure.

BENNY: How can you not know where you live?

MIA: I moved to New York from Australia.
That's how I . . . knew Serge. Now I'm
here for a little bit. Paris is good for the
eyes.

BENNY: Are you a photographer?

MIA: No, I used to sculpt. But I don't really
anymore.

BENNY: Serge was so talented, even when he was
young.

MIA: I saw some of his work at his parents' house. It's wonderful.

BENNY: I always thought he'd be a famous artist.

MIA: He was his own worst critic.

BENNY: But so generous with others.

Pause.

I saw your photo and suddenly there he was. The Serge I knew so well.

MIA: I look at it sometimes and think, there he is.

Pause.

BENNY: It's very . . . beautiful.

MIA: Well, he was . .

Pause. She struggles to compose herself.

BENNY: I'm sorry. I'm sure he felt the same way.

MIA: What do you mean?

BENNY: His smile, his eyes . . . I can tell.

MIA: What?

BENNY: He must have loved whoever took the photo. It's what I thought when I first saw it.

She is moved, holds it in. BENNY begins to say something but stops.

MIA: Thank you.

Silence.

Lights out.

SIXTEEN: TWO TALES OF MANY

THE ASH WOMAN *appears. The light is hazy.*

THE ASH WOMAN: It is time.

ILANA, BENNY, MIA and LILY *all file onto the stage, forming a line to the side.*

THE ASH WOMAN *nods her head. ILANA moves towards her and stops in front.*

Ashes to ashes.
Bodies emerge
from the dust of the earth,
only to return.
Time will pass before
you cleave to him again.
First, a new form will emerge,
sticky with residue.
Each limb will embody a memory.

THE ASH WOMAN *smudges ash on ILANA's belly.*

Go now.

ILANA *exits.*

BENNY *moves towards THE ASH WOMAN, stops in front of her.*

Transformed to ash,
objects become sacred,
imbued with new meaning.
The portrait of her
that you keep,
cracks upon inspection.
Be true to her reality
and return to your life.

She moves forward and smudges ash on his forehead.

Go. (MORE)

BENNY *exits.*

MIA *moves towards her, stops in front.*

Filmy leaves of ash shift,
exposing skin that is raw,
glowing with possibilities.
Release the guilt that
embitters every recollection,
all moments of breathing.
Allow yourself hope,
and inhale the world.

THE ASH WOMAN *moves towards MIA and places ash in her hand. MIA places it in her mouth.*

Go.

MIA *exits.*

THE ASH WOMAN *crosses to LILY, stops in front of her.*

Some unfortunates,
frozen by lifelong patterns,
are unable to shift
from beneath their carapaces.
They attempt to do so
but then retreat,
as dark bruises form.
Returning to lives of ash.

Go.

LILY *exits.*

THE ASH WOMAN *turns to the audience.*

In the beginning
there was the world
and only love.
Then emerged
pain and hate.
These, who have
passed before you
continue to suffer.
They are not alone.
Two implosions.
So many more
have occurred
and will continue
and continue . . .
Tale upon tale.
Implosion follows implosion.
Ash falls steadily,
insistently.
So they are not forgotten.

She begins to form small circles from the middle of the stage outwards, which become larger ones, all the while sprinkling ash, until she exits to the side.

Lights out.

END OF PLAY

Tales of Ash:
Phantom Bodies as Testimony in Artistic
Representations of Terrorism
(Volume Two-Exegesis)

Tali Lavi
(Master of Arts)

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RMIT

Phantom Bodies as Testimony in Artistic Representations of Terrorism

An exegesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Master of Arts

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'Phantom Bodies'

What does the ghost say as it speaks, barely, in the interstices of the visible and invisible?

Avery Gordon: *Ghostly Matters*¹

Two sets of explosions are experienced in different parts of the world. One is gargantuan, producing 1.5 million tonnes of debris, and causing the terrain to spew forth fire for months afterwards. This group of eruptions resonates globally and the date on which they are executed becomes a day to be nationally memorialised. The other explosion is enacted on a smaller scale and it mirrors similar blasts that have already reverberated and will continue to occur within the country's borders. Both are overwhelming for survivors, witnesses and their societies at large; molten metal and splintered glass transmogrify bodies into unimaginable, and sometimes unidentifiable, forms. After the conflagration, how are these absences, brought about through terrorist acts, grieved over and remembered?

In both of these diverse scenarios—the stand-alone event of September 11 2001 in New York and ongoing suicide bombings in Israel²—the populations affected have lost entire bodies that were literally obliterated by terrorism. Societies are forced to cope with both the violence that has been inflicted upon them alongside the growing sense of terror that emerges with the disappearance of the body. In some nightmarish realities, living people are instantaneously reduced by the attacks into DNA strands from which they might be identified.

Artists choosing to depict these new realities are communicating alternate histories in which ash replaces flesh and dislocated fragments replace the

¹ Avery F. Gordon, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination* (University of Minnesota Press: 1997), 24. This book was discovered through a reading of Maria Tumarkin's *Traumascapes*.

² For the purposes of limiting the area of study, I refer to the period of suicide bombings in Israel from 28 September 2000 to the present day, the start of what is referred to, by both Israelis and Palestinians, as the 'Second Intifada' ('intifada' is widely translated as uprising).

integrated whole. Potent stories and images are now being created by these playwrights, novelists, visual artists and architects. Some are choosing to repudiate the general discourse that surrounds terrorism, one that revolves around politics and blame-games. These artists are responding to nihilistic terrorist acts by focussing on the devastation itself and searching for remnants of humanity, one as minute as a fingernail, another as ethereal as a bedtime story. As writer Jonathan Safran Foer contends, he set out to create a novel 'that wasn't politicised or commercialised, something with no message, something human.'³ Can humanity be uncovered in the aftermath of an event in which certain individuals have sought to eradicate humanity? This is a latent preoccupation of these artists that emerges from an investigation of their works.

After an event that has resulted in the disappearance of so many people, an understandable preoccupation with the act of remembering arises. To bear witness is a theme that is continuously revisited when an atrocity of any kind is addressed. Eastern European intellectual Slavoj Žižek suggests that 'traumas we are not ready or able to remember haunt us all the more forcefully. We should therefore accept the paradox that, in order really to forget an event, we must first summon up the strength to remember it properly.'⁴ The sense of 'remember[ing] it properly', as he phrases it, might only be achieved with the help of passing time and even then one is likely to ask: what constitutes 'properly'? Does not the memory of trauma, with its accompanying permutations and refractions, prevent a definitive remembrance? Allowing for all of this, there is an essence of truth to Žižek's claim: when there are complications to the remembrance process of a traumatic event, a haunting occurs. When approaching September 11 and suicide bombings in Israel, crises emerge through the lack of bodies intact for burials and, in the worst cases an inability to identify or find remains, adding complexity to confronting the brutality of the act itself.

³ Quoted in Deborah Solomon, "Extremely Odd and Incredibly Clever" in *The Age: Good Weekend Magazine* 11 June 2005, 35.

⁴ Slavoj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert of the Real: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates* (Verso: 2002), 22.

How is this haunting revealed? When exploring works that emanated from these particular cataclysms, it became clear that those artists who rejected political polemic and instead engaged with the dimensions of human loss, required a mechanism in order to refer to the absence caused by the act of terrorism. They do not merely refer to the absence, but it becomes present as a distinct energy. Three recurring representations made themselves known: ash and remnants, presence/absence and memory building. Following a trauma⁵, as recognised by Žižek, remembering acts as an essential part of the healing process, as it simultaneously complicates the process. The representations all embody forms of remembrance and in many ways reflect Elizabeth Grosz's investigation of the cultural and psychological meanings that reside within the Phantom Limb.

Grosz's book, *Volatile Bodies*⁶, explores, through the Phantom Limb, the extraordinary role of the human body played in the remembrance process. The phenomenon is a response that exists in general cases of amputation or loss of limb, when the person affected feels as if that limb is still present and functioning, albeit in a distorted manner. It is a mechanism that helps them to deal psychically with the trauma of the event as the removed limb induces feelings of pain where it was once located. The phantom heralds an altered state of being, one that merges the living with what has been lost. According to Grosz, 'in traditional psychological and physiological terms, the phantom limb is treated as a memory'.⁷ However, the Phantom Limb can also be understood as 'not a memory or an image of something now absent [. . .] It is "quasi-present". It is the refusal of an experience to enter into the past; it illustrates the tenacity of a present that remains immutable.'⁸ This paper considers artworks, both literary and visual, wherein these limbs have evolved into Phantom Bodies.

⁵ The word 'trauma' is used throughout this study to denote a reaction to a type of event, which overwhelms a person, 'effectively shatter[ing]' a person's experience of the world. Definition from Maria Tumarkin, *Traumascapes* (Melbourne University Press: 2005), 11.

⁶ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Allen & Unwin: 1994).

⁷ *Ibid.*, 89

⁸ *Ibid.*

Two sets of explosions occur. The Phantom Bodies that emerge, directly from the scorching heat of the fire or from tapering wraiths of smoke, present forms of testimony that vary from that of traditional ones generally associated with the act of remembrance⁹. One of the forms, ash and remnants, are a direct response to the reduction of the affected bodies into fragmented remnants. This corruption of the intact body further compounds the horror, complicates the grieving process and expressly affects the formation of these Phantom Bodies. The fragments, at first a source of horror, become imbued with a sense of otherness at the hands of some artists, metamorphosing into new structures with an elusive sense of power. In Lynne Sharon Schwartz's novel, *The Writing on the Wall*, the effects of the September 11 attacks on the life of a New York librarian are depicted. The central character, Renata, sees the events unroll from the Brooklyn Bridge, and after returning to her apartment watches those outside: 'people have slowed down, drifting through the ashes underfoot like sleepwalkers [. . .] The walkers are moving through a new medium, not quite as fluid as water, not quite as vaporous as air. It is a fluttery, trembly ambience'.¹⁰ Through this literary interpretation Schwartz succeeds in transforming the matter from its negative implications of dust or dirt so that it takes on an ethereal, almost spiritual nature, affecting the gait of those walking through it. Other artworks are explored and considered for their transformative potential; are they purely mirroring the fragmented reality or are they conveying something more complex? 'Forms of Ash', Chapter One of this study, explores the significance of ash and remnants through a consideration of the American play, *The Mercy Seat*,¹¹ and the Israeli art installation, *The Country*.¹²

The disappearance of the body itself leads to an exploration of notions of absence and presence. In his investigation of the theory of absence, philosopher Patrick Furey suggests that 'secondary absences [. . .] imply presence [. . .] and indicate

⁹ Such as survivor diaries and accounts.

¹⁰ Lynne Sharon Schwartz, *The Writing on the Wall* (Counterpoint: 2005), 48.

¹¹ Neil LaBute, *The Mercy Seat* (Faber & Faber: 2003).

¹² Sigalit Landau, *The Country* (Spartizan: 2003).

sites of presence'.¹³ The inherent instability of these spaces allow for a deeper recognition of the loss that is approached by artists. Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*¹⁴ is a tale of nine-year-old Oskar, whose father has died in the World Trade Center and whose subsequent search for the lock of a key he has found, which he is convinced will lead him closer to his father, is characterised by the gap in space he is looking for. Gaps fill the pages of this book, literally and figuratively: empty coffins, blank pages, jewellery composed of Morse-coded messages from the dead father, spaces that defy labels of 'Something' or 'Nothing'. Chapter Two, 'Absence and Climbing Out of the Hole', is an examination of the power that emerges from the employment of absence in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, the Spike Lee film *25th Hour*,¹⁵ and the Israeli play *About the Oranges*¹⁶.

The paradox of representing absence in the physical articulation of architecture is discussed in Chapter Three, 'Explorations in Memory Building', which addresses the World Trade Center site plans for rebuilding. The wish to commemorate the terrain of Ground Zero as an appropriate and somehow consecrated burial ground, and thus begin to redress the chilling reality of mass destruction, is reflected by the much contested proposals for the rebuilding of the site of the World Trade Centre. Daniel Libeskind, the architect whose entry for the master plans entitled 'Memory Foundations' was selected, sought to reconstruct and revisualise this gap. His intention was for the site to act as a space where the phantoms can be both memorialised and placed to rest so that New York can experience a healing of its landscape.

Alongside the compulsion to bear witness emerges the problematics of testifying. Artists who are choosing to depict these post-terrorist attack realities have

¹³ Patrick Fuery, *The Theory of Absence: Subjectivity, Signification and Desire* (Greenwood Press: 1995), 1.

¹⁴ Jonathan Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (Houghton Mifflin Company: 2005).

¹⁵ Spike Lee (director), *25th Hour* (40 Acres & A Mule, 2002).

¹⁶ Robbie Gringras, formerly known as *The Situation Comedy* (Unpublished playscript, Draft 12, January 2004).

captured in their works an awareness of simultaneous horror (at the event) and beauty (in the need to memorialise those now absent). For some bystanders, in both American and Israeli societies, the depiction of Phantom Bodies, particularly when they engage with the horror of the event, is inappropriate and bordering on the sacrilegious. This reaction has the ability to result in a public repudiation of the artist's work, a refusal to look at what is being memorialised. A subsequent tension invests the work with danger, stemming from the question of when is the rendering of the Phantom Body too explicit and who holds the authority to determine this? Who, indeed, is the cultural gatekeeper? Images that were censored from the American public's gaze after the attacks on September 11, have been courageously reclaimed by artists and manipulated in a kind of power reversal. This is observed in Chapter Four, 'The Strength in Falling Upwards'.

Two distinct sets of explosions occur. For New York, the horror of physical absence is mirrored in its changed skyline where a gaping hole is situated. This physical reminder infects the works of artists as they address issues of memory and more intangible explorations of loss and healing in their cultures. They look back on their time of terror and examine it from a city that, although still bearing scars, has formed a shell of safety. What, then, are Israeli artists seeking to accomplish when they create their own versions of Phantom Bodies? How effectively can they attempt to heal their traumatised society when the bombs continue to detonate, puncturing cities and bodies? In the reality of Israeli artists, there is no moment to pause, no settling dust from which to position themselves. Americans and Israelis do, however, share the need to respond to the horror of fragmentation and a compounded sense of the terror usually found after natural made disasters—such as earthquake or fire—which emerges from the realisation that the public has experienced conscious acts of humans targeting civilians¹⁷.

