Full of sound and fury, signifying nothing:

How is 9/11's memorial culture reflective of a crisis in representation that has engendered limiting templates of remembrance?

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INTRODUCTION

"So much of this seems to oblige us to think about language" (Williams 2003:25)

Writing of 9/11, James Berger argues that "Nothing adequate, nothing corresponding in language could stand in for it. No metaphor could carry language across to it. There was nothing to call it because it had taken reality over entirely" (Berger 2003:54). The feeling that time had stopped, that history was at an end, innocence destroyed, the nation traumatised and America altered forever dominated the immediate reaction to the attacks. However, inevitably, over time words have been found, and forms of representation designated in which to express the events of the day. This dissertation will consider the attempt to find modes of articulation for the disaster commonly referred to as "9/11".

Dori Laub asserts that "September 11 was an encounter with something that makes no sense…there is no coherent narrative about September 11" (Laub 2003:204). Laub appears to posit 9/11 as a "limit event", which LaCapra defines as "an event that goes beyond the capacity of the imagination to conceive or anticipate it. Before it happened it was not- perhaps could not be- anticipated or imagined" (LaCapra 2004:133). However, as Žižek explains, 9/11 was an event that *had* been anticipated and literally pre-scripted in Hollywood disaster epics (Žižek 2002). Therefore, attempts to portray 9/11 as a limit event appear misguided and misleading, often serving to mask the ideological interests at work in the memorialisation of the attacks.

Against the formulation of the incomprehensible limit event, I wish to argue that the commemorative process may be seen as an attempt to develop the coherent narrative Laub suggests is missing from the understanding of 9/11. In *The Texture of Memory*, James Young states that sites of memory function to create meaning and orient the rememberer in exactly this fashion. Young argues that, like narrative, "which automatically locates events in linear sequence, the memorial also brings events into cognitive order" (Young 1993:7).

What, then, qualifies as a memorial object? Young explains that "sites of memory are many and diverse, deliberate and accidental. They range from archives to museums, parades to moments of silence, memorial gardens to resistance monuments" (Young 1993:viii). Thus, the "texture of memory" may be said to incorporate a multitude of diverse representational forms. Among those considered in this study will be the architectural (Libeskind and Child's *Freedom Tower*), the monumental (Arad and Walker's *Reflecting Absence*), and the literary (the post-9/11 novels of DeLillo, Safran Foer and Kalfus).

The plenitude of these memorial objects disproves Laub's claim that 9/11 should be considered an "event without a voice" (Laub 2003). However, I argue that within the vast amount of airtime and analysis that has been dedicated to the attacks, two interpretations have threatened to eclipse all others. The first has incorporated September 11 into a heroic, nationalist narrative of redemption and has come to dominate the public-political sphere. This has facilitated an introspective discourse, eager to assimilate 9/11 into a triumphalist vision of America rather than to consider whether its own shortcomings may have marked the United States as a target for attack (albeit unjustifiably). The second trend posits 9/11 as a traumatic limit event, the day upon which "Normality abruptly ceased. Life as we have known it stopped" (Laub 2003:205). This reading predominates in literary representations of 9/11, and has facilitated an over-personalised discourse that obscures the historical context of the attacks.

In both of these interpretations, the "experience" of 9/11 has overwhelmed analysis of the event itself, engendering a conflation of the individual and the nation, the personal and the political, that has distorted the meaning of the attacks. The historical import of 9/11 and the geopolitical context of the attacks, their antecedents and their aftermath have largely been omitted from memorial culture. This disregard of any need for contextualising historicity is, I believe, the biggest shortcoming of the current commemorative discourses surrounding 9/11. As Radstone asserts, "Events do not come out of nowhere, and neither do they leave their mark on a previously blank page" (Radstone 2003:121).

To advocate historicising memory may seem contradictory, and indeed many theorists draw a sharp distinction between the domains of history and memory[1]. In response to the challenge posed to history by the rise of memory studies in the academy, some historians have argued that memory should be viewed as a subjective testimonial that can be valued "only as an object of study and critique or at best as an unreliable source of facts for history" (LaCapra 2004:108), crediting history's demand for evidential proof with prioritising it as a more factual or "truthful" domain. Conversely, however, theorists more favourable to memory studies have suggested that the relationship between the two disciplines is carefully nuanced, and that history and memory should be viewed as "*entangled* rather than oppositional" (Sturken 1997:5). I argue that memory aims to mediate between the public and the personal, illuminating the dynamics of the individual and the collective that shape the domain of history. In general terms, as Radstone contends, "what is at stake in studies of memory is the elaboration of the relationship between lived experience and the broader field of history…including within its purview questions of broad social forces and power relations that exceed those of relations between individuals" (Radstone 2005:139).

In this sense, memory must be realised as inescapably sociological, as argued by Maurice Halbwachs, whose work forms the theoretical basis of much thinking on collective memory. Halbwachs insists that "individuals always use social frameworks when they remember" (Halbwachs 1992:40). His theory stems from the understanding that the "very language and narrative patterns that we use to express memories, even autobiographical memories, are inseparable from the social standards of plausibility and authenticity that they embody" (Kansteiner 2002:185).

However, Radstone argues that the field of memory studies has gone awry. Whilst the discipline initially endeavoured to expose and disrupt the workings of hegemony by interrogating relations between the inner and the outer, the personal and the public, "recent work on memory tends to demonstrate that what began as a radical questioning of boundaries…has hardened into a practice of reading in which the inner world…comes to be taken as 'the' world" (Radstone 2005:140). Reinforcing this impression, Kansteiner asserts that "the nature and dynamics of collective memories are frequently

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misrepresented through facile use of psychoanalytical and psychological models" (Kansteiner 2002:180).

Current psychologising trends in memory studies threaten to reverse Halbwachs' model of sociological memory. Rather than pointing to the socialised nature of individual memory, paradigms borrowed from psychology analyse collective memory in the highly personalised language of psychoanalysis, particularly in the field of trauma studies. This over-personalisation has obscured the ideological and hegemonic processes through which cultural memory is articulated and mediated, and led to a tendency (evident in both memory studies and commemorative culture) to evacuate historical specificity from memory.

The over-personalisation of cultural memory ignores the fact that "public memory…testifies to a will or desire on the part of some social group or disposition of power to select and organize representations of the past so that these will be accepted by individuals as their own" (Wood 1999:2). Radstone argues that "Memory is always mediated", accordingly particular attention should be given to the role of institutions and discourses in the public sphere in shaping commemorative practices (Radstone 2005:135). As Wood asserts, "If particular representations of the past have permeated the public domain, it is because they embody an intentionality- social, political, institutional and so on- that promotes or authorizes their entry" (Wood 1999:2).

The mediation of cultural memory may be said to occur through the mode of its articulation, making the study of memory as much concerned with questions of representation as content. Kansteiner argues that "the most interesting interventions in collective memory studies seek to profit from poststructural insights into cultural systems of representation, but hope to reconcile these insights with conventional methods of historical studies that emphasize agency and intentionality" (Kansteiner 2002:188). Consequently, this dissertation will focus on the ways in which articulations of the memory of 9/11 relate to their various disciplinary and discursive contexts, and the means by which the representation of 9/11 has been mediated by ideological, cultural and academic hegemonies.

I do not wish to suggest that there is only one "correct" form in which to memorialise 9/11, as to do so would be to impose a totalising interpretation. As Young (a panellist for the memorial competition at Ground Zero) asserts, memorial culture should allow for "competing, even conflicting agendas" (Young 2003:220). However, as I shall demonstrate, 9/11's memorial process has been dogged by a tendency to subsume the attacks into pre-existing, formulaic, modes of discourse, that do not allow any opportunity for dissent or critique.

Chapter I will consider how the evocation of America's historic national myths in the public-political domain following 9/11 has impacted memorial objects: looking particularly at the redevelopment of Ground Zero. Chapter II will argue that the sentimentalisation of public discourse has stifled the possibility of an effective counter-memorial in the cultural sphere, and lead to the development of a theoretically formulaic literary corpus that is severely derivative of trauma studies.

As this dissertation is substantially concerned with the analysis of discourse (generally taken to be a cumulative phenomenon rather than constituted by individual instances of representation), my methodology does not lend itself to lengthy analysis of isolated memorial objects. I will instead attempt to illustrate the combined effect of elements in the overarching memorial culture. However, in order to ground my research, I will undertake more detailed study of key case studies. In the first section these will comprise Daniel Libeskind and David Child's Freedom Tower. In the second, I shall consider literary works including Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2006), Ken Kalfus' *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* (2006), and Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* (2007).

Through the combined interrogation of these individual case studies, and their contextualisation within predominant discursive trends, I hope to identify the representational problems that have arisen in the commemoration of 9/11. I will then endeavour to illustrate the need for a historicising perspective and a more empathetic geopolitical outlook in order to provide more reflective, and diverse, templates of remembrance.