¹⁷ Nancy Boyd Webb, ed., *Mass Trauma and Violence: Helping Families and Children Cope* (The Guildford Press: 2004), *Passim*.

Rethinking binaries—absence and presence, remembering and forgetting, corporeal and ethereal—is a significant part of this investigation. The approach taken was always tentative; an attempt to discard political rhetoric or perspectives in favour of an engagement with issues of memory and a reintroduction of the notion of humanity into the post-terrorist landscape. Reconsidering the aftermath through the chosen texts allows for discovery of a discrete but ever-present force, that of the Phantom Body. By refocusing attention on the thresholds, alternate stories begin to be heard. This willingness to explore beyond the physical limits of what can be seen and heard is integral to the effectiveness of artists' works, especially those who are seeking to achieve resolution with what is otherwise a void.

What is required is a position of surrender to another space, one that resists laws of logic and science and embraces the possibilities of other knowledges. As sociologist Avery Gordon contends in her book on the power of haunting, *Ghostly Matters: Haunting and the Sociological Imagination*, Toni Morrison's argument that "invisible things are not necessarily not-there" encourages the complementary gesture of investigating how that which appears absent can indeed be a seething presence.¹⁸ An alternative—to view the terrorist aftermath as an irreducible void for those who have died—contributes to a nihilism that threatens to dominate such events. The portrayal of Phantom Bodies is essentially an acknowledgement of these 'seething presence[s]' in which both Morrison and Gordon believe. The novelist's willingness to support their existence is tied to America's history of slavery and subsequent lives and deaths relegated to the margins; myriads of people diminished by the labels of 'slaves' that were thrust upon them. The same reductionism threatens the memories of those who have died in terrorist attacks, not because their lives have been disregarded, but because their deaths are rendered even more incomprehensible

¹⁸ Toni Morrison, "Unspeakable Things Unspoken: The Afro-American Presence in American Literature." *Michigan Quarterly Review* 28, 1989 1:1-34. Cited in Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 17.

by their physical fragmentation. 'With the body reduced to pieces, death becomes fragmented and grotesque.'¹⁹

Recognizing these fragments and venturing into uncharted territory, artists are listening to what these presences might have to say. As Gordon articulates it, 'What does the ghost say as it speaks, barely, in the interstices of the visible and invisible?'²⁰ Silence in everyday discourse is often laden with meaning; this is particularly true when traumatic events occur and the things that go unsaid in the speech of those left behind are significant indicators of loss. Phantom Bodies might not engage in everyday vocabulary but much can be deciphered by not only how they appear, but when and where. Their existence is underpinned by a compulsion to reject being forgotten; they appear so as to establish a memory that will become entrenched in our consciousness. Subsequently, their movements resist their relegation to an abyss of inexistence.

When contemplating his master plans for the World Trade Center site, Libeskind called for 'a more profound indication of memory [. . . a] spiritual insight into vulnerability, tragedy and our loss.'²¹ The resulting blueprint had ethereal footfalls of fallen police and firemen shaping concrete pathways. Playwrights, novelists and visual artists enable these ghostly reminders to reveal themselves and so attain a kind of liberation. The artists considered populate the terrain with presences of those who have died; presences composed of ash, dust and the architecture of language. The charred landscape, devoid of living beings is transfigured into a space of neither being nor absence. Are Phantom Bodies able to register their presences in the midst of this altered reality, thereby disavowing the abyss?

¹⁹ Tumarkin, *Traumascapes*, 165.

²⁰ See footnote on page 1 of this exegesis.

²¹ Daniel Libeskind, *Breaking Ground: Adventures in Life and Architecture* (John Murray: 2004), 31.

Forms of Ash

We breathed that dust and inhaled particles of the dead that floated in the air.

Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett,
'Kodak Moments, Flashbulb Memories Reflections on 9/11'²²

The spectre of September 11 continues to haunt New Yorkers, especially those who were in the immediate vicinity of the World Trade Center. Observed on televisions around the world, these survivors and bystanders morphed into people of ash, as if they themselves were composed of remnants. The 'dust' was insidious; it found its way through gaps in window ledges and under doors, entering apartments in the surrounding areas and peoples' bodies as they breathed it in. But this was no storm from the Sahara: part of the public's horror was situated in the knowledge that this residue contained the incinerated remains of other human beings. Its presence signified the violent fates of those who had died.

The ash is a pervading image in both fictional and non-fictional representations of the event. Witnesses testified: 'we were in this cloud of smoke. . . there was just ash all over the stuff in the windows everything, everything'²³, 'Many of the people were covered in ash'²⁴. Art Spiegelman's autobiographical/ political protest graphic novel, *In the Shadow of No Towers*, has one cell of the author and his wife running across New York to his daughter's school at the foot of the towers, their figures blackened.²⁵ Steven Drukman's Pulitzer-nominated play, *Another Fine Mess*, has the character Boy enter the stage after an explosion has occurred outside (the audience is led to deduct that it is a terrorist attack), and he is 'covered with soot'²⁶. Roger, one of the actors who has been inside the theatre

²² Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, "Kodak Moments, Flashbulb Memories Reflections on 9/11" in *The Drama Review* 47, 1, Spring 2003, 26.

²³ 'Nilli Schiffman: Interview by Columbia University Oral History Archive'. Interviewer: Nancy Fisher, December 20, 2001. Unpublished, provided by Nilli Schiffman.

²⁴ Wilborn Hampton, *September 11, 2001: Attack on New York City* (Candlewick Press: 2003), 48.

²⁵ Art Spiegelman, *In the Shadows of No Towers* (London: 2004), 3.

²⁶ Steven Drukman, *Another Fine Mess* (Unpublished playscript, 24 September 2003), 42. Provided by Steven Drukman.

asks him, 'Why are you all covered in . . . ?'²⁷ The question hangs in the air, never answered, unanswerable. If an explanation was proffered it might be similar to Oskar's pained declaration of his Dad's fate in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*; "He had cells, and now they're on rooftops, and in the river, and in the lungs of millions of people around New York, who breathe him every time they speak!"²⁸ This sense of an ambiguous matter, simultaneously sacred and profane, also suffuses Neil LaBute's play.

The Mercy Seat was one of the first full-length plays to appear on a New York stage that addressed September 11. It premiered on 26 November 2002 at the Manhattan Class Company Theater²⁹ with much fanfare; partly because of its subject matter, partly because distinguished actors Sigourney Weaver and Liev Schreiber played the two roles, but also because it was the latest Neil LaBute work. Mirroring most of his other plays, *The Mercy Seat* succeeded in conveying its playwright's indictment of the human capacity for callousness. LaBute contends that he doesn't view 'this piece as a significant response to the attack', but he does allow that the 'destruction of two buildings [. . .] and the unfathomable loss of life that followed hangs like a damaged umbrella over the events of *The Mercy Seat*.³⁰ Importantly for this study, LaBute also claims that 'it is not a play which concerns itself with the politics of terrorism.'³¹ The relationship between Ben and Abby is undoubtedly central to the action but there are two other presences that interrupt and even influence the characters' dramatic narrative.

The first presence appears when the lights come up and the audience is confronted by a New York loft apartment with large windows looking out on buildings and revealing '*A kind of amber haze in the air.*' (5)³² Furthermore, 'A

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud*, 169. All subsequent references are incorporated into the text.

²⁹ LaBute, *The Mercy Seat*, 3. All subsequent references to the playscript are incorporated into the text.

³⁰ Preface by Neil LaBute. LaBute, *The Mercy Seat*, ix.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Italics as in text to denote stage directions.

layer of white dust [is] on everything. Absolutely everything.' (5) This setting frames Ben who sits on a couch with a mobile phone ringing continuously in his hand. 'After a long moment, the front door opens and [. . . Abby] enters, also covered in dust [. . .] White clouds of dust follow her every move.' (5) And so we enter the reality of September 12 2001; one instantly recognisable for the audiences of the original production. These 'clouds of dust' convert a domestic drama into one with higher stakes, where both Abby and Ben's behaviour seem to be judged by those who survey them; first and foremost the dead whom they cannot shake off, either literally or figuratively. Throughout the play, neither of them refers to this matter that threatens to envelop them, but that is not to say that they do not speak of the event. It eventually unfolds that Abby is Ben's mistress and boss, and that Ben should have been at an appointment at offices in the World Trade Center at the time of the attacks, but instead appeared at his lover's apartment. In the aftermath, he has decided that the event has effectively presented him with an exit strategy from his marriage, —as Abby accuses 'your first thought was that this is an opportunity' (11)— 'a *possibility*' (11) for him and Abby to reinvent their lives. In other words, he has decided to join the ranks of the missing. The irony of an obviously alive man speaking of his decision to become one of the presumed dead so that he can assume another identity is dramatised by the haunting movement of the remains, of those who were not offered any such choice. They might not be able to speak as Ben does but the continual physicality of their presence, however fragile, registers their protest.

Ben, in attempting to describe the event, contends that he 'can't really find words that're even [. . .] They all sound . . . lame./ No. It's impossible.' (13) Conversely, Abby attempts to foreground the surrounding reality and thus reveal the reprehensibility of his actions:

ABBY: All those people . . . just . . . (*She snaps her fingers.*)
 BEN: Yeah.
 ABBY: Including you.
 BEN: Mmm-hmm.
 ABBY: You've been lost, Ben. Just like that. Up in smoke. (28)

Whilst LaBute recognises that it is difficult to describe what might be deemed indescribable, he also suggests that there is a responsibility to do so, even on the day after the event when ash is flying through the air; that to resist this results in an inhumanity, a coarseness of character. Unlike LaBute, American playwright Craig Wright fails to recognise the obligation of approaching the event of September 11 with sufficient gravity in his play *Recent Tragic Events*.

Originally produced by Woolly Mammoth Theatre in Washington in 2002, *Recent Tragic Events* appeared the year later in New York at the Off-Broadway venue of Playwrights Horizons' Mainstage. It too shares the time frame of the immediate aftermath of the event, 12 September, but it is located in Minneapolis (no traces of particles in the air there). The main action revolves around Waverley whose blind date, Andrew, has turned up at her apartment even though 'it' has happened just over a day before. It becomes evident that Waverley hasn't been able to make contact with her twin sister who lives in New York and who might have been working at the World Trade Center. She refers to the attacks as the 'thing' (9)³³ and tells Andrew that he can watch television as she gets ready: 'There's this great new show called "Attack on America"-it's really long.' (6) As the play continues, Waverley's self-indulgence becomes evident. Like Ben of *The Mercy Seat*, who views the event chiefly through what its consequences might be for him, Waverley only becomes distraught when she thinks of her sister and the possibility of losing her, any other reference to it emerges in the form of a joke. But in Wright's play there is no Abby pleading 'don't make this thing that's happened, this whole . . . unbelievable thing that is going on out there right now . . . just about you. Because it's not. It isn't.' (26) There is also no form of ashy haunting. Without Abby's articulation of this horror, or the visual impression of an unsettling presence, the event itself is relegated to a 'thing'. Not an event that one struggles to describe, as portrayed by Abby's referring to it as an 'unbelievable thing' but some 'thing' that has become meaningless or even banal.

³³ Craig Wright, *Recent Tragic Events* (Unpublished playscript, 3 September 2002).

In *The Mercy Seat*, Ben articulates what seems to be his mantra: “Knowledge for Knowledge’s Sake” is pure bullshit. (*Beat.*) All learning ever does is remind you of what you haven’t got’ (19). This is significant; if the words ‘knowledge’ and ‘learning’ are replaced by that of ‘remembering’, much can be revealed about Ben’s psyche. Žižek’s position³⁴—that ‘in order really to forget an event, we must first summon up the strength to remember it properly’—serves to illuminate the dangers of this approach. Žižek is not supporting the notion of complete disavowal, by refusing to remember the traumatic event, but rather alludes to the crucial step in recovering from trauma, that of reaching the point where the affected person is able to prevent him or herself from being subsumed by memories in order to reengage with the experience of living. Ben and Waverley (from *Recent Tragic Events*) are so driven by their own egos that they cannot ‘remember’ the event of September 11 sufficiently to acknowledge its impact. Ben is both literally and metaphorically untouched by the dust blowing around Abby’s apartment. LaBute doesn’t have Abby denounce Ben for always having sex with her from behind and ‘never looking’ her ‘in the eye’ (40) only to disclose their sexual proclivities; these actions are mirrored by Ben’s refusal to look and see the ash in the apartment. Somehow, in a mental recess, he has turned his back not only on the living, his family, but also on the dead.

Are these ‘clouds of dust’, to quote from Grosz, ‘a memory’ or ‘quasi-present’? Are they an absence or a presence? Although for Ben—who wilfully ignores them—they are neither, for Abby, LaBute and the audience, they are both. These dust formations signify the absence of people whose ashes contribute to their composition. They are remains to grieve over and yet their air-borne quality problematises an essential act of the rite of bereavement: that of burial. Family members of those killed in September 11 were, in fact, given small boxes of dust to bury.³⁵ However, the lack of bodies in such a scenario, generally led to an ‘ambiguous loss process’, wherein the already significant trauma is further

³⁴ See full quote on page 2.

³⁵ Mark Wigley, ‘Insecurity by Design’ in Michael Sorkin, ed., *After the World Trade Center: Rethinking New York City* (Routledge: 2002), 73.

impacted³⁶. Like the Phantom Limb, these 'clouds' signify both the past wherein thousands more people lived just twenty-four hours before, and the grotesque new reality, one in which countless bystanders, through the casual act of breathing, involuntarily ingest people's remains. 'What does the ghost say as it speaks?'³⁷ Although these ashy particles do not have a voice like the one accorded to Hamlet's father, their very ethereality shrieks out 'Remember us, remember us, remember us'.