I

Mythologising the public sphere

In 9/11 criticism, it has become almost *de rigeur* to note that the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington bear a remarkable resemblance to scenes prefigured in American disaster movies[2]. In his post-9/11 treatise, Žižek comments that "for us, corrupted by Hollywood, the landscape and the shots of the collapsing towers could not but be reminiscent of the most breathtaking scenes in big catastrophe productions" (Žižek 2002:14). Arguing that the attacks were, therefore, not unimaginable, but thoroughly ingrained in the national psyche, Žižek asserts that "the unthinkable which happened was the object of fantasy…what happened on September 11 was that this fantasmatic screen apparition entered our reality" (ibid:16).

By "reality", Žižek means the nexus of symbolic co-ordinates that together determine the meaning of the experience we accept as real. The impact of September 11, Žižek argues, was so great that it smashed through the symbolic fiction that Americans had mistaken for reality, destroying the national fantasy of impregnability. As Susan Faludi states, "The intrusions of September 11 broke the dead bolt on our protective myth" (Faludi 2008:12-13).

 Marita Sturken contends that "in the attacks of 9/11, the United States experienced a kind of "image defeat" and was wounded at the level of spectacle" (Sturken 2007:172). The treatment and recovery of the national image has been one of the priorities of the public-political sphere in the aftermath of the event. The need to reappropriate 9/11 into an American narrative generated a frantic search for a redemptive American mythology. Politicians and public figures hastened to enlist the nation "in a symbolic war at home, a war to repair and restore a national myth" (Faludi 2008:12-13)

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[2] see Žižek (2002); Sturken (2007); Simpson (2006)

If we accept that "As the means by which we remember who we are, memory provides the very core to identity" (Sturken 1997:1), it seems logical that "memory is valorized where identity is problematized" (Kansteiner 2002:184). This explains the immediacy of the rush to commemorate in the aftermath of 9/11, and suggests that memorial processes proffered the means to repair the symbolic defeat suffered by America. This chapter will investigate how the quest to reassert a unified American identity after 9/11 led to the mythologisation and nationalisation of the commemorative process during the period between late 2001 and the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

1.1 Mythology and Nationalism

Lévi-Strauss positions myth at the hiatus between language (*langue*) and discourse (*parole*): the semiotic and the semantic. Myth works to translate the particular into the universal by recourse to established tropes or archetypes, eliminating disunity by painting broad discursive strokes that emphasise similarities and conceal divergence (Levi-Strauss 1955).

Myth's unifying character functions similarly to the principle of identification inherent in nationalism. Within a society such as the United States, the mediating banner of mutual nationality unites people who could otherwise be defined by a series of opposites (male/ female, white/ black, gay/ straight, Republican/ Democrat). One might argue, therefore, that the nation (according to Benedict Anderson, an "imagined community") is an exemplary example of myth: working to create unity from disunity through the process envisaged by Lévi-Strauss.

Anderson argues that "If nation-states are widely conceded to be 'new' and 'historical', the nations to which they give political expression always loom out of an immemorial past, and, still more important, glide into a limitless future" (Anderson 2006:12-13). This formulation resonates strongly with Lévi-Strauss' assertion that "what gives myth an operative value is that the specific pattern described is everlasting; it explains the present and the past as well as the future. This can be made clear through a comparison between myth and what appears to have largely replaced it in modern societies, namely,

politics" (Lévi-Strauss 1955:430). Lévi-Strauss' equation suggests that nationalism and myth both operate as an imaginative entity dominating political life by evoking eternalised values

Richard Hughes defines America's mythology as consisting of five chief tropes: The Myth of the Chosen Nation, The Myth of Nature's Nation, The Myth of the Christian Nation, The Myth of the Millennial Nation, and The Myth of the Innocent Nation (Hughes 2004). He argues that America's national character was defined in the early national period (roughly 1776-1825). The myths that emerged in this era possessed "a certain timeless quality. According to these myths, America virtually transcended the particularities of time and place. These myths implicitly denied, for example, that the nation had particular historical roots" (ibid:45).

The timeless nature of the American story was identified in 1791 by Thomas Paine, who wrote in his *Rights of Man* that, "the case and circumstance of America present themselves as in the beginning of the world…as if we had lived in the beginning of time." (Paine 1945:376). The manifest destiny that separated America from the rest of history was contained in the first line of the Declaration of Independence. The Declaration asserts that "all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the Pursuit of Happiness". Thus, America's special quality, its truly foundational myth (however compromised it would prove to be), was built upon the concept of freedom.

Each of the myths expounded by Hughes is conjoined by the theme of American exceptionalism, grounded in the state's apparent espousal of freedom. Eric Foner argues that "No idea is more fundamental to Americans' sense of themselves as individuals and as a nation than freedom" (Foner 1998:xviii). As the "central term in [America's] political vocabulary", and the "dominant master narrative for accounts of [its] past" (ibid:xiv), the concept of freedom has thereby subsumed within it America's diverse mythic tropes. More importantly, it has also formed the dominant tenet of resurgent national identity after 9/11, prescribing the thematic core of the commemorative process. This ubiquitous adherence to the notion of freedom has constituted the basis of much of the binary political rhetoric utilised after 9/11. However its most visible (and material) manifestation has involved the redevelopment of Ground Zero, and the controversial Freedom Tower, first proposed by Daniel

Libeskind and then jointly developed by Studio Libeskind and New York architects, Skidmore, Owings and Merrill (represented by David Childs).

1.2: Mythology, Memory, and Meaning: the Freedom Tower

The Freedom Tower will stand at 1776ft, recalling the signing of the Declaration of Independence in 1776. Libeskind states that the "memory of looking up at the Statue of Liberty had inspired part of my design", and argues that his asymmetrical tower mirrors the form of the Statue, evoking Liberty's torch (Libeskind 2004:47). In its interplay with the Statue, Libeskind's design provokes a doubling effect on the skyline reminiscent of that produced by the Twin Towers. Together, the Freedom Tower and the Statue of Liberty project an impression of America as the continuing propagator of freedom from 1776 to the present.

Ground Zero is located in environs that reflect a pre-existing discourse of freedom. It is bordered to the south by Liberty Street, to the east by Liberty Plaza and, one block down, by Liberty Place. To the west of Ground Zero is Liberty Island, upon which stands the Statue of Liberty. The Freedom Tower does not then import a new discourse to the area but, importantly, reinforces the rhetorical message of New York's historic streetscape. In this district, as Foner argues of the United States as a whole, "Freedom is the oldest of clichés and the most modern of aspirations" (Foner 1998:xvi).

As the place where the devastating effect of the attacks was most visible, Ground Zero has been the epicentre of the campaign to commemorate 9/11. The term "ground zero" has historical provenance as the site of, or ground directly under, a nuclear attack such as those unleashed at Hiroshima and Nagasaki by the U.S in 1945. In reappropriating the term for the American nation after 9/11, the U.S. has redefined the phrase in a way that emphasises American innocence, casting the nation as victim rather than perpetrator.

"Ground Zero", then, is a concept charged with contesting and over-determined meanings. As a burial ground, and a commercial property; an ideological space, and the focus of personal grief: "Ground

Zero is a place where practices of memory and mourning have been in active tension with representational practices and debates over aesthetics: a place, one could say, defined and redefined by a tyranny of meaning" (Sturken 2007:168).

The battle to control the meaning of Ground Zero has been bitter- raging between its owners (the Port Authority), its leaseholder (Larry Silverstein), the NYFD, relatives of those who died in the attacks, left and right wing media, and, of course, the federal government. Alongside Gettysburg, it has joined the ranks of "sacred" places- a designation that permits and facilitates its inclusion in a nationalist political sphere. As Sturken argues, "when death is transformed into sacrifice and made sacred, it is deployed almost always with political intent" (ibid:199).

Accordingly, Ground Zero has become an ideological space. Beyond its commercial rehabilitation, "is the more strident call for triumphalism, for an economic and patriotic display of national and local energy that can pass muster as embodying the spirit of America" (Simpson 2006:61). Hence the site's resurrection as a symbol of freedom and American heroism, a place of triumph and virtue, rather than a mausoleum of waste and loss. Joel Meyerowitz (the only officially sanctioned photographer to archive Ground Zero in the aftermath of the attacks) amazingly effected the site's beautification. Rather than a deadly pile (where the consequences of daily work would later have fatal respiratory effects upon rescue teams), his photographs portrayed Ground Zero as a cathedral-like space of virtuous sacrifice.