The second presence in *The Mercy Seat*, which incessantly interrupts the play's action, is the sound of phones ringing; both Ben's mobile phone and Abby's home phone but mostly the former. The unspoken understanding is that it is Ben's family desperately trying to contact him to see if he is alive. He intermittently turns his phone on and off, but for the duration of the action does not answer it. Abby urges him to call his wife, to relieve her and his children of their suffering, even though she fears that it might relegate her to her former position as secret mistress. At one point, she conjures up the image of Audie Murphy, a World War Two hero. This is a reference she labels as ironic, but the subtext is lost on Ben who responds, 'And so . . . the irony is . . .' Abby replies, 'When juxtaposed with you' (25), noticeably pointing out that Ben's decision to be grouped together with September 11's fallen places him in complete contradistinction to one of America's most decorated war heroes, who later wrote an exceedingly modest account of his life in his bestselling memoir *To Hell and Back*.

In another exchange, Ben's intentions are revealed as monstrous:

BEN: But now it's . . .
ABBY: . . . fine. Right? Because you're passed on.
BEN: Exactly . . . (*Almost a smile.*) I am.

³⁶ Charles R. Figley, Kathleen Regan Figley, James Norman, 'Tuesday Morning September 11, 2001: The Green Cross Projects' Role as a Case Study in Community-Based Traumatology Services' in Faust, Jan and Gold, Stephen N., eds., *Trauma Practice in the Wake of September 11, 2001* (The Haworth Maltreatment & Trauma Press: 2002), 24. This position is supported by Nancy Boyd Webb's 'The Impact of Traumatic Stress and Loss on Children and Families' in Boyd Webb, *Mass Trauma and Violence*, 9. and Tumarkin, *Traumascapes, Passim*.

³⁷ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 24.

ABBY: You and the six thousand other . . . heroes. (48)

Ben has succumbed to a lack of remorse. Through this ingenious stage direction, LaBute demonstrates Ben's absolute disregard for the pain he is causing to his family and for the disrespect he is according to those who are, as Abby terms them, 'heroes'. By taking this course of action, Ben becomes a hollow man, soulless and without conscience, crossing to the world of the dead but devoid of the honour that Abby bestows upon them as she facilitates their movement around the room. Interestingly, a review of the original production notes that the audience was aware that Schreiber, as Ben, sits in the opening scene 'with a tear-streaked face'. He suggests that Schreiber is 'a more nuanced actor than [. . .] the script calls for [. . . and that he] is going to greater lengths to humanize the character'.³⁸ Perhaps Schreiber felt that the text didn't allow space for sympathy and that by attributing the action of crying to Ben, he could restore him to the land of the living. Maybe LaBute as director even agreed with him. This is, of course, mere speculation but the script that was published in 2003 does not incorporate this added dimension in the text. Ben is presented as an opportunist and even more appallingly, he rejects the ashy phantoms around him, unmoved by their very existence. However, this disregarding of highly visible particles and what they signify does not succeed in rendering them impotent; rather their presences condemn him further.

The Phantom Bodies in *The Mercy Seat* are less corporeal than those that appear in Sigalit Landau's art installation, *The Country*, which premiered at the Alon Segev Gallery in Tel Aviv on September 2002. Indeed, Landau's work seems to reject the notion of 'seething presences' to which Avery Gordon subscribes. This is an artwork that has not surfaced from the embers of the burning rubble; it has emerged out of a setting where bombs ceaselessly explode. The installation is composed of many parts but its central features are three flayed human figures— life-size reproductions of Gray's Anatomy pared back to

³⁸ Mark Steyn, 'Trivial selves, big issues' in *The New Criterion* February 2003, Vol. 21, Issue 6, 40.

their muscles and sinews—, the eruption of more than 450 fruit (also in papier-mâché form, Appendix 1) and a large painted panorama of a Tel Aviv rooftop scene with a blood-red sky (Appendix 2). The three life-size figures, stripped down to their musculature, and seeming to seep blood are engaged in three activities: one picks fruit (Appendix 3), the other bears the yield (Appendix 4) and the last acts as scribe³⁹ (Appendix 5).

The Country fittingly depicts an ongoing reality, one that is complex and intermingled with the carnage of suicide bombings and the violence of the Palestinian occupation. Most of the figures in the exhibit are constructed from copies of *Ha'aretz* ('The Country')⁴⁰, an Israeli daily newspaper, some of its images and text still recognisable. The exact dates of the copies used are significant, they begin from when the second Intifada broke out, in late 2000, up until the very date of the exhibition's opening, 5 September 2002⁴¹. As art critic Smadar Shefi noted after visiting the exhibit, there was a palpable absence of sound or video. Thus the 'silence echoes the silence of confusion and sadness with which the viewer enters a world that cannot be dismissed as impossible or an unrealistic nightmare—not as long as the material from which it is made is in daily use, literally and metaphorically'.⁴² This engagement of a principal medium that otherwise communicates the daily events of a country steeped in an interminable conflict, only intensifies the feeling that it is 'about a situation with no escape'⁴³. But this is not a fictional situation, neither is it one that is reproduced with the distancing comfort of time; it is a situation at which the artist is positioned at the core. The concept of memory does not resonate here because there is no moment of peace with which an Israeli observer might pause

³⁹ Gideon Ofrat is the sole critic to note that what the 'archivist' writes in his/her 'diary' is a detail of 'the actions of the Israeli government and army during the period of the intifada'. He therefore sees this as 'the key figure'. Gideon Ofrat, 'At Roof Top Height' in Landau, *The Country*, 33.

⁴⁰ To contextualise the medium, *Ha'aretz* can be positioned philosophically alongside Melbourne's *The Age* or London's *The Guardian*. The translation of the name 'Ha'aretz' is slightly ironic here as the actual sense of the term is untranslatable; it is tied to the Zionist concept of 'The Land', linked to a sense of the remarkable.

⁴¹ Ofrat, 'At Roof Top Height', 30.

⁴² Smadar Shefi, 'Poison Fruit From the Daily Paper' *Ha'aretz Guide*, 20 September 2002. Unknown page number. Provided by the Alon Segev Gallery, Tel Aviv.

⁴³ *Ibid.*

and reflect. The artist's role here is to communicate what she or many of her viewers have experienced; years of bombs, of flesh stripped raw and the overwhelming sense of being trapped in an endless cycle of carnage.

One critic reads the scene as a type of Hell where all that remains is 'death' and 'remnants', a kind of universal post apocalyptic scene.⁴⁴ Philip Leider, former editor of *Artforum*, entitles it 'Israel's "Guernica"'.⁴⁵ Another critic, Gideon Ofrat, views it as a 'disaster tableau, which [. . .] seeks to proclaim "business as usual," i.e. prosaic realism: Here people pick fruit, here they bear the fruit on their backs'.⁴⁶ Whilst he agrees that on some levels it offers a universal relevance, Ofrat convincingly argues that the work is highly specific to its setting, deconstructing various images that relate to Israeli art and Zionist mythology. He contends that this is an altered, corrupted version of 'the charmed orange grove, which in the twenties of the past century, harboured erotic Oriental secrets [. . . a version where] nothing lurks here but death'.⁴⁷ The artist admitted to Ofrat that the fruit are pomegranates,⁴⁸ which takes on further significance when one realises that the Hebrew word for pomegranate is 'rimon', a word that contains the double meaning of 'grenade'. As Ofrat claims; 'Landau's allegorical fruit symbolizes blood, violence, and the horrors human beings perpetrate upon one another, Israelis and Palestinians in particular'⁴⁹ but even further, that 'the time [represented] is a time of terror'⁵⁰. This is not a recollection of a past happening, it is the recording of events very much in the present, as the figure of the scribe

⁴⁴ Michal Popovski, "'The Country'" *Studio Magazine*, 138, November-December 2002. Unknown page number. Provided by the Alon Segev Gallery, Tel Aviv.

⁴⁵ Philip Leider, 'Israel's *Guernica*' in *Art in America* May 2003, Number 5.

⁴⁶ Ofrat, 'At Roof Top Height', 27.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 27-28. The title of the play *About the Oranges* confirms the potency of this image in Israeli mythology. For the central character of Gringras' play, images of orange groves contain the romanticism of what drew him to migrate to Israel.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 28.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.* He continues: 'terror documented in the newspaper, terror continuing to occur as the installation was being prepared: Terror attacks every couple of days, and behind the artist's home is the sea-food restaurant that was the scene of a particularly grievous assault. In the evening, when the artist heads for a café, reeking of sweat and iron after a long day's work, she is challenged by dogs seeking to sniff out terrorists'. (Continuation of reference cited.) This positions the artist at the heart of this reality and exposes how integral this sense of terror is in the making of her work.

records occurrences in his book, so does Landau on her multi-dimensional canvas. Leider is only partly right when he calls the work 'Israel's "Guernica"', like Picasso's anti-war masterpiece, this installation also conveys a brutality and violence capable of shocking viewers, but for Israelis encountering the exhibit, it is a reflection of life outside the gallery, stripped back and placed on display.

The Country's multi-dimensionality serves to intensify the experience of entering another, more heightened, world. The work is incredibly rich in detail, divided into separate rooms, so that almost all of the critics point to something that the others have not registered. Not all mention the 'remnants'—which for Popovski is central and which Leider notes are 'most upsetting of all, the bits and pieces of reddened "flesh" that we only gradually come to notice clinging to almost everything on the roof'⁵¹. This is not a subtle haunting, these are graphic, mutated bodies, mirroring the scenario within which they are trapped: they are neither Grosz's 'memory' nor are they 'quasi-present'. Landau's installation is as explicit as any newspaper photo published after a suicide bombing. Much of the graphic nature of this work can be attributed to the lack of a *past* trauma that is being revisited; the distress of suicide bombings was a constant reality during the inception and exhibition of this installation. Contrary to Shefi's claims, and unlike the muffled calls of September 11's clouds of ash, there is nothing silent about this work. There is no need to strain to hear the words of the ghosts here, the cries of the dying and their remnants fill the air.

⁵¹ Leider, 'Israel's *Guernica*', 63.

Absence and Climbing Out of the Hole

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 or Nothing . . . But a friction arose between Nothing and Something, in the morning the Nothing vase cast a Something shadow, like the memory of someone you've lost . . . It became difficult to navigate from Something to Something without accidentally walking through Nothing.

Jonathan Safran Foer: *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*⁵²

The reader of *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* is ushered into a close engagement with liminal space—a space that is contested and presents a danger by its very immateriality—and, consequently, with a haunting. The word ‘liminal’ originates in the Latin word ‘limen’, threshold, and was popularised by the Scottish anthropologist Victor Turner in his work on rituals in the 60s and 70s. Turner perceived the liminal state to be ‘a no-man’s land betwixt-and-between . . . Liminality can perhaps be described as a fructile chaos, a fertile nothingness, a storehouse of possibilities.’⁵³ Since then, liminal space has been widely regarded as one that is transformative. Safran Foer’s work, which approaches historic atrocities experienced by humans, alongside the central experience of September 11, is populated by Feury’s ‘secondary absences’⁵⁴ and characterised by its very liminality.

The quote above belongs to Oskar’s grandparents’ story. Their lives have been decimated by the World War Two bombing of Dresden. Oskar’s grandfather, Thomas Snr., is rendered mute after he survives but his pregnant teenage girlfriend, Anna, is killed in the bombings. He communicates through writing down sometimes enigmatic, but always brief phrases in his various notebooks. Oskar’s grandmother⁵⁵, another traumatised survivor, is Anna’s younger sister,

⁵² Safran Foer, *Extremely Loud*, 110.

⁵³ Victor Turner, ‘Are there Universals of Performance in Myth, Ritual, and Drama?’ Cited in Susan Broadhurst, *Liminal Acts: A Critical Overview of Contemporary Performance and Theory* (Cassell: 1999), 12.

⁵⁴ See pages 4-5 for the full quote.

⁵⁵ Although a central character, she is referred in the novel only as ‘Grandma’ or ‘your mother’. When it comes to Oskar’s narration it is clear why she should be referred to as Grandma and not by her name. But with Thomas’s narration it is as if she is nameless, not a distinct person, perhaps mainly a reminder of the absence of her sister.

who also lost her parents in the raids. This is a history of which Oskar seems to be unaware, having never met his grandfather who left his grandmother when he found out that she was pregnant with Oskar's father. At one point in the narrative, Thomas Snr.'s words are superimposed upon other words so that it creates an illegible palimpsest, the text morphing into a black canvas with pinpoints of white (281- 284. Appendix 6). After being convinced by her husband, Oskar's grandmother begins to write her life story. Thomas Snr. tells her that the desk where she is to write, is positioned in "a Nothing Place [. . .] what better place to write your life story?" (119) Countless hours of typing ensue until she eventually presents Thomas Snr. with over a thousand blank pages, three of which are presented in the book (121-124. Appendix 7). He is devastated, believing that he is to blame because he forgot that, years before, he had taken out the ink ribbon in the typewriter and didn't realise, until this point, that his wife's eyesight, which she always complains about, is so poor. It is later revealed to the reader, through Grandma's letter to Oskar, that she chose to write nothing: 'I hit the space bar again and again and again. My life story was spaces.' (176) These are both reactions to the burden of depicting the incomprehensible: what is often termed, 'describing the indescribable', therefore relegating this task to the realm of the impossible.

The insidiousness of silence is particularly marked after events that produce trauma but it is a mistake to view this response as meaningless. Lawrence Langer, Holocaust testimony scholar, claims that Holocaust survivor and acclaimed writer Aharon Appelfeld 'reject[ed . . .] that the unsaid is necessarily unsayable'.⁵⁶ This is supported by linguist and academic Ruth Wajnryb, who suggests that in cases of people who undergo crippling trauma (her study like Langer's focuses on Holocaust survivors), it is often the survivors themselves who lack the ability to express their experience in words.⁵⁷ Safran Foer provides the reader with an unarticulated experience, or at least unarticulated in a

⁵⁶ Lawrence L. Langer, *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays* (Oxford University Press: 1995), 125.

⁵⁷ Ruth Wajnryb, *The Silence: How Tragedy Shapes Talk* (Allen & Unwin: 2001), 85.

conventional sense, with the spectacle of both these pages, one blank and the other crowded with black letters—the reader sees both—produces a chilling effect. It provides an undefined, unrecognisable space: one that accepts the validity of an alternate world indescribable but ever-present. There are multitudinous ways of deconstructing these visual signs. Observing Thomas Snr.'s blackened page, one might approach it as if it is an artist's canvas, a work that depicts the encompassing threat of darkness but also, almost imperceptibly, illuminates pinpricks of light. These texts within a text are both highly symbolic; one is composed of too many words, a kind of anarchical telling, and the other lacks any of the appropriate words to begin to thread together a narrative. Instead there are spaces encompassed by spaces, constructing a hole so wide it threatens to destroy both grandparents with its suffering.