In 2002, the U.S. State Department selected Meyerowitz's images for global exhibition: travelling to targeted areas in the Middle East, including Istanbul, Kuwait and Islamabad. As works of art-turned-propaganda, Meyerowitz's photographs became triumphal symbols, intended to reveal, as Assistant Secretary of State, Patricia Harrison, enthused: "the resilience and the spirit of Americans and freedom-loving peoples everywhere" (in Sturken 2007:198). The political deployment of the Meyerowitz photographs aims to translate a site of loss into an aestheticised vision of freedom. Echoed in the desire to view Ground Zero as sacred terrain, this Christianised perspective attempts to effect the resurrection of the American nation through its dominant myth[3].

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[3] This reading of Ground Zero as a "pure" site of redemption was reflected by the iconic image of a section of mangled beams from the World Trade Center, which had formed the shape of a cross. This giant crucifix was left as an impromptu memorial throughout the site's clearance.

However, such quasi-religious notions of redemption also serve to elevate 9/11 into a transcendental happening that occurred outside of history. Through such action, ""September 11" is coded as the extraordinary event that restructures time" (Trimarco and Depret 2005:36). As a result, its incorporation into American discourse has ignored the usual "metamorphosis of a locus of history into a site of memory", which requires "the passage of decades, generations, even centuries" (Stamelman 2003:15). The attacks have instead become "an event already integrated into memory but not yet archived in history" (ibid:17). Commemoration occurred at an unprecedented speed - by September 12, 2001, suggestions for a suitable memorial were already circulating on the Internet. This facilitated 9/11's manipulation into nationalist mythology, preventing its assimilation into a more reflective historicising narrative. Indeed, Barthes notes that while myth "postulates a kind of knowledge, a past, a memory, a comparative order of facts, ideas, decisions", within it "history evaporates, only the letter remains" (Barthes 2000:117).

Barthes argues that myth is a *metalanguage*. The mythologised object does not confer meaning upon itself, but upon the thing or event to which it gestures (in the memorialisation of Ground Zero, this subject may be understood as, variously, 9/11, the victims of 9/11, or the American nation). Barthes designates myth as a "tri-dimensional pattern of semiology" (Barthes 2000:112), consisting of the signifier (the form of the myth), the signified (the mythical concept) and the sign (the myth's signification: a combination of signifier and signified).

However, whilst the Freedom Tower may be posited as the signifier and the dead of 9/11 as the signified, the notion of "freedom" is not equivalent to, or representative of, the 2,789 lives lost in the attacks. An appropriation of meaning has occurred here, effected to secure a politically-advantageous equation of the dead of 9/11 and the fight for "freedom" that is presented as characterising the American nation throughout history, and particularly now during the War on Terror. Translation into the Freedom Tower eternalises 9/11 by equating it with the universal ideal of liberty, distorting the meaning of the event and emptying it of historical specificity. Barthes suggests that this distortion of the signified is characteristic of myth for "the fundamental character of the mythical concept is to be *appropriated*" (ibid.).

Such a mismatch of signifier and signified explains the superficiality that many critics have noted in the Freedom Tower[4]. Although it has been substantially altered throughout a design process fraught with unhappy compromises, Libeskind's original masterplan relied heavily on the emotive rhetoric for which he is renowned, including amongst its features a "Park of Heroes", a "Wedge of Light", and a "Garden of the World". Libeskind's early rhetoric reveals a form of "frozen speech…it suspends itself, turns away and assumes the look of generality: it stiffens, it makes itself look neutral and innocent" (Barthes 2000:125). This performance of innocence is typical of myth; however these idealist mantras mask the redemptive ideological intent of the design[5]. As Simpson argues, "Libeskind's soporific doublets are all too coincident with the ideological shorthand of the months after 9/11- giving us, for example, the "axis of evil", and the "coalition of the willing"" (Simpson 2006:64).

According to Barthes, "myth is the most appropriate instrument for the ideological inversion which defines this society" (Barthes 2000:142). Myth, he suggests, "is a type of speech defined by its intention…much more than by its literal sense… in spite of this, its intention is somehow frozen, purified, eternalized, *made absent* by this literal sense" (ibid:124). The mythologised object thereby serves to frustrate both meaning and purpose. Myth engenders only a betrayal of meaning, for its function "is to empty reality: it is, literally, a ceaseless flowing out, a haemorrhage, or perhaps an evaporation, in short a perceptible absence" (ibid:143).

Critics argue that the final design for the Freedom Tower exemplifies such emptiness. Thomas Foster contends that this reliance upon hollow forms of emotive rhetoric is typical of the post-9/11 Republican administration, which dispensed a form of ideology he refers to as "cynical nationalism"[6]. Cynical nationalism makes it unimportant to those in power whether or not the fantasies they mobilise (dreams of America as the arbiter of freedom, the heroism of those who died on 9/11) are believed, or exposed as mythic constructions. Instead, "reasons are found to maintain the mask of universality or national consensus, but explicitly as a mask, an empty form, a rhetorical gesture. This kind of nationalism is like

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[4] See Goldberger (2005); Muschamp (2003); Simpson (2006)

[5] Libeskind originally entitled his project *Memory Foundations*. The name "Freedom Tower" was coined by New York Governor, George Pataki, underlining its politicised construction.

[6] This derives from "cynical reason", a term Žižek (1989) takes from Sloterdijk (1987).

prayer; it's enough to go through the external motions of bowing your head and saying the words, whether you believe or not" (Foster 2005:257).

The aim of this empty rhetoric is not to convince, but to block dissent. Cynical nationalism manifests itself in post-9/11 America as "a form of false consciousness or bad faith that knows itself as such, and is therefore "reflexively buffered" in advanced against critique of this ideological state of being" (Foster 2005:257). By signalling to the essential emptiness of its own myths, cynical nationalism seems to pre-empt and incorporate traditional forms of left ideology critique, making them irrelevant. This explains the re-emergence in memorial culture of "debunked nationalist myths and cliches after 9/11, as more or less recognizably empty or inauthentic forms that are nevertheless presented as necessary and unavoidable, even moving in their very emptiness" (ibid:258).

Coupling Foster's theory with Barthes' analysis of myth presents the Freedom Tower as an ideological tool that attempts, despite its essential emptiness, to naturalise a redemptive vision of post-9/11 America. Barthes argues that the purpose of myth is to eternalise, to transform history into nature. Accordingly, it serves to present the whim and will of the state as the inevitable and irrefutable condition. In *The Sublime Object of Ideology,* Žižek expounds upon this connection between ideology and mythology. He suggests that ideological space is made of "'floating signifiers', whose very identity is 'open', over-determined by their articulation in a chain with other elements" (Žižek 1989:87). The individual objects of 9/11's commemorative culture may be viewed as just such 'floating signifiers'- the meaning of each one altered and augmented by its connection with other memorial elements.

Žižek suggests that the "free floating of ideological elements is halted" by a process of totalising "quilting", by means of which they "become parts of the structured network of meaning" (ibid.). At the heart of any ideological "quilt" is the *point de capiton*, the central image which "unifies a given field, constitutes its identity" (ibid:95). I believe that, as the most prominent memorial to September 11, the Freedom Tower represents the *point de capiton* of 9/11's commemorative culture, attempting to consolidate a redemptive image of both the attacks and the nation.

The emptying out of meaning that occurs during the process of mythologisation is effected through the misidentification of signifier and signified. In Žižek's reading, mythology aims to disconnect the signifier entirely from the signified. He argues that "the unity of a given 'experience of meaning', itself the horizon of an ideological field of meaning, is supported by some 'pure', meaningless 'signifier without the signified'" (ibid.). In the context of 9/11, this disconnection of signifier from signified would allow the Freedom Tower to subsume and surpass 9/11, standing alone as a celebration of liberty, without referring directly to any specific person, building or event to be memorialised.

Žižek explains that this process is complete "only when a certain inversion takes place, it does not occur until 'real' Americans start to identify themselves (in their ideological self-experience) with the image created [in this case by the Freedom Tower]" (Žižek 1989:96). This retroactive reconfiguration of American identity will only occur once the redemptive vision encompassed by the Freedom Tower is embraced as the "true" memory of the attacks. For this to happen the ultimate meaning of the attacks must be read as a celebration of American freedom, rather than a reaction to the country's foreign policy, or a devastating blow to the national psyche, and the victims reinscribed as "heroes" in the popular imagination. Whether consciously or unconsciously, the national media have been extraordinarily helpful in facilitating these ideological transitions.

1.3: Ground Hero: ideological sentimentality

Within hours of the Twin Towers' collapse, the media was feting Ground Zero as the domain of heroes. Archibishop Edward Egan memorably announced in a memorial service held on September 16th 2001, that the site of the former World Trade Center had been transformed into "Ground Hero" (Zehfuss 2003:517-8). As the search for survivors became increasingly futile, the media's "hero hunt" (as a *New York Times* op-ed dubbed it) intensified. The language of the serious media began to reflect the hyperbole of comic books, and- as the narratives of the two forms began to conflate- a troubling fluidity between the fantastic and the real occurred. In *Heroes*, Marvel Comics' response to 9/11, firefighters and policemen were portrayed as having eclipsed the traditional super heroes of the graphic novel. As Marvel Comics' editor-in-chief, Joe Quesada, commented: "Right now, the difference

between Peter Parker putting on a costume to become Spider-Man and a man off the street putting on a uniform to become a fire-man is really wafer-thin" (*Today,* NBC, June 4, 2002).

To permanently enshrine this heroic vision upon the imaginative landscape of America, a visceral memorial affirming codes of heroism was called for. Accordingly, the two major proposed Firefighter memorials to 9/11 are figurative pieces invoking codes of military sacrifice. Only one of these is yet complete, a 56ft wall designed by Rambusch Company and intended to mimic Trojan's Column. The uncompleted memorial, modelled on a photograph by Thomas Franklin, pastiches the iconic image of American soldiers raising the Stars and Stripes in Iwo Jima during World War II. By recreating this photograph to depict firefighters raising the American flag over Ground Zero, the memorial attempts to enact the symbolic recapturing of the site for a nation of heroes

Unlike glorifying figurative works, abstract commemorative projects such as Arad and Walker's *Reflecting Absence* (which is to be located alongside the Freedom Tower at Ground Zero) function by refusing any imposition of memorial meaning. Such works are "contemplative rather than declarative" (Sturken 1997:58) and, in this sense, anti-heroic. As such, *Reflecting Absence* stands as at odds with the prevalent memorial discourse surrounding 9/11. It is unsurprising, therefore, that those at the centre of the heroic accolades (the NYFD) should attempt to augment the memorial with celebratory monuments that affirm codes of heroism by evoking a glorious phase in American military history- the capture of Iwo Jima[7].

This is not to say that Arad and Walker eschew altogether the vision of heroic firefighters. Alongside the World Trade Center Memorial Museum[8], the footprints of the Twin Towers (transformed into reflective pools edged with the names of those who died on 9/11) will form the basis of *Reflecting Absence.* So vast were the plaudits awarded to the 343 firefighters who died in the Twin Towers, that a hierarchy of victimhood appears to have developed, with the firefighters at the top, and (often unregistered) manual workers at the bottom. Although it was initially intended that victims' names

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[7] This tension between the figurative and the abstract recalls the debate surrounding Maya Lin's Vietnam Veteran's Memorial in Washington. So controversial were the anti-heroic modernist aesthetics of Lin's memorial that two figurative statues were later commissioned- the first (in 1984) a sculpture of three soldiers, the second (in 1993) a monument to women serving in Vietnam.
[8] Which will hold the unidentified remains of those who died on 9/11.

should be spaced randomly without associative patterns to avoid hierarchy, firefighters demanded that their colleagues be listed separately and designated by insignia.

The inscription of victims' names represents the transferral of the dead into the official realm. Engraved in "monumental time", Berlant argues, the victim becomes the possession of the state (Berlant 1997:33). By designating the firefighters as heroes, memorial culture is seen to privilege them above the other victims of 9/11. Those who can be incorporated into a nationally beneficial discourse are implicitly stated to be of national value, whilst those who remain at the undignified level of "victim" are lumped together without any features of distinguishing individuation.

The grafting of the "heroes" of 9/11 into the public-political realm reveals the use of sentimentalised commemoration as an ideological tool. In this climate, nationalism "makes citizenship into a category of feeling irrelevant to the practices of hegemony or sociality in everyday life. We might call this antipolitical politics "national sentimentality"" (Berlant 1997:11). The mechanism of this "antipolitical politics" is the appeal to sentiment so evident in Libeskind's emotive rhetoric. In this context it is worth considering Muschamp's indictment of the Freedom Tower as "an emotionally manipulative exercise in visual codes. A concrete pit is equated with the Constitution. A skyscraper tops off at 1,776 feet…the play of sunlight is used to give a cosmic slant to worldly history. A promenade of heroes confers quasi-military status on uniformed personnel" (Muschamp 2003).

 Public acceptance of these hollow symbols demands a form of passive capitulation, and requires in essence the removal of citizens' critical faculties- engendering their regression to a state of intellectual infancy. As Berlant argues, "In the process of collapsing the political and personal into a world of public intimacy, a nation made for adult citizens has been replaced by one imagined for fetuses and children" (Berlant 1997:1). Alienated from the political sphere by the disingenuousness of cynical nationalism, this infantile citizen is a person who has substituted patriotic inclination for political agency. Devoid of critical or mnemonic faculties, he or she suffers a contraction of citizenship, engendered by the national knowledge industry (the politicised, mediatised domain of public discourse), and can supply 9/11 with no satisfactory narrative other than the perpetual, incoherent,

revisiting of its trauma. These lost, uncomprehending, individuals constitute the characters that dominate the corpus of 9/11 fiction. It is to their analysis that I shall now turn.

II

Trauma, infancy and fiction

Berlant's theory of infantile citizenship is founded upon the reduction of politics and nationalism to structures of sentimentalised feeling. Berlant argues that the collapse of the public into the private sphere has engendered a society in which the political is hidden within the domestic in such a way that the dynamics of hegemony are no longer apparent. This concealment of the mechanisms of ideology has, she suggests, neutered the critical faculties of the American population, reducing citizens to a condition of infantile credulity, which can be manipulated at will by the increasingly monopolistic mass media.

Radstone observes, however, that this saturation of the public sphere with the language and sentimentalism of the intimate realm has been replicated within the academy, most specifically within the discipline of memory studies. This over-personalisation of memory theory risks leaving the stealth mechanisms of hegemony unrecognised and unchallenged. Radstone argues convincingly that "Where articulations of memory in and by the public sphere slip from view, the stress can tend to fall on the personal alone, rather than on the complex relations between memory and the wider social and public spheres within which it is given meaning, screened, recognized and misrecognized" (Radstone 2005:148). Along with Antze and Lambek (1996), Radstone and Berlant associate this trend with "the rise of victim politics, the recourse to personal narratives of traumatization and the personalization of politics, if not the rise of memory and trauma *studies*" (ibid:140). They argue that increasing reflex to trauma as a frame of reference has facilitated such sentimentalised over-personalisation of both the academy and wider society.

Whilst there needs to be careful differentiation between the theoretical domain of trauma studies and the overarching culture of trauma, the two are integrally connected. Radstone suggests that the rise of trauma studies in the academy was at least partially responsible for the growth of the phenomenon Luckhurst terms "traumaculture" (Luckhurst 2003). Traumaculture extends the experience of trauma to

a national, if not universal, level; positing that entire populations may be traumatised, regardless of individuals' exposure (or lack thereof) to specific historical traumata. In this "cartoon version of the shaken nation, a citizen is defined as a person traumatized by some aspect of life in the United States. Portraits and stories of citizen-victims - pathological, poignant, heroic, and grotesque - now permeate the political public sphere" (Berlant 1997:1).

The emerging corpus of 9/11 literature is dominated by the portrayal of such traumatised individuals. These novels over-personalise the depiction of 9/11, precluding historicising analysis and relying instead upon tropes of representation inherited from trauma studies. This body of work has begun to emerge in the course of the last 3 years (roughly since 2005). For concision, I shall concentrate on the analysis of three key texts by Safran Foer (2006), Kalfus (2006) and DeLillo (2007). However, it is important to emphasise the remarkable thematic and structural consistency that arises across the whole of this corpus, which includes works by Haskell (2005), Beigbeder (2006), McInerney (2007), and O'Neill (2008)[9].

I believe the impact of these texts has been neutered by a general failure to distinguish between what might be termed a transhistorical, structural trauma marking the character of everyday life, and more specific historical traumata such as 9/11. Kansteiner (2004) and LaCapra (2004) argue that this lack of distinction arose within the academy. The failure of theorists such as Caruth to differentiate between structural and historical trauma has facilitated the development of a culture within which, "the public rhetoric of citizen trauma has become so pervasive and competitive […] it obscures basic differences among modes of identity, hierarchy and violence. Mass national pain threatens to turn into banality, a crumbling archive of dead signs and tired plots" (Berlant 1997:2).

Radstone maintains that structural trauma is illusory; the misguided effect of "hardening into literality what might better be regarded as a series of compelling metaphors- the 'traumatization' of a nation, for instance, or the 'healing' of a culture" (Radstone 2005:137). For this reason, "trauma may be of only limited value in aiding understanding of the impact of large-scale events such as those of September 11" (Radstone 2003:118). Assertions that the entire United States was traumatised by 9/11 dominated

the media and the academy in the aftermath of the attacks[10]. As Luckhurst argues, however, traumaculture was well established by the end of the 1990s, and for this corpus to rely so heavily upon trauma as an explanatory model threatens to deny 9/11 of any hermeneutic specificity by analysing the events in the same light their antecedents. The insights trauma theory might have brought to the analysis of 9/11 have therefore been negated, because practitioners (both theoretical and literary) have failed to distinguish between preexisting traumaculture, and the specific, historical trauma touching a small number of directly-affected individuals in the aftermath of 9/11.