This narrative of gaps, spaces and overlapping words is mirrored in the modern-day story of their grandson, Oskar. Oskar is plagued by the phone messages his father, Thomas—named after his absent father—left as the towers were falling. When he returns to his family's apartment that morning after being sent home from school, he listens to five increasingly disturbing messages. The first is of his father telling his wife and son that he's 'OK' (14), the second admits that 'It's getting a bit. Smoky' (69), the fourth discloses that he's going to go up on the roof (207) and the last, in which Thomas is obviously struggling to speak, contains the disjointed words 'EVERYTHING OK FINE SOON SORRY' (280). This message cuts off at the word 'REMEMBER' and Oskar later wonders why he didn't say goodbye, why he didn't tell them he loved them. 'Maybe he didn't say he loved me *because* he loved me. But that wasn't a good enough explanation.' (256) Upon hearing the last recording, the phone rings. Oskar is paralysed, too scared to pick it up, to live out this drama till the end. It is this moment—when he hears Thomas speaking to the machine but he doesn't pick up—that he most regrets. His father calls out, '*Are you there? Are you there?*' repeating this phrase until he is cut off (301). In a childish action of guilt and out of a desire to protect his mother, Oskar hides these messages so that no one else hears them. As time passes and Oskar

suspects that his mother is beginning to move on with her life, he makes her a bracelet; 'what I did was I converted Dad's last voice message into Morse code, and 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, which are actually called blips, I think, or something. Dad would have known.' (35) In this way, he tries to physicalise the memory of his father, but it is a physicalisation of silence as well as words. Even young Oskar knows that sometimes more profound meaning resides in gaps. Into Thomas' silence the reader detects fear, knowledge of impending death, suffering and love for his family: all things Oskar's father cannot say, but which his son desperately needs confirmed.

Following an interview with Safran Foer, Deborah Solomon writes, 'Foer's belief in the power of the unspoken word probably helps explain his fascination with blank pages [. . .] He wants to offer us not just a reading experience, but a visual experience as well, as if words alone can no longer be trusted to tell our life stories.'⁵⁸ Images undoubtedly contribute to this story—they punctuate the book's pages—from photos of keys and locks, to a quirky child's image of his hero, Stephen Hawking, and a cat that seems to be in flight. However, there is a more complex dimension to this visual telling of a story connected to the layout of the words themselves. In this way, different types of silence are portrayed: the asphyxiating silence of Grandma's empty pages; a pained pained back silence situated in between single sentences when she writes to her grandson of her reunion with Thomas Snr. after the war (81. Appendix 8); the heavy burden of silence as Thomas Snr. writes the ambiguous 'I'm sorry' on meeting Oskar for the first time, the sense of what he is sorry for crowding the rest of the empty page (264. Appendix 9) and finally the protective silence that Oskar's father chooses as he gasps for breath in the World Trade Center during his last moments (280. Appendix 10). These are all evidence of the powerful phantoms of trauma and their effects on language. Poetic phrasing of this phenomenon is proffered by T.S. Eliot in his 'Four Quartets':

⁵⁸ Solomon, 'Extremely Odd', 37.

Words strain,
Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
Under the tension, slip, slide, perish
Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
Will not stay still.⁵⁹

Words do indeed 'sometimes break' but they break into fragments, which then communicate different meanings and convey another dimension of truth.

Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close is framed by a search; Oskar finds a key in an envelope hidden in a vase in Thomas' wardrobe (37). When the boy discovers the key, he decides it will somehow lead him closer to his father. He transforms this random find into a sign from his missing father who, when still alive, constructed enigmatic treasure hunts for him to enjoy. The envelope is labelled with the word 'Black' and Oskar concludes he must find the key for the lock, even if it equates with meeting all two hundred and sixteen people with the family name of Black who live at different addresses (51). The space he desires to fill is not one that is literal: it is the hole in his heart left by the loss of his beloved and devoted father. 'So Oskar is a baby Hamlet in quest of his father's Ghost'.⁶⁰ But this time there is no spoken command to avenge the dead father's murder. This does not connote that Oskar does not feel angry or fearful after the attacks; he experiences both emotions. He becomes obsessed with knowing the details of his father's death, and consumed with finding out if Thomas was one of the figures people witnessed falling to their deaths from the towers. But, above all, this is a quest propelled by love and an unknown gap; a lock. Into this gap, Oskar has projected all his memories of his father; the man who sent him off to sleep with wonderfully self-constructed stories, most notably the story of a lost sixth borough of New York whose only remnant is Central Park (217-223). When Oskar asks whether his father believes the story is true, Thomas answers abstractly, telling him that when anyone visits Central Park they can't help but

⁵⁹ From 'Burnt Norton'. Quoted in Wajnryb, *The Silence*, 85.

⁶⁰ Peter Craven, 'A child in time' *The Sunday Age: Extra*, 17 July 2005, 23.

feel “some tense in addition to the present . . . Maybe we’re just missing things we’ve lost” (222).

Even this story within a story, with its nostalgic notes, serves as a haunting but soothing refrain, simultaneously evoking the storyteller’s life and his eventual demise. It is a potent symbol of loss and memory. It echoes in Oskar’s memory, reassuring him, however subconsciously, that although his father has been made to physically disappear to an extent where there is nothing to bury but an empty casket, and although the boy tells his mother that Thomas’ cells have been ingested by New Yorkers⁶¹, there is a strong force of his father’s being that he carries around. The honour usually bestowed by a funeral, is instead accorded with recollections and a protracted search that ultimately leads to Oskar arriving at a place of reconciliation with both himself and his mother.

In Safran Foer’s tale, Oskar’s scrapbook ‘*Stuff That Happened to Me*’ includes a single photo of Ground Zero. In contrast to this fleeting appearance, the physical space of Ground Zero is firmly embedded in *25th Hour*. After a short prologue, the film’s opening credits appear upon a background that depicts, in film noir style, New York skyscrapers illuminated by what appears to be a blue spotlight. The camera deliberately pans away from the buildings and the light is revealed to be the ‘Tribute in Light’, a temporary memorial composed of two beams of light that ‘reached into the sky from 11 March to 13 April 2002, to mark the six-month anniversary of the event’⁶². This memorial was originally proposed under the name of ‘Phantom Towers’. As Julian LaVerdiere, an artist involved in the project confessed, “Those towers are like ghost limbs, we can feel them even though they’re not there anymore”.⁶³ The connection of New Yorkers to the actual World Trade Center buildings contributed to an added sense of loss.

⁶¹ See quote on page 10 of this exegesis.

⁶² Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, ‘Kodak Moments’, 39.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

The height of the skyline achieved by the imposing structures was one of the most identifiable landmarks of the city and the visual absence in the space where they had previously stood, had been converted by the attacks into a 'hole, sixteen acres broad, [which] was filled with 100 vertical feet of rubble . . . icy and silent as an open tomb—which it was.'⁶⁴ The landscape remained as a 'tomb' to all who were able to view it, until the plans for the site's reconstruction were agreed upon and construction work began on the rebuilding; not for over a year later.

The sense of September 11 continuing to inform the lives of the city's inhabitants is evident in Lee's film. Although the story is essentially about Monty Brogan's last day of freedom before he is imprisoned for drug dealing, it also depicts a more profound sense of grieving; that of New Yorkers coming to terms with their tragedy. '*25th Hour* is a melancholy tone poem, deeply affecting in its mute apprehension of loss.'⁶⁵ At one point, two of Monty's friends, Francis and Jacob, are in Francis's apartment, the windows of which look out onto Ground Zero. When confronted with this night scene the introspective Jacob exclaims 'Jesus Christ!', music wells up and a singer wails plaintively. Jacob's eye is drawn to this harrowing view again and again throughout their conversation as if he is compelled to look, to witness, to not become complacent about what has happened here. Afterwards, the camera closes in on the ground below, pausing to reveal tributes, an operating steamroller and workers combing the surface, searching for remains. Lee moves here from depicting an intimate study of a man worrying over his friend's fate, to a wider picture; it is as if a painter has shifted from a single portrait to a crowd scene, but there are no crowds to represent. By moving the visual focus away from Francis's face, the audience is, not so subtly, reminded of the bleak fates of the dead of September 11. The ruins are revealed for what they are; not just another view from someone's window but a scene of mass devastation. The tragedy does not lie in the destruction of an architectural landmark—the rubble that the viewer sees—but the death of thousands of people who cannot be shown, all with lives as interesting and complex as any of the

⁶⁴ John Carroll, *Terror: A Meditation on the Meaning of September 11* (Scribe: 2002), 48.

⁶⁵ David Edelstein, 'Back Door Blues', *Slate.com*, December 19, 2002.

characters in the film. There is an irony present; as much as the audience might empathise with Francis's sadness over his friend's misfortune, Monty has made conscious choices that have led up to this point. Those who were killed on September 11, however, had no such choice in their fate.

A conscious effort has been made to conjure up an authentic version of the changed metropolis, even though the film was adapted from a book published in 2000⁶⁶. There are signs of the altered city everywhere.⁶⁷ As one New York film critic, Charles Taylor, claims; 'Nothing I've seen or read -- nothing -- understands what it felt like to live in New York City after Sept. [sic] 11 the way "25th Hour" does.'⁶⁸ Taylor argues that Lee attempts 'to get at how something so dire seeps into every bit of our existence, how the very texture of our lives soaks it up'⁶⁹ and that the filmmaker succeeds in doing so by communicating, in the subtlest of ways, what it was like to be living in the city after the attacks. The sense of growing loss and nostalgia that infuses the film can be read as a larger symbol of the emotions that were felt by New Yorkers after the painful event.

Lee has not produced an uncharacteristically mawkish film, throughout the narrative he employs subversions that are often highly confronting. As a drug-dealer, Monty is a highly ambivalent character; he is softly spoken and at the outset of the story saves a stray dog from death. But in one shocking tirade he reveals a racism that is frightening. This is prompted by his seeing the words 'fuck you' written on a bathroom mirror and, on contemplating them over his reflection, he launches into a monologue of 'fuck you'. The speech is directed at nearly every conceivable ethnic, cultural and religious group known to populate

⁶⁶ David Stratton, 'Doomed but not Forsaken' in *The Weekend Australian 'Review'* June 7-8, 2003, 19.

⁶⁷ Lee has continued to portray this altered New York, albeit in a different manner, in his latest movie *The Inside Man* (2006). In this film, Lee focuses on the matter of being a Muslim in New York through a subversive scene where a Sikh, one who is obviously so (he wears a turban) is mistreated by policemen who have mistaken him for being a Muslim and thus a potential terrorist.

⁶⁸ Charles Taylor, 'The Best Movie You Haven't Seen', *Salon.com*, February 19, 2003.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

New York and accompanied by corresponding images of these stereotypes.⁷⁰ It is an almost unbearable few minutes of viewing, infected by a fierce vitriol.⁷¹ This event is later partly redeemed, when towards the end, as Monty looks out from the passenger window of the car in which his father is taking him to jail, some of these very people form a type of honour guard, bidding him goodbye as he leaves the city.⁷² This is an elegiac moment, one that perhaps unconsciously refers to another scene that cannot be depicted. This scene is of people, as varied looking as those shown, who have disappeared from their city into the abyss of Ground Zero. Could it be that they have arisen to bid goodbye, not just to Monty, but also to their loved ones? No, they are not resurrected from the dead but their presence connotes the absence of those lost, like the earlier view revealed from Francis's apartment windows.

Whilst *25th Hour* is a movie that incorporates the reality of a post-terrorist landscape into its narrative, the Israeli play *About the Oranges* has the *current* terrorist reality at its core. Robbie Gringras responded to the absence brought about by suicide bombings in Israel by writing a one-man play that grapples with the social trauma prompted by this phenomenon. Gringras, an English-born resident of Israel, witnessed the direct effects of such an event when a man on his kibbutz had a daughter killed in a bus bombing; “The entire kibbutz followed the news, the closing down of his possibilities until he had to travel to recognise the remains of his daughter, the nightmare journey that everyone in Israel dreads.”⁷³ The sense of a perpetual nightmare is played out in this highly physicalised

⁷⁰ The speech does appear in the book from which the film was adapted. Some of Monty's speech: fuck you to the panhandlers, the squeegee men, the Sikhs and the Pakistani, the Chelsea boys, Korean grocers, the Russians in Brighton Beach, the black-hatted Hasidim, the men of Wall Street, the Puerto Ricans, Dominicans, Italians, the Upper Eastside wives, Uptown brothers, corrupt cops, priests, the church, Jesus Christ, Osama Bin Laden, Fundamentalists, his family and friends—fuck the city and everyone in it! Lee, *25th Hour*.

⁷¹ Strangely enough, both Charles Taylor and Spike Lee (‘If you live here long enough, we've all thought, and hopefully not said, some of those things that Monty says into the mirror’) claim that this is an amplified reaction of any New Yorker who loses patience in the city. Charles Taylor, ‘The Best Movie’ and quote from Paula J Massood, ‘The Quintessential New Yorker and Global Citizen: An Interview With Spike Lee’, *Cineaste*, 28 (3) Summer 2003, 5.

⁷² Spike Lee attributes this idea to Edward Norton, the actor who plays Monty. Lee in Paula J. Massood, *Ibid*.

⁷³ Robbie Gringras quoted in Linda Grant, ‘A Short Play About Suicide Bombs’ *The Guardian*, 9 August, 2004 www.guardian.co.uk

theatre piece. The protagonist is introduced in the playtext as a '*terribly vulnerable, damaged clown*' (2) (he is not literally a 'clown' but throughout the piece he continuously endeavours to make jokes) who has arrived thirty-five days late to a job interview. He⁷⁴ begins to convince an invisible panel why He is the right candidate, but is constantly sidetracked into disclosing an explanation for his delayed appearance. It is as though the audience is forced to watch the deeply unsettling experience of someone coming apart, slowly, from a point of great fragility. Unfortunately, the script itself does not adequately convey this, but as I had the opportunity to see the play performed twice over a period of two years, this image was what resonated. Gringras is a highly trained physical actor and consequently his performance succeeds in portraying the phantoms that haunt him.

These phantoms are communicated by a series of repeated actions that are, at the outset, bewildering. The first appears early on when He makes reference to 'getting your hands dirty' and consequently looks '*at his fingernails. [He is] Struck with horror and panic. Holds out his fingers in front of him, frozen.*' (5) There are several more incidences of this puzzling behaviour as He re-enacts an imagined, and extremely blackly comic, journey of a Palestinian baker named Mohammed, who becomes a suicide bomber. The hapless Mohammed finds himself legless after having detonated the bomb and is resuscitated by the unknowing central character when He discovers the wounded man. The bomber dies just as He realises that He has given mouth-to-mouth to a murderer. At this point, '*it turns manic as he weeps*' (21). But this is not the moment of crisis. Afterwards, He and his wife, Sigal, try to reach his daughter, Tali, who was in the area at the time of the explosion. They cannot and after contacting the hospital and not finding her amongst the injured, He decides to go to the morgue to see whether she is amongst the unidentifiable. When he arrives at the dreaded destination, the pathologist wheels out a single fingernail, the remains of one of the dead (27) in what is an almost absurd action. There is an

⁷⁴ Once again a character is unnamed; but here the 'he' is an Everyman. I have referred to him as 'He' to limit any confusion.

overwhelming sense of horror in the telling, and acting, of this revelation; towards which all these previous physical movements now connect. Here is the single identifiable remain of his daughter; a minute, almost superfluous, body part. This atmosphere of horror painfully endures until a moment later when the mistake is discovered; Tali is alive, this is somebody else's remains.⁷⁵ The feeling of relief is fleeting. After all, this is the sole remnant of somebody else's daughter, the image of which remains situated in his consciousness. According to Gringras, the entire play is 'built from real events' (2) which only adds to the terror.

This is no ephemeral ash which might be ignored or rejected; for the main character of *About the Oranges* the source of haunting has become His own body. Every time He sees his fingernails, He is reminded of not only this one unknown female, but all others who have been disfigured in this way. In her exploration of the psychological and social resonances of the human body, Grosz lists nails as part of those 'Detachable, separable parts of the body [. . . which] retain something of the cathexis and value of a body part even when they are separated from the body.'⁷⁶ His witnessing has transformed his *own* intact limb into a Phantom Limb, one perpetually reminding him of the traumatic event. However, the transposition of this condition leads to a state of madness and undoing, where the horror of the death takes residence in this witness's body. Perhaps this is what Jacques Derrida meant when he urged there to be an 'exorcis[ism] not in order to chase away the ghosts, but this time to grant them the right . . . to . . . a hospitable memory . . . out of a concern for justice.'⁷⁷ The excessive disintegration of the body here requires a proportionate degree of what Derrida terms 'hospitable memory'. How else to redress the imbalance in the

⁷⁵ This is the second version of the ending. The first performance ended with Tali having been killed. Gringras rewrote this into the current ending where the identity of the deceased has changed into an unknowable as he was prompted to do so by several people who suggested it was less predictable and that in doing so, He becomes 'a witness, not a victim. This is a role with which an audience can more honestly identify.' The rationale is connected to Gringras' perception of himself as a 'community artist', one he distinguishes from an 'artist'. Information by Robbie Gringras, emailed August 2004.

⁷⁶ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 81.

⁷⁷ Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* quoted in Gordon; *Ghostly Matters*, 58.

natural order? But for He, the integrity of his body has been compromised; his own fingernail has been transformed into someone else's remnant. The reality is so gruesome, that the power of the haunting threatens to overwhelm him.

Explorations in Memory Building

To redeem the hole and everything it contained, would require gravitas and pity, sorrow and prayer, gratitude and wonder—a creation that was of the hole, yet rose out of it, reaching beyond it.

John Carroll; *Terror: A Meditation on the Meaning of September 11*⁷⁸

Derrida's notion of 'hospitable memory' is closely tied to the universal phenomenon of memorials; from the simplicity of gravesite tombstones to complex public memorials that strive to reflect diverse wishes. The desire to create a memorial at Ground Zero held a doubly weighty responsibility; for many families of those who had died, there were no identifiable physical remains to bury. Consequently, the aspiration to create an alternate resting place at the site of the tragedy was a compelling force when considering redevelopment of the affected area. So too was the will to rebuild. Physical recovery was subsequently framed as a form of resistance to terrorism and to a somewhat extreme extent, developer Larry Silverstein, owner of the lease on the site, claimed that the size of the office space was tantamount to other concerns⁷⁹. The plans for the site required agreement amongst most of the parties involved: families of victims, residents, officials, the Lower Manhattan Development Corporation, and the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey who hold ownership over the land. These competing interests might be viewed as constituting two distinct responses; one characterised by its focus on remembering, the other linked to a belief that forgetting was a form of resistance. Both of these responses continue to impact upon the redevelopment of the site, but the former is most relevant to this paper.

On the sixth month anniversary of September 11 'Tribute in Light' was unveiled (Appendix II). Onlookers from Washington Square Park exclaimed 'it's ethereal . . . it almost looks like them [the towers]'.⁸⁰ The project was conceived by two

⁷⁸ Carroll, *Terror: A Meditation*, 57-58.

⁷⁹ Libeskind, *Breaking Ground, Passim*; Mike Wallace, *A New Deal for New York* (Bell & Weiland, 2002), 8.

⁸⁰ Unidentified observer interviewed by Margot Adler, 'World Trade Center Memorial', 11 March 2002. Audio interview on www.npr.org.

groups of artists. The first group, Julian LaVerdiere and Paul Myoda, had initially been commissioned to create a light sculpture for the towers when the structures had still been standing.⁸¹ After the attacks, their initial response was to create a tribute to the building entitled 'Phantom Towers'⁸², two pillars of light that would evoke a ghostly vision of the towers. Simultaneously, architects John Bennett and Gustavo Bonevardi responded to September 11 with a proposal entitled 'Project for the Immediate Reconstruction of the Manhattan Skyline'⁸³ that was nearly identical to 'Phantom Towers'. The two artistic teams were brought together by the Municipal Art Society, and joined by architect Richard Nash Gould, to produce 'Tribute in Light'.

The names of all these projects are revelatory, communicating the various philosophical underpinnings of the people involved. 'Phantom Towers' perceived itself as a portrayal of New York's Phantom Limbs—the two towers—that New Yorkers felt were still present yet altered, hovering in their absence and situated in the skyline's gap. LaVerdiere and Myoda also saw this tribute as an attempt at "sculpting the plumes of dust" hanging above Ground Zero the nights just after the attacks⁸⁴. Myoda went further and suggested that the light sculpture was a 'sort of reconfiguring [of] the chaotic smoke cloud'⁸⁵, an attempt to create some semblance of order out of a chaotic past event. Bennett and Bonevardi were even more abstract than this; their intention was to 'reconstruct' the skyline, a desire grounded in their architectural expertise. The need to heal or repair the gash in the skyline appeared to be their overriding concern. However, when discussing 'Tribute in Light' on the eve of its opening, Bonevardi offered up light as a symbol of 'the souls of those who died rising up to heaven'⁸⁶. This seems to be one of the sole allusions to the dead of September 11, all other remarks by the creators are directly related to the buildings themselves,

⁸¹ Terence Smith, 'Tribute in Light: A NewsHour with Jim Lehrer Transcript' *pbs.org* 11 March, 2002.

⁸² See page 24 of this study.

⁸³ Quoted in 'Tribute in Light' on *www.creativetime.org*.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ Paul Myoda interviewed by Terence Smith, 'Tribute in Light'.

⁸⁶ Gustavo Bonevardi interviewed by Smith, *Ibid.*

to their evocation and memorialisation. Such a position becomes more understandable after reading Bonevardi's explanation. He writes that the day after the towers had fallen, he had discussed the project with Bennett and both had rejected the idea of a memorial. How is this so? 'Though thousands had died [. . .] At that time, we still believed the rescue workers would miraculously free survivors. We could not yet acknowledge their deaths.'⁸⁷ Because the 'Tribute in Light' was a temporary tribute, the artists involved allowed themselves to be distanced from the human toll of the event. They were not emotionally ready nor yet equipped to address the site for what it was: a giant mass grave without bodies. This was a response constructed within the first few days of the event, when numbers of the dead were unknown and Phantom Bodies had not yet surfaced from the burning fires. Survivor groups, who did not share this position of distance, pressured the mayor before the sixth month anniversary to rename 'Towers of Light', the title of the project, as 'Tribute in Light';⁸⁸ a shift away from language that identified with the buildings to that which acknowledged the dead.

This approach of recognition—couched with human empathy and engaged in a struggle to face the void and explore gaps—is naturally employed by Daniel Libeskind; the architect whose master plan for the redevelopment of the World Trade Center site was selected in February 2003. Libeskind, a respected architectural academic, had been previously responsible for the construction of the Jewish Museum in Berlin and the Imperial War Museum in Manchester, amongst other projects. He had already set out his belief in seething presences: 'I think there is a history of the invisible [. . .] Architecture should embody the invisible'⁸⁹. The architect has noted that his family history is the central source of his understanding, as he was born in post-war Poland, in 1946, to Holocaust survivors:

⁸⁷ Gustavo Bonevardi, "'Tribute in Light' Explained' *Slate.com*, 11 March 2002.

⁸⁸ Anne Pasternack, Executive Director of Creative Time, interviewed by Neal Conan host of 'Talk of the Nation' *National Public Radio* 11 March 2002. Audio interview on *npr.org*.

⁸⁹ Daniel Libeskind, *The Space of the Encounter* (Universe Publishing: 2000), 91.

Because of who I am, I have thought a lot about matters like trauma and memory [. . .] I find myself drawn to explore what I call the void—the presence of an overwhelming emptiness created when a community is wiped out, or individual freedom is stamped out; when the continuity of life is so brutally disrupted that the structure of life is forever torqued and transformed.⁹⁰

The development of the World Trade Center site, one that had experienced an act of mass devastation demanded, like his previous design for the Jewish Museum in Berlin, that Libeskind articulate the meaning-filled silences and absences through his architecture. He needed to communicate to the public, through his plans, what the ghosts were saying. Although phrasing it differently from Avery, Libeskind does acknowledge the existence of these sounds: ‘At the start of each project, he strives to hear the “voice of the site”.’⁹¹

To hear the ‘voice of the site’, which for Libeskind is inextricably linked to those who died there, he descended into the depths of Ground Zero. Through this action, the architect seemed to be communicating that through a physical exploration of the depths of the landscape, he would ultimately understand the depths of the experience. Libeskind describes the experience of encountering the ‘bathtub’—the phrase employed to describe the sixteen-acre hole that was, in some parts, as deep as seventy feet—in October 2002, as a point of epiphany;

The lower we descended into the deep hole, the more intensely we could feel the violence and hatred that had brought down the buildings; we felt physically weak with the enormity of the loss. But we could feel other powerful forces present: freedom, hope, faith; the human energy that continues to grip the site. Whatever was built here would have to speak to the tragedy of the terrorist act, not bury it. Down we went [. . .] We always think of the skyscrapers of New York, but it’s down below where you perceive the depth of the city [. . .] We felt a whole city down there. The ashes of those who had died, and the hopes of those who survived. We felt we were in the presence of the sacred.⁹²

⁹⁰ Libeskind, *Breaking Ground*, 12.

⁹¹ Dominic Lutyens, ‘Daniel Libeskind’s Tall Order’ in *The Weekend Australian Magazine*, 6-7 September 2003, 21.

⁹² Libeskind, *Breaking Ground*, 14.

This is not Alice's fantastical drop down the rabbit hole—one that was marked with wonder—rather it is a courageous willingness to face the void and thus find meaning alongside traces of humanity. This perspective is almost completely antithetical to the thinking behind 'Tribute in Light', which illuminated the air and created an impression of ethereality, instead Libeskind attempts to ground his response in *terra*. The outcome was a focus on the 'slurry wall', the foundation that is a dam remained intact after the attacks (if it had been broken, New York could have been flooded). For Libeskind, this wall demonstrated a spirit of resistance, its 'refus[al] to fall' symbolised 'the unshakable [*sic*] foundations of democracy and the value of human life and liberty'.⁹³ The architect heard the ghosts whispering 'freedom' and 'liberty', an experience revealed in the exposure of the slurry wall in the subsequent plans. The decision to expose the wall (Appendix 12) as part of a memorial site was a potent act of remembering; it was suggestive of a crypt, taking on the sense of a sacred resting place, far beneath the surface of the city. This was a place where the Phantom Bodies could rest and simultaneously be unveiled. The design did not seek to muffle their voices in an act of negation, it only made them softer, almost peaceful.

Another acknowledgement of these phantom presences was contained in the lines of Libeskind's design. He chose to incorporate the routes taken by 'the heroes of that day', those of 'rescue workers, police and firefighters', at points where they arrived at the World Trade Center. These pathways would be situated between the city and a public space to be called 'September 11 Plaza'.⁹⁴ In doing so, Libeskind acknowledges the movement of people who were on their way to provide help to those in the towers, and anticipates a kind of subconscious memorialisation by countless future passers-by. Shaping people's routes to walk in the dead's footsteps would be a performative memorial, a physical affirmation of their last acts and, thus, of both their lives and deaths. The footpaths are both 'memory' and 'quasi-present' as they create a new reality literally directed by the

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 43. Whilst some might point to the political overtones of such a statement, Libeskind's approach is foremost to honour the dead, not to contribute to political grandstanding.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 48

past event. Libeskind's original designs, although they have been radically altered since their submission by several of the interested parties, were a fulfilment of Carroll's wish⁹⁵; they were indeed 'of the hole, yet rose out of it, reaching beyond it'.

⁹⁵ See epigraph on page 31 of this study.

There's Strength in Falling Upwards

This is what a culture looks to art for, to put image, or voice, or context to a way of rethinking, reseeing, re-experiencing.