This is not to entirely negate the value of trauma studies. At the time of its conception, the discipline was heralded as possessing the potential to destabilise and democratise master-narratives, providing a form of counter-hegemony by insisting upon the value of personal testimony and forms of witnessing previously excluded from historiography. However, as Kansteiner, Radstone and Luckhurst demonstrate, the over-application of a once-promising methodology has led to trauma studies itself becoming an example of the very form of organising master-narrative it initially sought to disrupt.

I argue that the novels studied here perpetuate culture's saturation with indistinct and misleading paradigms of trauma, recycling the "tired plots" evidenced by Berlant. This chapter will demonstrate how the over-application of tropes of trauma to 9/11 has produced a series of almost indistinguishable narratives, and suggest that "the trauma perspective may obscure from view aspects of September 11's potential meanings in cultural memory that might be illuminated by other approaches" (Radstone 2003:118).

2.1 Narrating trauma

In *Unclaimed Experience*, Cathy Caruth argues that history should be regarded as a history of trauma. She asserts that "For history to be a history of trauma means that it is referential precisely to the extent that it is not fully perceived as it occurs; or to put it somewhat differently, that a history can be grasped only in the very inaccessibility of its occurrence" (Caruth 1996:18). Trauma, by this account, arises not

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[9] See also Updike (2006) and Hamid (2007). Whilst these texts differ slightly from the thematic pattern of the main corpus, both repeat the tendency towards the over-personalisation of historic narratives.

only from a particular tragedy or disaster, but is an inherent structural condition resulting from the impossibility of accurate representation. In highlighting the allegedly traumatic component of all renditions of history, Caruth has "transformed the experience of trauma into a basic anthropological condition. In her mind, we are all victims and survivors of the trauma of representation" (Kansteiner 2004:204).

Caruth has here created "a misleading symbolic equivalency between the allegedly traumatic component of all human communication and the concrete suffering of victims of physical and mental trauma" (Kansteiner 2004:194). In so doing, her theory proffers "an aestheticized, morally and politically imprecise concept of cultural trauma, which provides little insight into the social and cultural repercussions of historical traumata" (ibid.). Combined with trauma studies' contribution to this universalisation of trauma is the tendency of contemporary culture (epitomised by television confessionals and talk shows) to attribute victim status to everyone, thereby subsuming more commonplace troubles such as divorce and depression into the melee of trauma. Here, personal upset, so-called "structural trauma", and historical traumata are conflated, the three becoming (as is demonstrated in these novels) indistinguishable.

LaCapra defines trauma as "a shattering experience that disrupts or even threatens to destroy experience in the sense of an integrated or at least viably articulated life" (LaCapra 2004:117). Trauma is regarded as an unassimilable experience that may affect the ability to remember, carrying "the past into the present and future in that the events are compulsively relived or reexperienced" (ibid:56) . As documented in the novels of DeLillo and McInerney, these cognitive disruptions engender certain posttraumatic symptoms including "confusion, a fixation on the past, and out-of-context experiences (such as flashbacks, startle reactions, or other forms of intrusive behaviour)" (ibid:45).

In *Falling Man,* DeLillo's protagonist, Keith Neudecker, reveals the disruption that traumatic experience causes to memory. He is initially unable to remember his flight from the World Trade Center in the aftermath of the attacks, and the novel charts his recovery of this memory. In *The Good Life*, McInerney's Luke McGavock (who helped at Ground Zero following the towers' collapse) has

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[10] See Cvetkovich (2003); Greenberg (2003); Trimarco and Depret (2005). For dissenting opinion see Radstone

recurrent flashbacks of receiving a bodybag that opened to reveal the charred remains of a faceless woman. In order for such posttraumatic symptoms to cease, the subject must process and assimilate their experience. However, as LaCapra argues, trauma may be experienced in one of two ways, with differing implications for the potential of its eventual assimilation. The first is an endlessly repetitive "acting-out" of the event; the second is a more progressive "working-through" of traumatic memory towards its integration.

As it is transhistorical (therefore foundational and impossible to eradicate) structural trauma cannot be worked through, and is destined to be interminably acted out. Moreover, as structural trauma is not related to any particular event, there is no specific memory or experience to process. The literalisation of such metaphors of trauma has led to claims that traumatisation was universal in the aftermath of 9/11, regardless of the fact that most of the American population had only an indirect experience of the events. These novels fail to differentiate between characters (such as DeLillo's Keith Neudecker) who were immediately affected by the attacks, and those whose only claim to being traumatised is their vicarious identification with a culture of victimhood[11].

The novels of Kalfus, DeLillo and Safran Foer demonstrate how those afflicted by such vicarious trauma are destined to compulsively relive an experience of 9/11 that was not their own. They fictionalise memories of the attacks, which are endlessly re-enacted but (being false), can never be worked-through to a satisfactory conclusion. Such attempts to process a fictive "memory" of 9/11 are demonstrated clearly by the portrayal of children throughout this corpus.

As its title suggests, "acting-out" is a form of mimetic repetition, according to Seltzer a "literalization of experience" (Seltzer 1997:9) similar to that of children's games. In these novels such games are presented as a metaphor for the repetitive re-enactment of 9/11. Through the medium of play, the children recreate the events of September 11, but distort them to end with a fantasised redemptive twist. As Rose notes, "If fantasy can be the grounds for license and pleasure…it can just as well suffice

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(2003); Jameson (2003)

[11] It seems almost fashionable to claim trauma post-9/11 (see *The 9/11 Faker* (CH4 September 11, 2008) and McInerney (2007)). McInerney illustrates how traumatisation has become as integral a feature of the party scene as excessive alcohol and recreational drugs. As Sasha McGavock airily comments,
"we're all traumatized by what happened in September…We're all drinking too much" (McInerney 2007:195).

as fierce blockading protectiveness, walls up all around our inner and outer psyche and historical selves" (Rose 1998:4).

In DeLillo's *Falling Man,* Justin (the child of the two protagonists, Keith and Lianne) and his two friends, "the Siblings", spend their time "searching the skies", looking for a man named "Bill Lawton", who "has a long beard. He wears a long robe" (DeLillo 2007:73-4). Bill Lawton is a mispronunciation of bin Laden: a name the children have misheard and incorporated into "the myth of Bill Lawton" (ibid.). Through the "twisted powers of imagination", the children use their myth to convince themselves that "The towers did not collapse…They were hit but they did not collapse" (ibid:72).

Similarly, in Ken Kalfus' *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country* (2006), Victor and Viola, the children of the two protagonists (Joyce and Marshall) play a game of "9/11". They enact jumping from the World Trade Center, holding hands, believing it is possible to "survive" as long as they keep hold of each other. When Viola is finally injured, spraining her wrist from a bad landing, she blames her brother for letting go saying "He let go of my hand…He broke the rules!" (Kalfus 2006:114-5).

The phenomenon of redemptive play is given its most detailed exposition in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), where nine-year-old Oskar Schell attempts to track down the lock that fits a key he discovers in his father's closet, shortly after he died on September 11. Oskar's quest allows him to "stay close to him [Thomas, his father] for a little while longer" (Safran Foer 2005:304), maintaining the illusion that Thomas is somehow alive or reachable.

Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close is a book concerned with intergenerational problems of representation and (self-)deception[12]. Throughout, Safran Foer demonstrates how fantasising leads to a breakdown in one's ability to understand and assimilate reality. Lying awake at night, Oskar invents fantastical gadgets to insulate himself from the death of his father. He conjures a skyscraper that moves up and down while its elevator stays in place. Consoling himself, he comments that this "could be

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[12] Oskar replicates a pattern of miscommunication repeated in his family through generations as a consequence of other historical traumata. Oskar's grandfather stopped speaking after losing his girlfriend in the Dresden bombings; he sends Thomas, the son he has never seen, empty envelopes missing the letters that explain his absence; his grandmother creates an autobiography comprising only blank pages. In conflating such distinct traumata as 9/11, Dresden and the Holocaust, Safran Foer appears to echo Caruth's suggestion that history should be regarded as a continuous record of trauma, thus his novel risks discounting the historical specificity of 9/11.

extremely useful, because if you're on the ninety-ninth floor, and a plane hits below you the building could take you to the ground and everyone could be safe" (Safran Foer 2005:5). This sentiment is echoed in the photographs that follow the final passage of the book[13]. These last pages work as a form of flip-book, showing the "falling man" of DeLillo's title "floating up through the sky". Oskar imagines that, had he more pictures of the man (whom he thinks might be his father), "he would've flown through a window, back into the building, and the smoke would have poured into the hole that the plane was about to come out of" (ibid:325).

Each of these children is creating a fictive reversal of history, in which the inherent unreality of each game dooms it to end in silence or injury. Justin's search for Bill Lawton trails off into uncommunicative silence; Victor and Viola's hopeful re-enactment of the fatal leaps made from the Twin Towers ends in the emergency room; and Oskar's search for his father's lock ends in at the abyss of an empty grave which he fills with his grandfather's blank letters[14]. Inevitably, acting-out a fantasised version of the past in this way cannot alter events. As LaCapra argues, "Narrative at best helps one not to change the past through a dubious rewriting of history but to work through posttraumatic symptoms in the present in a manner that opens possible futures" (LaCapra 2004:122). If acting-out appears in these novels as an idealistic and ultimately unsuccessful attempt to redeem or alter a memory that was never one's own, LaCapra suggests that working-through might offer a more fruitful processing of genuinely traumatic experience. He cautions, however, that "working-through does not mean total redemption of the past or healing its traumatic wounds" (LaCapra 2004:119).

Somewhat misleadingly, DeLillo appears to suggest that working-through trauma means, literally, the closing of the book on 9/11. If any character in these novels possesses a genuine claim to have been traumatised by the attacks, it is perhaps Keith Neudecker. The last pages of *Falling Man* depict Keith's successful recovery of his memory of 9/11. Keith has been through the processes of avoidance and denial, hiding away in Las Vegas casinos where he fools himself that "there was nothing outside, no flash of history or memory" (DeLillo 2007:225). He has weathered the posttraumatic symptoms, the

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[13] Safran Foer reflects a contemporary trend for texturing literary works with montages of text and imagery. The interplay of text and image works to unsettle both, problematising the truth-claims of the respective modes of representation. Much might be said about the narrative tension produced by such photo-textuality (particularly evident in Holocaust fiction, notably in the work of W.G. Sebald), however, there is insufficient space for analysis here. See Long and Whitehead (2004).

flashbacks, the "thousand heaving dreams, the trapped man, the fixed limbs, the dream of paralysis" (ibid:230). By the end of the novel, it seems, Keith has worked through his trauma and recovered "the moments lost as they were happening" (DeLillo 2007:243).

Yet DeLillo concludes his narrative on 9/11 before any meaningful or historicising reflection on the attacks has occurred. Whilst Keith's recovery of memory is a textbook exposition of traumatic paradigms, there is something formulaic about DeLillo's adherence to these models. His apparent desire for "closure" seems to reflect the quest for redemption that LaCapra warns against. I am unconvinced as to whether DeLillo's novel attempts a critique of traumaculture[15]. Regardless, his failure to supply any perspective other than a highly personalised portrait precludes the development of a contextualising literary discourse by concentrating on individual experience at the expense of the historical event.

2.2 Event, Experience and History

The relationship between an historical event and the subjective experience it engenders is complex. The two are, simultaneously and paradoxically, conflated and regarded as oppositional. The contradictions entailed by this confusing statement might be viewed as a further consequence of over-personalising narratives. The conflation of event and experience arises as a result of representing 9/11 within a domestic context. However, depicting the attacks in this way leads to a prioritisation of individual experience over a wider geopolitical perspective, thus emptying representations of historicity.

LaCapra proposes that to create an accurate and reflective narrative it is necessary "to distinguish, however problematically, among the traumatizing event or events, the experience of trauma, memory and representation" (LaCapra 2004:112). He suggests that the tendency to conflate an historical event with the traumatic experience it engenders arose in the academy. However, I believe that this confusion

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[14] The blank letters and the "silent" memoir of Oskar's grandmother echo the tropes of erasure that commonly feature in trauma writing. See Suleiman (2006)

[15] The incisiveness of DeLillo's critiques of American culture in earlier works suggests that *Falling Man* would not be critically passive. However, DeLillo's own comments on 9/11 indicate that he believes in the possibility of such redemptive narratives, able to "gives us a glimpse of elevated being…Before politics, before history" (DeLillo 2001).

has subsequently infiltrated traumaculture, particularly as portrayed in (and constituted by) these novels.

If an event is seen as external to the subject, then experience must be viewed as subjective and internally construed. Yet, as Mark Seltzer argues, the inability to distinguish between the two is characteristic of the traumatised state, as trauma entails "a fundamental shattering or *breaking-in* of the boundaries between the external [event] and the internal [experience]" (Seltzer 1997:10). This collapse of boundaries undermines the subject's sense of identity. Accordingly, "The problem that trauma poses is a radical breakdown as to the determination of the subject, from within or without: the self-determined or event-determined subject; the subject as cause or as caused" (ibid:11). Seltzer insists, however, that trauma "is the product, not of the event itself but of how the subject repeats or represents it to himself" (ibid.). Consequently, it appears that it is not the trauma that defines the subject, but the subject (the individual, culture or nation) that defines the trauma, thereby predetermining the way events are experienced.

Seltzer posits that "The attribution of trauma…bends event-reference to self-reference, transferring interest from the event (real or posited) to the subject's self-representation" (ibid.). This transferral from historical event to personal experience is a dominant feature of the corpus under discussion. Herein, 9/11 is portrayed, not as an occurrence of historical magnitude, but as the catalyst for marital reunions (DeLillo and Safran Foer), adultery (McInerney), or divorce (Kalfus).

In Kalfus' *A Disorder Peculiar to the Country*, the attacks not only provide the background for Joyce and Marshall Harriman's divorce, they become incorporated into the marital narrative. On the phone to her sister, Joyce whispers that she is unable to talk at that time because "Osama" (Marshall) "is holed up in Tora Bora" (the bedroom) (Kalfus 2006:76). As he leaves the apartment after the finalisation of their divorce, Marshall feels compelled to assure Joyce that "I'm not Saddam Hussein…If that's what you think…There's no analogy here! I haven't gassed any Kurds, I'm not threatening anyone with weapons of mass destruction" (ibid:255).

There *is*, however, an analogy, a false analogy, but one to which both Marshall and Joyce have subscribed. Although they were only tangentially impacted by 9/11, the attacks have been subsumed into the Harrimans' biographies. Marshall goes so far as to comment that "September 11 was now part of his medical history" (Kalfus 2006:58). By assimilating geopolitical events into their personal lives, Joyce and Marshall have reduced their significance to the level of an embittered divorce. Historical trauma and domestic upset are conflated and rendered equivalent.

Kalfus' novel demonstrates how the muddling of event and experience identified by LaCapra can lead to the collapse of the political into the personal illustrated by Berlant and Radstone. Joyce allows her personal circumstances to dictate her political position. She feels that she ought to oppose the War in Iraq because "Although she had never before been politically active, and wasn't even sure that a war to disarm Saddam wasn't necessary, she understood that her new situation as a soon-to-be-divorced woman required a new mode of thought" (Kalfus 2006:219).

Joyce's inability to make a distinction between her martial circumstances and a critically-situated opinion on the war in Iraq identifies her as an archetypal infantile citizen. Berlant argues that, like Joyce, the infantile citizen can exercise only "a political subjectivity based on the suppression of critical knowledge" (Berlant 1997:27). Moreover, this passive individual is seduced by the allure of victimhood engendered by traumaculture, which creates images of idealised "victim-citizens" possessed of "a zero-sum mnemonic" (ibid:50). This suggests that regression to a state of "infantile" faculties is engendered or intensified by a climate in which trauma is recognised as prevalent (whether the trauma is real or metaphorical).

In *Falling Man* DeLillo repeatedly emphasises the childlike appearance of his adult characters. The language Lianne Neudecker uses to describe her husband, Keith, and her mother in the aftermath of 9/11 resonates with phrases that evoke their infantile nature. After he has appeared, without warning, at her door on September 11, Lianne walks Keith to the hospital, "step by step, like walking a child" (DeLillo 2007:9). Once at the hospital, Keith is given a memory suppressant, following which he has "trouble writing his name" (ibid:15).

DeLillo depicts a world in which the ability to communicate has been shattered by the impact of 9/11, a world where "the witness wonders what has happened to the meaning of things, to tree, street, stone, wind, simple words lost in the falling ash" (DeLillo 2007:103). Denied access to a viable discursive form by words that seem to have lost their meaning, Keith finds it initially impossible to access or articulate his memory of the attacks[16]. Through his struggle, DeLillo emphasises the vital interdependence of language and memory, and the debilitating loss of both that the regression to an infantile position entails.