Eric Fischl, sculptor of 'Tumbling Woman'⁹⁶

Libeskind's plans succeed in negotiating the complex space between representing the 'beautiful' that is implicit in memory and the depiction of horror that emerges from confronting the event of terror. For many people left behind, the responsibility of bearing witness to such an event or of performing the act of remembering, can only be fulfilled by accepting these two, entirely distinct, narratives. The locus of September 11's horror in New York seems to reside in one strand of the day's happenings that appeared only briefly in the public arena, through a set of images, before being withdrawn from the public gaze. These pictures, both still (photographs) and moving (film and video footage), relayed the photojournalistic account of an unknown number of people who, trapped in the burning top stories of the World Trade Centre, fell to their deaths. The plummet of a distance of over one hundred stories of building conveyed the violence of the event. As one young child, who did not have adequate knowledge of the possibilities of atrocity to decode this terrible reality, put it: "Look, teacher, the birds are on fire!"⁹⁷ In a wider context, people chose not only to turn away from, but further than this, to make these images vanish.

One particular image, which became known as 'The Falling Man' was photographed by Richard Drew, a journalist from the Associated Press, and immediately appeared in hundreds of newspapers around the world. It depicted a man in freefall, but unlike the other images that revealed people who 'appear to be struggling' against their impending deaths, who 'flail and flail', this man was 'perfectly vertical, and so is in accord with the lines of the buildings'.⁹⁸ After September 12, the photo was not republished in the general press as reactions to it were fierce; people accused the press of being disrespectful to the families of the

⁹⁶ David Rakoff, 'An Interview with The Artist: Eric Fischl' reprinted from *The New York Times*, 27 October 2002 on newyorkartworld.com.

⁹⁷ "The Birds Are on Fire", *The New York Times*, 18 September 2001, 30.

⁹⁸ Tom Junod, 'The Falling Man' *Esquire*, September 30, Volume 140, Issue 3 www.esquire.com

dead and Glenn Guzzo, editor of *The Washington Post*, responded with the claim that “the terrible truth is the truth that we should not deny folks.”⁹⁹ Writer Tom Junod investigated the disappearance of this photo two years later and found that it was, in fact, misleading. It was one of a series of this man’s fall, the other pictures of the man had captured the struggle and the flailing that the others, who had been captured dying this way, had demonstrated so chillingly. However, as an image, Junod found the photo to be potent: ‘Some people who look at the picture see stoicism, willpower, a portrait of resignation; others see something else—something discordant and therefore terrible: freedom.’¹⁰⁰ Part of his article explored the rejection of the man by people who might have been his family. Some approached, judged the man to have committed an act of betrayal, that in jumping he had rejected the possibility of reunification with them (which was in reality, non-existent), or that he had committed a religious sin. In investigating this image and reactions to it, Junod suggests that this act of rejection was taken up by the American public in their decision to refrain from looking at the images. ‘Dozens, scores, maybe hundreds of people died by leaping from a burning building, and we have somehow taken it upon ourselves to deem their deaths unworthy of witness—because we have somehow deemed the act of witness, in this one regard, unworthy of us.’¹⁰¹

These were not the only cases of a refusal to witness, a reaction that some artists encountered when they tried to redress this facelessness in their own work. Eric Fischl, a New York sculptor, created a personal response to September 11—through which he had lost a friend ‘trapped on the 106th floor of the North Tower’¹⁰²—in the form of a large bronze entitled ‘Tumbling Woman’. The statue depicts a naked woman who seems to have fallen to the floor, her head and shoulders in contact with the ground, her feet in a type of balletic move, lengthened and out to the side. (Appendix 13) The artwork was exhibited in the

⁹⁹ Jim Rutenberg and Felicity Barringer, ‘News Media Try to Sort Out Policy on Graphic Images’ *The New York Times*, 13 September 2001, 24.

¹⁰⁰ Junod, ‘The Falling Man’.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

plaza of the Rockefeller Center for the first year anniversary of the attacks. After a scathing article by *New York Post* columnist Andrea Peyser who inaccurately described it as ‘a violently disturbing sculpture [. . .that] depicts a naked woman, limbs flailing, face contorted, at the exact moment her head smacks pavement following her leap from the flaming World Trade Center’¹⁰³ and subsequent lobbying, the statue was removed. It didn’t matter that, as Fischl later expressed, it was clear that ‘there’s no impact at all’¹⁰⁴ expressed in the piece, that ‘it feels like a dream in which somebody is floating’¹⁰⁵. To the section of the public who were vocal in their criticism, this was an image with which they were not comfortable, an image of painful vulnerability: a phantom that was too visible. This mammoth phantom of bronze possessed a realistic female face and body, she was an Everywoman, who represented the public’s own vulnerability through her explicit humanity. The artist’s intent—to rehumanise those who had fallen to their death and thus capture their tragedy¹⁰⁶—ironically worked against him.

During an interview with writer Junod, National Public Radio journalist Melissa Block suggested that not only printing the photographs of the falling, but even ‘talking about them [. . .]’ was absolutely forbidden.¹⁰⁷ She argued that the censorship of images came about because there was a cultural taboo that surfaced almost immediately after they were published as people perceived them as a ‘kind of violent pornography’.¹⁰⁸ Perhaps this establishment of a taboo—of a

¹⁰³ Andrea Peyser, ‘SHAMEFUL ART ATTACK - ROCK CENTER SHOWCASES WTC LEAPER’ *New York Post*, 18 September 2002, 3. The very heading of this piece expressly reveals a disregard for the woman’s awful dilemma by referring to her in a flippant manner as a ‘leaper’. In this article Peyser also directs a personal attack at Fischl for not having viewed the attacks from up close as he was in the Hamptons at the time of the attacks and thus had no right to produce the statue, making little allowance for his grief over his friend’s death. Fischl later explained, ‘My piece came out of grief and was meant to be shared. I wanted to sit with those who had suffered directly, to sit with my society, my country, in a shared way.’ Robert Fishko, ‘Art in Troubled Times: A Conversation with Artist Eric Fischl’ transcript from an ADAA Collectors’ Forum, 21 May 2003, *artdealers.org*.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵ Eric Fischl quote in Rakoff, ‘An Interview with the Artist’.

¹⁰⁶ Eric Fischl, ‘I see heroism in victimization, in identifying with the loss or tragedy and thereby finding the strength to overcome it. The lessons of death are really about how one survives it.’ Quoted in Fishko, ‘Art in Troubled Times’

¹⁰⁷ Melissa Block, ‘September 11 and the Photo of the falling man’ *npr.org* August 21, 2003. Audio recording from ‘All Things Considered’ interview with Tom Junod.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

general cultural repudiation that extended to even discourse on the subject— explains the alterations that Honor Molloy¹⁰⁹, a respected American fringe playwright, made to her script *autodelete://beginning dump of physical memory*. The play was a personal response to having witnessed September 11 from the close environs of her street;

We stood on that street, hundreds of us. And we could do nothing. Useless in the face of the unimaginable, we could save no one. I watched helplessly as my neighbors to the south began to leap from the windows of those burning towers. One couple held hands as they fell their final mile in this life. A woman clawed her way upward as she plunged, trying so desperately to climb the sky.¹¹⁰

The story of *autodelete://* revolves around the character of Kick Arse Malone, a tough-talking, exploitative New York editor who has suffered from what is probably a brain aneurism. Her ex-husband, writer Pierce Parrig, and long-time friend, Meyer Auderkirk, try to piece back her memory. In the first version of the script¹¹¹, the writer ultimately reveals the source of the trauma as Kick retells her experience of the fateful day, in fragmented dialogue. She tells Pierce of looking at the towers from the sidewalk and seeing a woman standing in the hole of the burning building:

What will she? Do [. . .]

Watched her. I watched her.
Step on her desk.
And.
Leap to up.
Clawing the sky.
Climbing Tuesday.

Scrabbling the blue beyonds.
That blue-eyed mourning.
Towards the scorchy sun.

She jumped. And where did she go?

¹⁰⁹ Formerly known as Honour Kane.

¹¹⁰ Honour Kane, 'Climbing Tuesday' *American Theatre*, September 2002, Volume 19, Issue 7, 29.

¹¹¹ Honour Kane, *autodelete://beginning dump of physical memory* (Unpublished playscript provided by the playwright, April 2002). All subsequent references to the script are incorporated into the text.

She jumped and.

Where did I go? Where did I go in that moment?

I went. And I went with her. (119)

Here, again, the artist bravely confronts the void. Molloy draws upon her own shattering experience of having watched people fall to their deaths and reconfigures this into a tale of a woman who mentally implodes from the trauma that followed this witnessing. It is only by recognising her haunting, by narrating to her ex-lover the picture seared on her brain, that she is able to piece herself back together by regaining her memory. But, like Fischl, Molloy sought to humanise this falling woman and attempted to do so by recasting her ending: 'Finally, after time, I found a way through my work to see her safely home, send her onwards, upwards and amend her brutal end.'¹¹² In this act of rewriting, Kick identifies with the unknown woman to the extent that her very identity merges with hers. As if by remembering her, Kick empowers her to climb out of the frame, bestowing upon the dead a lease of life. For this act of kindness, Kick is rewarded with a new life philosophy, shedding her harsh persona she asks of Pierce 'Love me. Gather me *in*.' (121) This is simultaneously the voice of the dead woman and her own.

Regrettably, the play does not seem to have been received in the redemptive manner in which it was intended. A later version of *autodelete://*¹¹³ has all references to this event extracted and consequently the play becomes incomprehensible as the centre of the story vanishes together with the falling woman. Molloy categorises the different drafts as 'the early draft that includes World Trade Center day. And the "condoned" version—the one that American Theatre [*sic*] might be able to stomach.'¹¹⁴ As in Fischl's case, the phantom has again been cast aside out of the public gaze or discourse. One cannot help but

¹¹² Honour Kane, 'Climbing Tuesday', 29.

¹¹³ Honor Molloy, *autodelete://beginning dump of physical memory* (Unpublished playscript provided by the playwright, undated later draft).

¹¹⁴ Personal email from Honor Molloy to writer. 15 August 2005.

wonder, who holds the power to decide whether a phantom is not welcome in the public sphere? Is there a distinctive feature that all rejected phantoms share, are they too visible, too vivid, too realistic, too truthful? This is dangerous territory, particularly when artists who struggle to engage with the unsightly remains, so as to recover them in the public memory, have their works subsequently become unrecognisable and meaningless because someone has deemed their work to be disrespectful or distasteful.

The phantom of the falling body is boldly reintroduced by Safran Foer in *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*. Towards the end of the story, Oskar's mother discloses to her son that her husband, Thomas, called her from the building to reassure her that he was alright, even though he was about to die (324). Oskar, who is plagued by the same secret, is thus able to forgive both his mother and himself; an emotional shift that allows him to release his grief in the comfort of her embrace. Later that night he looks at images he has placed in his scrapbook, several censored photos of a man falling from the World Trade Center that he has uncovered on the internet. 'Was it Dad? Maybe. Whoever it was, it was somebody.' (325) In coming to this conclusion, Oskar echoes the work of artist Fischl and playwright Molloy and the sentiments of writer Junod who claimed, 'The reason that I wrote that story [about the falling man] was to reclaim this man.'¹¹⁵ The figure is *somebody* but by editing these images out of the historical public record, by negating these phantoms, the very lives of the dead, along with their deaths, risk becoming nullified. Safran Foer then creates a visual mirror image of Kick's spoken one; Oskar rips the pages out and 'reverse[s] the order, so the last one was first, and the first was last. When I flipped through them, it looked like the man was floating up through the sky.' (325) And instead of allowing the reader to visualise this, the author provides them with a visual flip book at the end of the novel, fifteen pages in all that display this hopeful retelling¹¹⁶. A boy's imagination thus becomes a compelling force when combined

¹¹⁵ Tom Junod quoted in Block, 'September 11 and the Photo'.

¹¹⁶ Although reactions to this ending were mixed, John Updike in his review of the novel claimed it was 'one of the most curious happy endings ever contrived, and unexpectedly moving'. John Updike, 'Mixed Messages' *The New Yorker*, 14 March 2005 www.newyorker.com.

with his determination to witness this man's existence. Like Kick's woman, this *someone*, is able to climb out of his reality.

In Israel, a taboo-like status has traditionally attached itself to artistic works that depict those who have died by acts of terrorism. Gringras, writer of *About the Oranges*, states that Natal, a non-profit organization that offers counselling for victims of terror came to some local performances of his show and conducted discussions afterwards. One of its 'representative[s] tells me the show portrays very honestly the trauma and the aftermath of the terror survivor's experience – too often a taboo subject in Israel.'¹¹⁷ Perhaps Gringras' role as a community artist allows him the freedom to explore the human trauma that emerges from cases of suicide bombing. Pre-eminent Israeli playwright, Yehoshua Sobol, recently wrote *Zman Emet* ('Time of Truth'), a play that deals with terrorism; the first of his works that overtly addresses the issue to be produced in his country. He perceives there to be a newfound rupture with this taboo, which was initially imposed as a social mechanism of coping with the reality. 'The moment now, when *Plonter* is playing at the Cameri and *Zman Emet* is playing at Habima, is a new one [for Israel]. It shows the audience does not just want escapism. I have seen with my play that the audience is ready to confront an unsettling situation.'¹¹⁸

Both Sobol and Professor Freddie Rokem¹¹⁹ suggest that whereas Israeli artists have attempted, since suicide bombings began in the country, to approach the subject matter, there has been a past unwillingness by the public to partake in this kind of art. For years, it was generally accepted that the media was the

¹¹⁷ Robbie Gringras, 'About the Oranges (The Situation Comedy)' *All About Jewish Theatre.com* 2005.

¹¹⁸ Yehoshua Sobol quote from a phone interview, 6 June 2005. *Plonter* ('Tangle') was a group-devised work directed by Yael Ronen which appeared in the 2005 Cameri Theatre, one of the most respected and mainstream theatre companies, to a sold-out season. Habima is the other major theatre company in Tel Aviv.

¹¹⁹ Professor Freddie Rokem, Dean of the Faculty of the Arts and Professor of Theatre Studies at Tel Aviv University also spoke of this recent shift in Israeli society, of audiences being increasingly prepared to see plays that dealt with these themes. Personal interview with Freddie Rokem, Tel Aviv, 8 June 2005. This is a theory that is also explored in his book more widely, as it addresses violence in Israel and the first Intifada. *Performing History: Theatrical Representations of the Past in Contemporary Theatre* (University of Iowa Press: 2000).

acceptable medium for restoring humanity to faceless victims. The shift in theatre has been mirrored by a similar movement in literature, as demonstrated by short story writer, Etgar Keret's 'Surprise Egg'¹²⁰ and A.B. Yehoshua's novel *A Woman in Jerusalem*¹²¹. In Keret's exceedingly ironic story, a man is left grieving over his wife's death after a suicide bombing. When the unnamed woman undergoes an autopsy, the pathologist is faced with not only the standard findings after such an event— 'little pieces of metal, nails or other kinds of shrapnel' (76)—but also 'tumors in her stomach, in her liver and in her intestines, but especially in her head' (76), thus leading him to deduct that she would have died within a month. He struggles with the dilemma of whether to inform the husband of this otherwise impending death and decides against doing so, concluding that the 'news might make the grief even more distressing' and 'what difference does it really make?' (77)

In deciding this, the pathologist unconsciously resists a way to rehumanise her by disclosing her particular story, even if it is one of sickness. This hypersensitive approach to the living results in the woman's status being maintained as yet another body whose name, along with her reality, is not so terribly important to warrant the further discomfort of those left behind. Much like the censored September 11 images of falling people, these facts are considered too disturbing for public consumption. However, the refusal to recognise the haunting, with all its force, leads to further suffering. In this case, the husband is left feeling secretly guilty for not having driven his wife to work that day. As sculptor Eric Fischl advocates, 'We should approach the memorialization of death in ways that give us, who are living, the strength to continue to live.'¹²² This strength emerges from uncovering from amongst the fragments, the humanity of the dead regardless of the pain it might cause other people.

¹²⁰ Etgar Keret, 'Surprise Egg' from *The Nimrod Flip-Out* (Picador: 2004), 75-80. Subsequent references are incorporated into the text.

¹²¹ The novel was shortlisted for the Man Booker International Prize in 2005. A.B. Yehoshua, *A Woman in Jerusalem: A Passion in Three Parts* transl. Hillel Halkin (Halban: 2006). Subsequent references are incorporated into the text.

¹²² Quote from Fischl, 'Art in Troubled Times'.

A Woman in Jerusalem is similar in theme to 'Surprise Egg' as it deals with a human resource manager's journey to uncover the identity of a woman, killed in a suicide bomb in Jerusalem. The manager—in a reversal of Keret's story, he, not the dead woman, is unnamed¹²³—has been charged with a mission by his boss; to redeem the humanity of the company, a well-known bakery. The owner is distraught after an article is published exposing the company for not having identified the woman, an employee, as she has lain in the morgue; accusing it of negligence. And so the search begins, the manager subsequently revealing her identity as Yulia Ragayev, a Christian Russian temporary resident. At first, the manager wonders why he is dedicating so much energy to the task, 'was it to reclaim the dignity of an engineer come from afar to be a cleaning woman in Jerusalem. To let her know — her and whoever had loved her — that her suffering and death hadn't gone unnoticed because of anyone's callousness?' (24) Later, during a talk with the investigative journalist who wrote the exposé, the manager is surprised to hear that the journalist doesn't "give a damn for the dead [. . .] The dead are dead. Whatever dignity we accord them, or fear or guilt we have about them, are strictly our own. They have nothing to do with it." (29-30) Thus Yehoshua impels the reader to contemplate not only the dehumanisation of the dead but the wider implications on a societal level; of a slow descent into inhumanity with each case of the unclaimed dead—both in body and story. The writer doesn't suggest that a deeper engagement with the memory of the dead is uncomplicated; for the human resource manager this process is, at times, treacherous. His physical voyage takes him to the harsh terrain of rural Russia to bury Yulia's remains but it is his emotional journey that is more gruelling, as he finds himself increasingly fascinated by the dead woman, obsessed by her spectre. Perhaps this is Yehoshua's warning; that in a society where bombs are a continual presence, the obligation of its citizens is not to become consumed by the phantoms but rather to recognise them.

¹²³ During a close reading of the text, it became clear that the dead woman, Yulia, is the sole character in the novel who is named. This is a dramatic subversion of the literary convention of the one-dimensional, unnamed character.

'I want to hold you in my arms'

Even out of atrocity, one is stirred to make art. *Especially* out of atrocity. One feels impelled to transform it.

Salamander in Janette Turner Hospital's *Due Preparations for the Plague*¹²⁴

The Phantom Limb was first indicated by sixteenth-century physician and surgeon, Ambroise Paré, whose work was predominantly located in the field of war injuries and subsequently amputations. 'He explained the experience of the Phantom Limb after "mortification" as being produced by the continuity and "consentment" of the dead parts with the living ones.'¹²⁵ In much the same way, the presence of Phantom Bodies is inextricably bound up with those who are left alive in a population targeted by acts of terrorism. Whilst the act of amputation consists of the violent removal of a damaged limb in order to keep the patient alive, these specific terrorist acts violently obliterate entire living bodies from the social landscape in an act of pure destruction. What remains in the place of those who have vanished, contrary to the terrorists' desire to entirely annihilate life, is the potent haunting presence of Phantom Bodies. They simultaneously function as a reminder of the event itself, insisting upon the response of bearing witness, and as a symbol of the overwhelming power of humanity.

However, although always present once they emerge from this wreckage, these Phantom Bodies are rendered weak if rejected by the living. Their recognition by characters such as Abby in *The Mercy Seat*, or the human resources manager in *A Woman in Jerusalem*, prevent their total suppression through the refusal of

¹²⁴ Janette Turner Hospital, *Due Preparations for the Plague* (Fourth Estate: 2003), 285. This novel, which explores biochemical terrorism and its consequences, was commenced three years before September 11 but as Turner Hospital was finishing it, the event itself occurred. Subsequently, the author rewrote a scene which conveys her victims' final moments so as to evoke more humanity. She tells of how after reading a *New York Times* article about the last conversations of the victims of September 11, "I found myself weeping and I was profoundly reassured about human nature. These people had 20 minutes [. . .] What they wanted to do was call those they loved and tell them they loved them. It was as if they had already passed through some kind of gateway where all the usual narcissistic concerns just flew away from them and they became these radiant benign beings.' Quoted in Jane Sullivan, 'The thrills in Turner Hospital' *The Age*, 31 May 2003, 3.

¹²⁵ Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 36.

people, like Ben of *The Mercy Seat* or even journalist Andrea Peyser¹²⁶, to respectfully acknowledge them. This is why the role of artists—who take risks in confronting this haunting and sometimes even reshaping it—is integral to a public’s memory of the dead. Many people who identify these figures of haunting find them difficult to explain in words, but Avery Gordon intelligently phrases them as ‘seething presences’ and claims that in their acceptance there resides a ‘transformative recognition’¹²⁷. Perhaps this notion of transformation explains Safran Foer’s two novels. The first, *Everything is Illuminated*, is a journey of memory through the frame of the Holocaust, the second, addressed here, is a search for presence and hope in the spectre of September 11. In an interview, the author speaks of his late grandfather, a Holocaust survivor, and the sense of always knowing of his trauma even before it was relayed to him. ‘There should be a name for those things that one feels one has always known without ever having learned. And a name for those things that are central to one’s life without ever being thought about or felt.’¹²⁸ This reflects a strong belief in the presence of the invisible that is echoed by Toni Morrison and Daniel Libeskind. Safran Foer reveals a driving energy behind his writing, a personal phantom: during the Holocaust his grandfather’s baby daughter was killed by the Nazis and because of the intolerable anguish this event caused, her name was never revealed to the family born after the war, it was always shrouded in silence. ‘In this case, a dead, nameless child is more alive to me than many living things.’¹²⁹ This affirmation of the writer’s phantom is what enables him to convey the horror of the void such events leave in their wake, alongside the wonder that can be encapsulated in life through the vibrancy of his stories.

Some of the artists considered throughout this study counteract the annihilation of life with a response that might be described as an embodiment of love. Safran Foer and Honor Molloy both express this sentiment in their work, with Oskar

¹²⁶ The *New York Post* columnist whose attack of Fischl’s sculpture led to its being removed from the Rockefeller Center.

¹²⁷ Gordon, *Ghostly Matters*, 8.

¹²⁸ Jonathan Safran Foer quoted in Solomon, ‘Extremely Odd’, 37.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

and Kick figuratively embracing the falling men and women of the World Trade Center and recasting their fates, allowing these figures of haunting to climb into another frame. This is not to suggest that they disregard the horror located in September 11. An alternative response offered by Spike Lee is the depiction of an unresolvable scenario, and his representation of Ground Zero in its raw and frightening state is much like Daniel Libeskind's slurry wall. There is no shying away from the horror here; remembering can only be performed fully with a sense of the truth that comes with the artist conveying the void in his or her canvas, regardless of the medium. Eric Fischl claims that he created 'Tumbling Woman' because he wanted to 'sit with those who had suffered directly' and with his society.¹³⁰ For him to succeed on his own terms, the sculptor was required to bravely face the version of the truth that was confronting him, even if he was condemned for doing so by sections of the public. Ironically, the woman he portrayed was intact and thus elided the image of a body fragmented by its brutal impact.

Importantly, we must recognise the risks involved for artists who choose to journey into the abyss in order to emerge with signs of humanity. Risks of rejection, of contempt, of being accused of being voyeurs, of sacrificing some of their own innocence. There is also the danger hazarded by an individual who opens himself up to extreme haunting that threatens to overwhelm him as exhibited by the character in *About the Oranges*, who has internalised the presence and is unable to differentiate his own body from the phantom one, or to a lesser extent, the human resources manager of *A Woman in Jerusalem*.

It is only in the truthful encounter with the void that the artist can begin to communicate what the ghost has to say but first it is crucial that the person who sets out to do so should listen for meaning-filled silences alongside words. How might one begin the encounter? Toni Morrison offers up her own philosophy:

¹³⁰ See footnote 103, 39.

To speak to you, the dead of September 11, I must not claim false intimacy [. . .] I must be steady and I must be clear, knowing all the time that I have nothing to say—no words stronger than the steel that pressed you into itself; no scripture older or more elegant than the ancient atoms you have become.¹³¹

For what purpose, you might ask? The wise poet knows the answer to this as well:

And I have nothing to give either—except this gesture, this thread thrown between your humanity and mine: *I want to hold you in my arms* and as your soul got shot of its box of flesh to understand, as you have done, the wit of eternity: its gift of unhinged release tearing through the darkness of its knell.¹³²

To embrace these Phantom Bodies, or as Morrison keens, to ‘hold [them] in [our] arms’, pieces back together their fragmented humanity, and in turn, strengthens our own.

¹³¹ Toni Morrison, ‘The Dead of September 11’ from *Vanity Fair: One Week in September, Special Edition*, November 2001, No. 495, 49.

¹³² *Ibid.*

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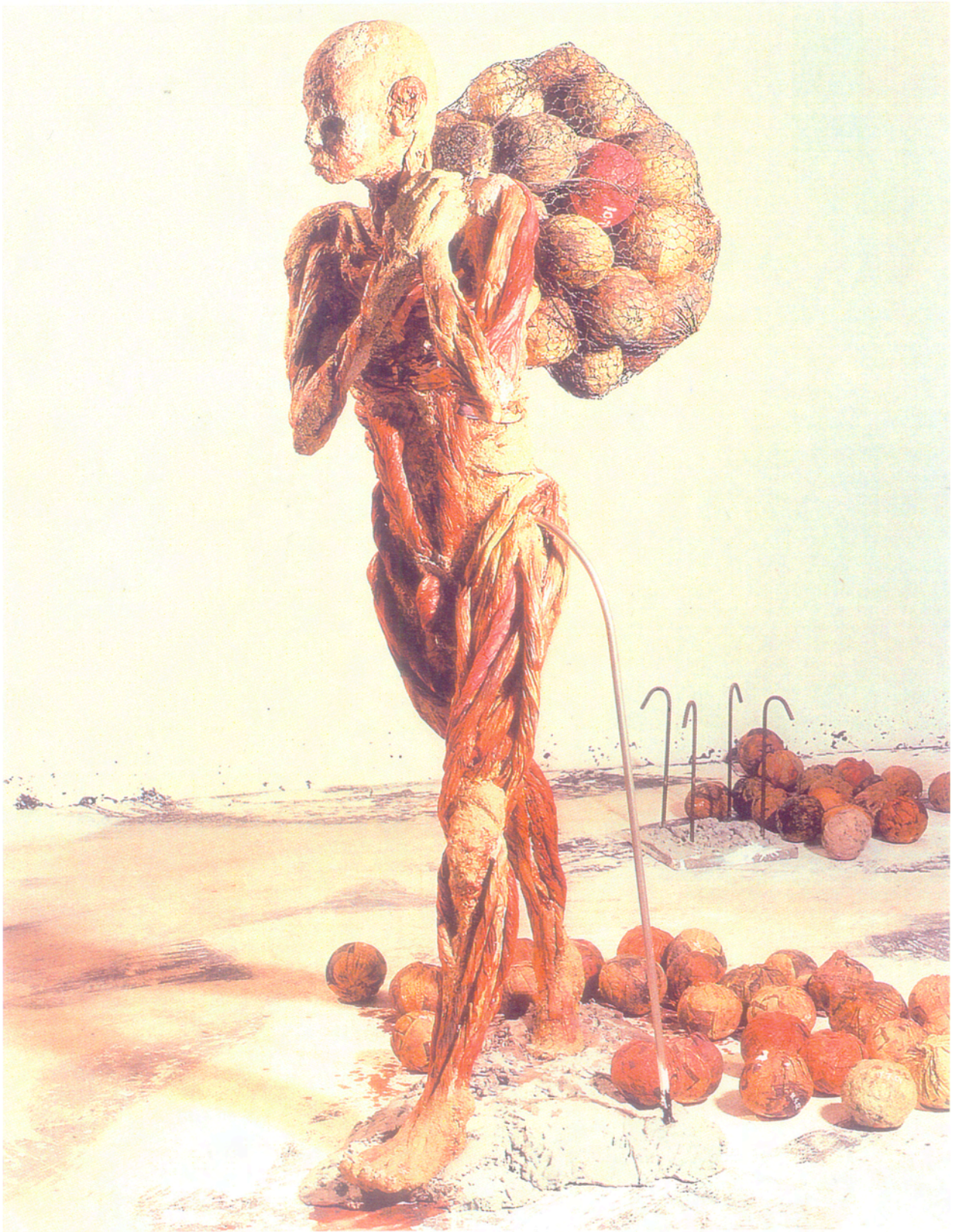
Appendix 1 - 'Fruit'