Taking infancy as a metaphor for this inarticulate and amnesiac condition reveals a model that suggests the infantile state to be experienced without knowledge of the past (outside of history), and without the possibility of linguistic expression (outside of discourse). Extending this portrait to the infantile citizens depicted in these novels, we can begin to identify the roots of the artificial separation of history and experience that appears to occur in representations of trauma. Joan W. Scott argues that such attempts to separate experience from history are flawed as they disguise the fundamentally discursive nature of experience.

Scott is adamant that it is erroneous to view experience as outside of either discourse or history. She asserts that "Subjects are constituted discursively, experience is a linguistic event (it doesn't happen outside established meanings) …Experience is a subject's history. Language is the site of history's enactment" (Scott 1992:34). She writes against a recurrent failing of texts whose "appeal to experience as uncontestable evidence and as an originary point of explanation…weakens the critical thrust of histories" (ibid:24). By suggesting that experience is "a kind of subjective testimony, one that is immediate, true and authentic" (van Alphen 1999:25), these novels have replicated in the cultural sphere the same unreflexive over-personalisation of history and memory that Radstone identifies as stultifying critique within the academy. To combat this trend, it is necessary to understand experience as historically produced and discursively mediated. It is also crucial to recognise that "experience" does not describe the lived present of the event, but its retroactive reconstruction and assimilation into narrative.

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[16] Although it does not directly take 9/11 as its subject matter, Haskell's *American Purgatorio* (2005) foregrounds

LaCapra argues that, "Since memory is a prominent part of (indeed at times a metonym for) experience, the problem of the relation between history and memory is a somewhat smaller scale version of the problem of the relation between history and experience" (LaCapra 2004:67). As I illustrated in the introduction, history and memory should be regarded as entangled rather than oppositional, and the same should be suggested of history and experience. It seems illogical to suggest that an historical event could be divorced entirely from one's experience of it, and yet it is vital to recognise that the way an individual represents an event (the way they experience it) will mediate their perception of the actual occurrences. Therefore, to attempt to separate experience from history is as mistaken as the thinking that conflates individual experience and historical event. And yet the novels in this corpus may be argued to be guilty, somewhat paradoxically, of both phenomena.

The problem, I believe, stems from the mistaken belief that 9/11 was a limit event. In *Falling Man* and the other novels of this corpus, 9/11 is regarded as a transcendental occurrence that defies the possibilities of the expressive order; an event, as DeLillo illustrates, that is destructive of language's ability to signify anything. Over-exaggerating the extremity of the attacks' effect on semantic ability has led to the ill-conceived evacuation of historicity from literary representations of 9/11. In his article for *The Guardian,* DeLillo compounds the impression that "history is turned on end", arguing that everything "changed on 9/11…The narrative ends in the rubble" (DeLillo 2001). He suggests that "The event itself has no purchase on the mercies of analogy or simile" (DeLillo 2001). With the event rendered unrepresentable, DeLillo recommends finding a counter-narrative in "the surpassing drama of human experience" (ibid.). He thus appears to suggest that experience can provide a transcendental explanatory mode that excludes the historical event.

Perhaps, however, representations should seek to restore the nuanced balance between event and experience. Disputing LaCapra's designation of inherent limit events, van Alphen asserts that "in principle representation does offer the possibility of giving expression to extreme experiences" (ibid:26). However, it should be understood that "representation itself is historically variable…experience of an event or history is dependent upon the terms the symbolic order offers" (ibid:26-7). This suggests that the failure of 9/11 narratives to adequately represent the event is not

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the same issues of the disintegration of memory and identity in the face of traumatic loss.

related to any inherent incomprehensibility, but is a result of a mismatch of representational form and content. Van Alphen stresses that "it is better to focus not on the limits of language or representation as such, but on the features of the *forms of representation* that were available"(ibid:27). This historicisation of representation suggests that attention must be given to the predominant modes of discourse in the period immediately *preceding* the attacks. If van Alphen's analysis is correct, these will identify the discursive resources available to authors and theoreticians in the aftermath of 9/11.

Luckhurst (2003) and Radstone (2005) criticise the "organising power of trauma" in the 1990s, within both the academy and the rapidly developing "traumaculture" (Luckhurst 2003:28). This suggests that the prevalence of trauma studies, and its permeation into wider culture, ensured the repetitive and mimetic narratives of the 9/11 corpus by predetermining the most obvious form for these representations to take. However, accession to this model was not obligatory and authors could have sought other modes of expression. As van Alphen argues, "representation is not a static, timeless phenomenon, of which the (im)possibilities are fixed forever…Discourses, whether literary, artistic or not, are changeable and transformable" (van Alphen 1999:26).

The effect of these authors' reliance upon tropes of representation inherited from trauma studies is the absence of insightful historicising analysis. Once responsibility to historicity is disposed of, world events are free to become fantasised, distorting the geopolitical context of 9/11. Kalfus fabricates a positive outcome to the Iraq War, which redeems America's controversial War on Terror. He portrays a transformed world in which "American investigators in Iraq had uncovered a vast cache of nuclear weapons"; "all the coalition troops left Iraq, seen off by cheering flag-waving Iraqis who lined the thoroughfares to Baghdad Airport"; "Osama bin Laden was found huddled on a filthy rug in a cave" (Kalfus 2006:230-234).

Within these novels, history is either distorted and subsumed within the domestic or, as with DeLillo's portrayal of the last days of Hammad (a hijacker in the first plane to hit the World Trade Center) intimated to have ended at 9/11. A review of *Falling Man* noted that there "is a definite decline in the quality of the writing" in the Hammad passages (Litt 2007), suggesting that DeLillo's attempt to provide a wider historical context is unsatisfactory. Litt goes on to comment that the Hammad passages

aren't pieces of narrative insight, but "repeating. For the truth is that, in Mao II, DeLillo had already written his great 9/11 novel long before the specific date and the event happened to come round" (ibid.).

In a passage from *Mao II* that would prove to be more self-reflexive than he could have known, DeLillo commented, "the more clearly we see terror, the less impact we feel from art" (DeLillo 1991:157). I do not believe that this need necessarily be so. However, an obsession with "traumatization" has undoubtedly drawn attention away from the "processes of articulation through which past happenings and their meanings are discursively produced, transmitted and mediated" (Radstone 2005:137).

In the last two chapters, I argued that cloaking public processes of commemoration in the sentimentalised rhetoric of heroism and nationalism has created a memorial discourse at once so dominant and so empty that it cannot form a part of any meaningful critique. The memorialisation of 9/11 in the cultural sphere has in turn retreated into narratives that over-personalise the representation of the attacks, and are unable to reveal the workings of, or significantly challenge, the politicised commemoration occurring in the public sphere. I wish to conclude my overview of 9/11's articulation in memorial culture by considering instances where a more insightful historicising narrative has been proposed: looking in particular at the now rejected Freedom Center that was intended to form part of the memorialisation of Ground Zero.

CONCLUSION

Although the two commemorative trends analysed here appear contrasting (the first centring upon the nation, the second upon individualised domestic portraits), these visions have much in common. Scott views such projects as "parallel narratives, in parallel columns" (Scott 1992:35). For, whilst "one seems to be about society, the public, the political, and the other about the private, the psychological, in fact both narratives are inescapably historical" (ibid.). However, it is this acknowledgement of history that is missing from these narratives at present. Instead, each imposes templates of remembrance that prevent 9/11 being analysed as an historical event by translating it into the domain of mythology or appropriating it into indistinguishable representations of trauma.

Each of these discourses is markedly reliant upon pre-existing images, mythologies or modes of critique. The similarity between the attacks and Hollywood blockbusters indicates that 9/11 resonated with scenes already embedded within America's cultural imagination, and that what followed in the development of commemorative projects was part of the "cultural process that weaves events into preexisting fantasy scenes" (Radstone 2003:120). Following van Alphen, I demonstrated in the last chapter that the same reflex to preexisting forms also explains the recourse to trauma in the literary sphere. As Radstone argues, "the alignment of the media's response with the processes of subjective trauma memory belies the preexistence of meaning-making paradigms into which these events, shocking as they were, could tentatively be located" (ibid:119).

This demonstrates the close interrelation of the entire commemorative process across the political, mediatised, literary and scholarly domains. It is particularly remarkable, for instance, that the insistence upon the vast reach of post-9/11 trauma that dominated the media in 2001-2, and formed the foundation for much early academic theorising of 9/11, should by 2007 still be the chosen model for literary representations. This commingling of discursive modes suggests to me a convergence of theory and practice that has left it hard to articulate, in any meaningful way, a more historicised account of September 11.

This fixing of modes of representation might itself be viewed as a process of mythologisation. As Tal argues, "Mythologization works by reducing a traumatic event to a set of standardized narratives" (Tal 1996:6). September 11's mythologisation has indeed led to the development of a number of such standardised narratives, each feeding into one predominant discursive trope. This might be seen as a highly sentimental representation that seeks some promise of redemption: either, in the public-political sphere, by producing narratives of heroism; or, in literary renditions, by the characters' search for a way to undo, reclaim, or tame, history.

The effect of this uniformity of expression is that "Traumatic events are written and rewritten until they become codified and narrative form gradually replaces content as the focus of attention" (Tal 1996:6). This process has significant repercussions for cultural memory as it ensures that we are able to recall "not the memory of the complex set of historical and cultural events that comprised [for example] the Third Reich, but rather a distilled and reified set of images for which "Holocaust" has become the metonym" (ibid:7).

A similar reification of September 11 has occurred in commemorative culture. Accordingly, "9/11" has become the metonym for a series of images and narratives that on one hand emphasise the trauma of the America population, and on the other attempt to elevate this victimhood into a redemptive heroic image that reinforces a triumphal national identity. Because they were predetermined by the dominant forms of representation prior to the attacks, however, this set of symbols excludes the actual events of September 11. Memorial culture thus reflects very little about 9/11 itself, but fixates instead upon its aftermath: determined either to produce a healing effect or to demonstrate the working-through of traumatic memory that might lead to such closure.

LaCapra argues against such simplifying forms of commemoration, and stresses the need for "a complex, self-questioning understanding of working through the past in which the alternatives are not reduced to a justifiably criticized idea of total transcendence of problems, full ego identity, totalizing meaning, mastery, or complacent cure on the one hand, and an insufficiently qualified valorization of trauma […] on the other" (LaCapra 2004:142-3). He advocates a form of narrative that induces *empathetic unsettlement*: "an aspect of understanding that stylistically upsets the narrative voice and

counteracts harmonizing narration or unqualified objectification yet allows for a tense interplay between critical, necessarily objectifying (even self-protectively "numbing") reconstruction and affective response to certain problems" (ibid:140).

Empathetic unsettlement is a form of "heteropathic identification. And it involves virtual not vicarious experience" (ibid:135). It allows one to put one's self in another's position without appropriating the victim's voice or suffering. In essence, empathetic unsettlement induces critical distance between one's self and the subject of commemoration (in this case, the victims of 9/11 and those who suffered genuine trauma in the aftermath of the attacks), facilitating greater reflexivity and perspective. This would be invaluable to both of the commemorative approaches outlined here. In the first instance, it would allow citizens to maintain a critical distance between themselves, their nationality and the highly mythologised and redemptive vision of America embraced by the Freedom Tower and associated discourses of heroism. In relation to the novels analysed in Chapter II, empathetic unsettlement would destabilise the organising power of trauma paradigms, and prevent the collapse of the distinctions between event and experience that result from the over-extension of trauma.

LaCapra argues that "there is something inappropriate about signifying practices- histories, films or novels, for example- that in their very style or manner of address tend to overly objectify, smooth over, or obliterate the nature and impact of the traumatic events they treat" (LaCapra 2004:136). I believe that such a smoothing over of 9/11 is strongly evidenced by memorial culture to date. This effacement of historical complexity is caused by an over-identification (whether with the national image as manifested in propagandist memorial objects, or with the victims of 9/11 and their families), which might be countered by a commemorative approach more appreciative of the virtues empathetic unsettlement.

In its absence, a tragedy that might have been seized as an opportunity for generating empathy with other suffering peoples has instead engendered an intensification of American introspection, compounding an already isolationist position. Judith Butler contends that instead of this self-congratulatory solipsism, a better reaction to 9/11 would have been "to reflect upon injury, to find out

the mechanisms of its distribution, to find out who else suffers from permeable borders, unexpected violence, dispossession, and fear, and in what ways" (Butler 2004:xii).

It is noticeable that none of the commemorative projects analysed here espouses an outward looking vision, but each engenders an introspective portrait of America as either a land of traumatised individuals, or a glorious nation espousing timeless virtues. If organised around Butler's philosophy, however, memorial projects might reflect the fact that "the dislocation from First World privilege, however temporary, offers a chance to start to imagine a world in which violence might be minimized, in which an inevitable interdependency becomes acknowledged as the basis for global political community" (Butler 2004:xii-xiii).

In fact, the original masterplan for Arad and Walker's Reflecting Absence involved a feature called the International Freedom Center Museum, which endeavoured to embody the empathetic outlook that Butler espouses. Although its name bears an unfortunate similarity to Libeskind's redemptive rhetoric, the Freedom Center aimed to reflect upon diverse global injustice. As its mission statement posits, "The Freedom Center…was envisioned as a living memorial in which the story of Sept 11, 2001, would be told in the context of the worldwide struggle for freedom through the ages" (Dunlap 2005). It was lauded as a place where the "world's great leaders, thinkers, and activists" might participate in debates examining the "foundations of free and open societies" (Burlingame 2005).

However, Ground Zero's designation as a sacred site stymied any such plans, as "critics said the sacred precinct of the memorial was no place for a lesson in geopolitics or social history" (ibid.). The Freedom Center's responsibility to consider the US' own miscarriages of justice, from slavery to Abu Ghraib, threatened to undermine the vision of liberty embraced by the Freedom Tower. Even stranger than suggesting that a memorial built in the name of freedom should aim to forget or dismiss instances of pitiful human bondage, is Debra Burlingame's assertion that the Museum would actually work to undermine freedom[17]. She argued that the Freedom Center would become the domain of the liberal-left, "people whose inflammatory claims of a deliberate torture policy at Guantanamo Bay are undermining this country's efforts to foster freedom elsewhere in the world" (ibid.).

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[17] Burlingame is on the board of directors of the World Trade Center Memorial Foundation.

Burlingame scorns the idea that it "is not only history's triumphs that illuminate, but also its failures" (ibid.). Such desire to depict a purely redemptive history has resonated throughout 9/11's memorial culture. Like Burlingame, its advocates appear to believe, that "Instead of exhibits and symposiums about Internationalism and Global Policy we should hear the story of the courageous young firefighter whose body, cut in half, was found with his legs entwined around the body of a woman" (ibid.).

These tales of sacrifice and heroism form the core of the sentimentalised knowledge industry responsible for rendering Americans the infantile citizens of which Berlant despairs. They demonstrate the perceived need to unify around a consolatory vision rather than to engage in informed and reasoned debate that might breed an empathetic respect for diversity, instead of an alienating obsession with self-defence and pre-emptive violence. The Freedom Center (in my opinion the most reasoned and reflective component of 9/11's memorial culture to date) fell foul of the trend towards unifying simplification that LaCapra cautions against. When it was abandoned as the centrepiece for Reflecting Absence in 2005, New York Governor, George Pataki, justified his decision by saying that "Freedom should unify us, this tower has not" (Dunlap 2005).

Like Pataki, Burlingame has a very precise vision of "freedom", which she defines (somewhat vaguely) as being that of American Marines rather than the proposed Freedom Center. As Foner argues, however, "Freedom has always been a terrain of conflict, subject to multiple and competing interpretations, its meaning constantly created and recreated" (Foner 1998:xv). In attempting to unify the idea of freedom, Burlingame, Pataki and Libeskind perpetuate a system of hermeneutic hegemony that works to eliminate dissent. As with cynical nationalism, the perception of unity is all that matters, whether the identification is real or pretended. Accordingly, Ground Zero will not now herald the possibility of a place of reflection where conflicting voices might be heard on an equal platform.

It is tempting to formulate the fissures that have arisen in the debate over processes of representation along political grounds and argue with Berlant and Foster that the sentimentalisation of the public sphere, the practice of "stealth" politics, and the predominance of consciously empty rhetoric are uniquely the ideological tools of the political Right. This is inevitably a simplification. However, I wish

to return to Žižek's analogy and suggest that potentially enlightening processes of debate and dissent have been suffocated by the ideological quilt that has been woven from 9/11. Alongside this, it appears as though the critical faculties of certain cultural contributors have been stifled by the overwhelming application of trauma studies to the analysis of the attacks. As I have aimed to demonstrate throughout this dissertation, both of these trends have reified the memorial process, and lead to the assumption of limiting templates of remembrance that engender a narrow and introspective vision.

It is possible that the outcome of the American elections in November 2008 will provoke a rethinking of the position of 9/11 in the national psyche that will go some way to redressing these shortcomings. However, the cultural memory of the attacks has long begun to take shape and, whilst it may not yet be fixed, these predominant patterns of remembrance will take some unravelling before new quilting can occur. I hope that, if or when it does, commemorative culture will incorporate more diverse threads of memory than the products of its production would so far suggest. To ensure this, however, a certain historical perspective must be granted to the attacks. There needs to be wider admission that the nation is not (and need not be) homogenous, that America is part of a global community, and that, in the long run, an empathetic approach to others is far more likely to prevent a reprisal of 9/11 than either solipsistic arrogance or unwarranted aggression.

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