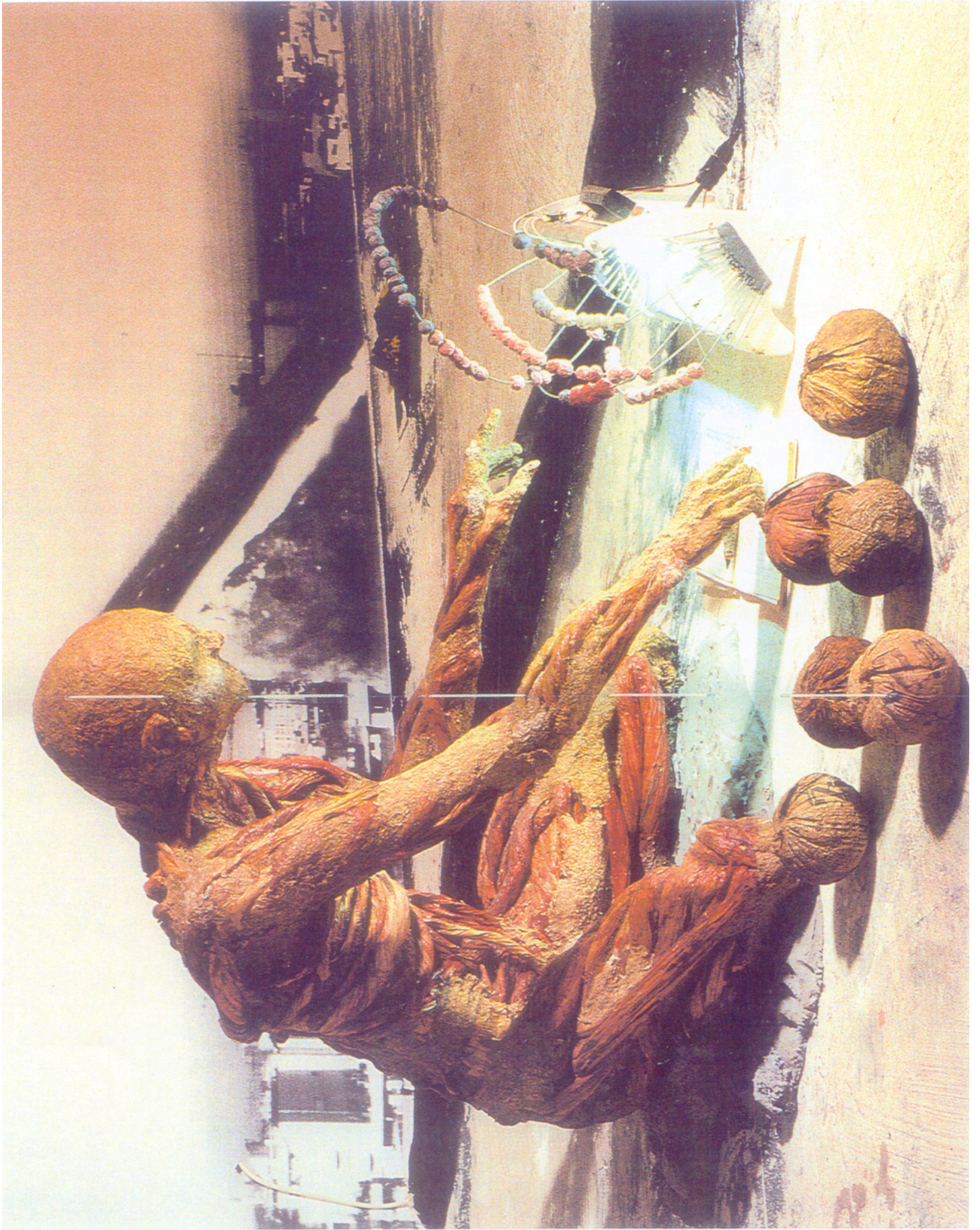
Appendix 2 - 'Tel Aviv rooftop scene'



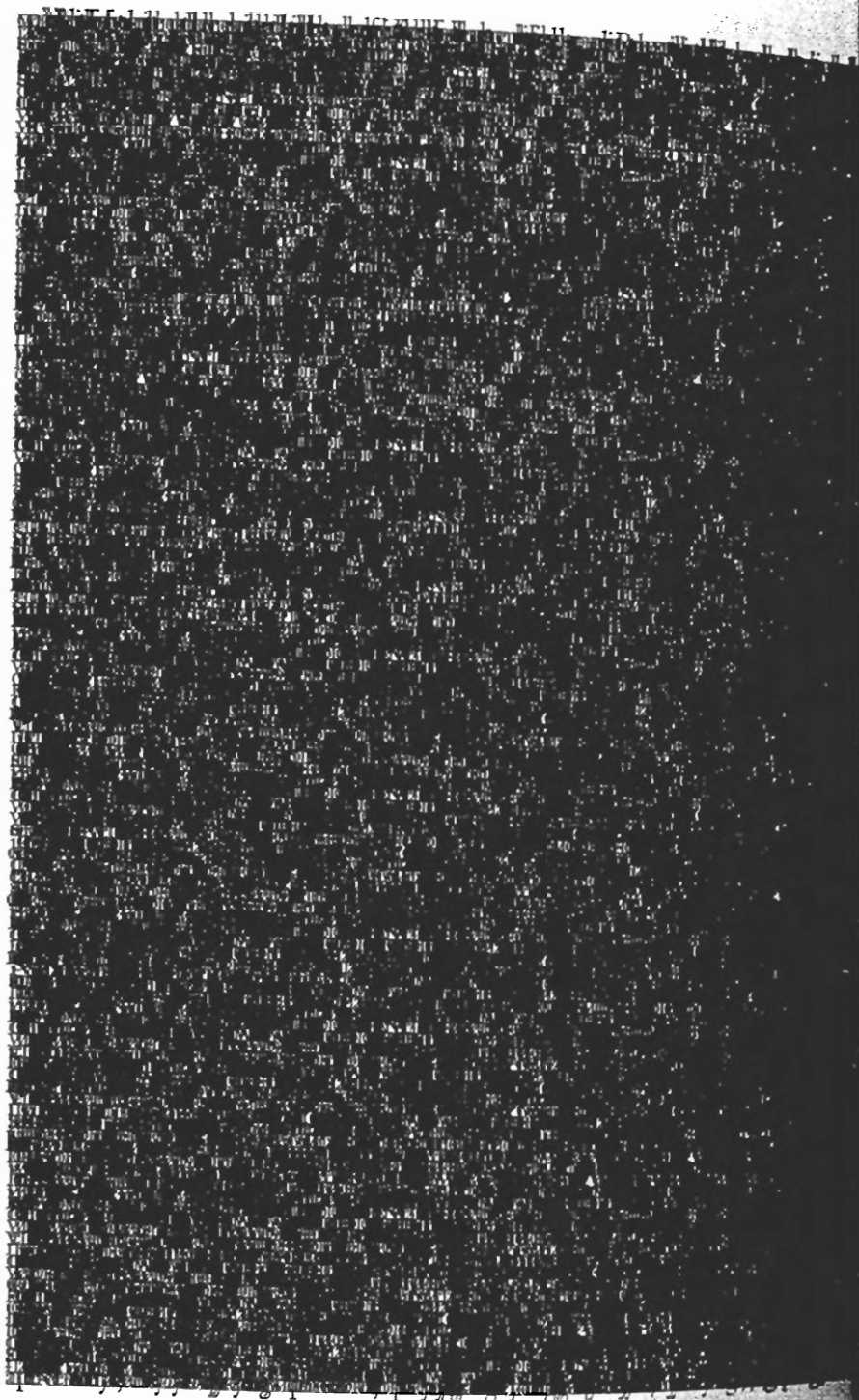
Appendix 3- 'The fruit picker'



Appendix 4- 'The porter'



Appendix 5- 'The recorder of days and fruit'



Appendix 6
'Thomas Snr.'s page'

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Appendix 7
'Grandma's Story'

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I walked into a bakery seven years later and there he was. He had dogs at his feet and a bird in a cage beside him. The seven years were not seven years. They were not seven hundred years. Their length could not be measured in years, just as an ocean could not explain the distance we had traveled, just as the dead can never be counted. I wanted to run away from him, and I wanted to go right up next to him. I went right up next to him.
Are you Thomas? I asked.
He shook his head no.
You are, I said. I know you are.
He shook his head no.
From Dresden.
He opened his right hand, which had NO tattooed on it.
I remember you. I used to watch you kiss my sister.
He took out a little book and wrote, I don't speak. I'm sorry.
That made me cry. He wiped away my tears. But he did not admit to being who he was. He never did.
We spent the afternoon together. The whole time I wanted to touch him. I felt so deeply for this person that I had not seen in so long. Seven years before, he had been a giant, and now he seemed small. I wanted to give him the money that the agency had given me. I did not need to tell him my story, but I needed to listen to his. I wanted to protect him, which I was sure I could do, even if I could not protect myself.
I asked, Did you become a sculptor, like you dreamed?
He showed me his right hand and there was silence.
We had everything to say to each other, but no ways to say it.
He wrote, Are you OK?
I told him, My eyes are crummy.
He wrote, But are you OK?
I told him, That's a very complicated question.
He wrote, That's a very simple answer.
I asked, Are you OK?
He wrote, Some mornings I wake up feeling grateful.
We talked for hours, but we just kept repeating those same things over and over.

Appendix 8 'Grandma's letter to Oskar'

I'm sorry.

264

Appendix 9

Thomas Snr. says he's sorry

MESSAGE FIVE.

10:22 A.M. IT'S DA S DAD. HEL S DAD. KNOW IF
EAR ANY THIS I'M
HELLO? YOU HEAR ME? WE TO THE
ROOF EVERYTHING OK FINE SOON
SORRY HEAR ME MUCH
HAPPENS, REMEMBER—

280

Appendix 10
'The phone message'

Appendix II



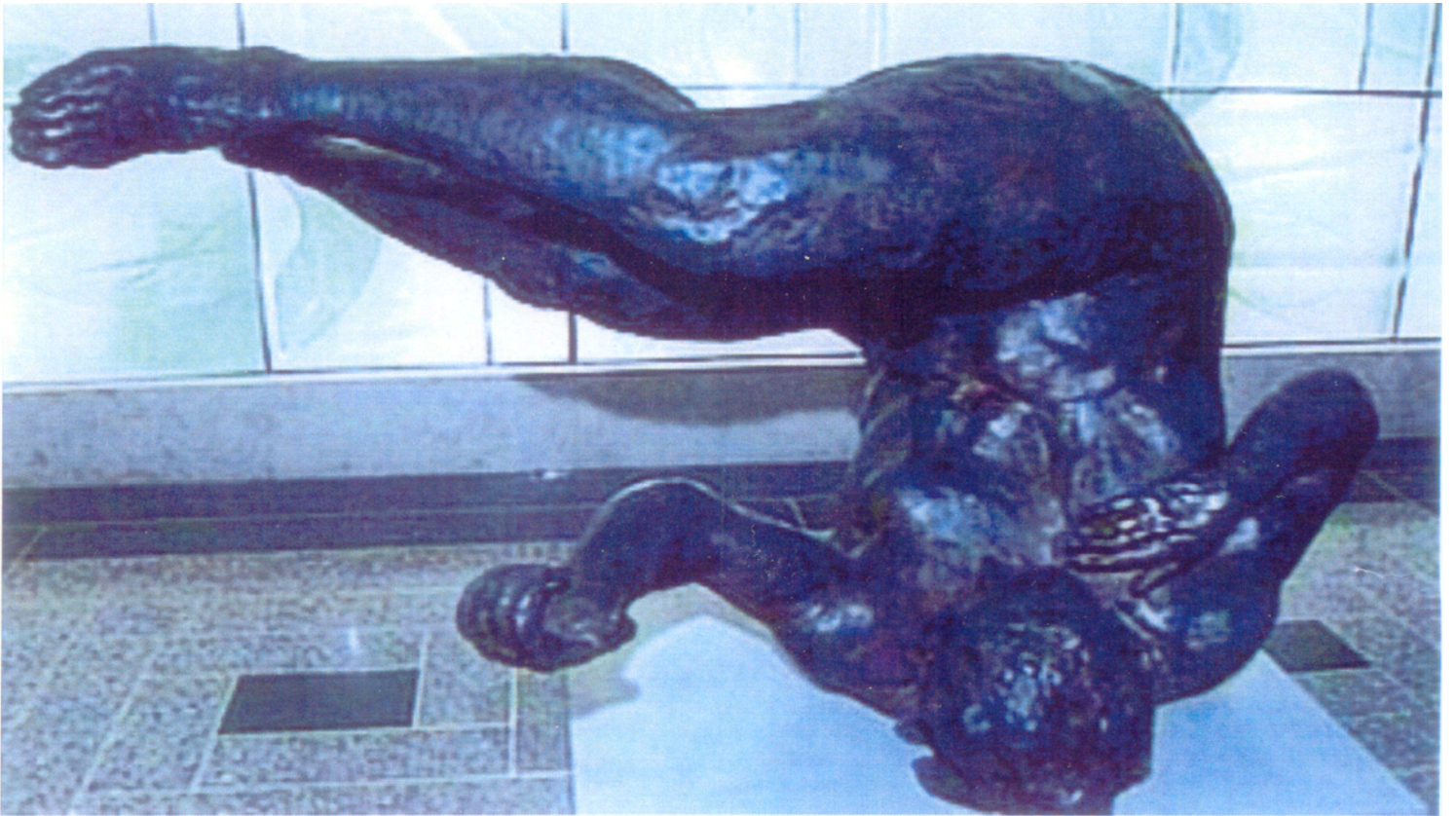
'Tribute in Light'

Appendix 12



'The Slurry Wall'

Appendix 13



'Tumbling Woman' by Eric Fischl