

REMEMBERING “9/11” AS A CRISIS OF EDUCATION

COMMITTED TO MEMORY:

REMEMBERING “9/11” AS A CRISIS OF EDUCATION

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ABSTRACT

This study considers the pedagogical significance of mourning and remembrance in the context of the commemorative culture surrounding the “9/11” attacks on America, which have stimulated recent explorations of what it might mean to commit to ethical remembrances of the dead. Critical of “9/11” memorial discourses that provide justifications for heightened “homeland” security and military mobilization in the “War on Terror,” this project not only addresses the educative force of memorial-artistic responses in creating meaning out of mass deaths, but also dissociates the concept of the public memorial as foremost an apparatus of the state, private corporations, and other institutions which seek to use memorials towards amnesiac or ideological objectives. Analyses of the memorial responses addressed in this project unpack how particular modes of remembering “9/11” and its victims are themselves reflections upon the meanings and objectives of collective remembrance. The project first explores the “September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows” organization and how it negotiates the ways public sentiment is mobilized “in the name of” victims and their families. Through an analysis of Art Spiegelman’s *In the Shadow of No Towers*, I examine the capacity of graphic narrative to bear witness to traumatic events and speak to their legacies in non-hegemonic ways. Lastly, the project explores how Samira Makhmalbaf’s film *God, Construction and Destruction* calls for the re-evaluation of strategic memorial practices that risk reducing “9/11” remembrance pedagogies to universalizing modes of remembrance that further subjugate already marginalized communities. Stimulated by such memorial responses that interrogate conventional practices and assumptions of

collective remembrance, the project argues that the public remembrance of “9/11” is a crisis of and for education: that is, an important occasion to seek and call for modes of remembrance and sites of pedagogies that foster an openness to the critical and transformative force of historical trauma.

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DECLARATION OF ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

This declaration certifies that the author, Karen Espiritu, is the sole author of this thesis and as such, is wholly responsible for this text in its entirety.

INTRODUCTION

“9/11”: A Crisis of Education

Here is how to defeat terror – make
it useless by doing what terror hates:
reach out, learn, understand, talk.

--John Oughton (“Riven towers” lns. 8-10)

It is, by now, a well-known image: two men dressed in suits, discreetly communicating with one another at the front of a primary-level classroom. The man seated on the chair appears dumbstruck by what his unobtrusive interlocutor whispers in his ear: “A second plane hit the second tower. America is under attack.” These were the brief words whispered by Andrew Card, then-White House Chief of Staff, to George W. Bush on the morning of September 11, 2001.¹ Photographs that capture this fleeting exchange show Card leaning close to Bush as he informs the President at the time of what had, a few minutes prior, befallen already chaotic Lower Manhattan: a second commercial airplane struck the South Tower of the World Trade Center, cancelling out, as it were, the possibility that the first plane’s earlier collision with the North Tower was accidental—initially considered a rare instance of pilot error. On account of Card’s murmured communiqué, Bush’s plan to discuss his administration’s “No Child Left Behind” educational reforms that sunny Tuesday morning took a shockingly unexpected turn. News of the attacks transformed a routine plan to promote the President’s literacy

¹ I shall discuss in greater detail the significance and implications of naming this event, the names that have been assigned to this event, as well as my rationales for choosing to employ certain names for this event (over others) later in this introduction.

campaign in Sarasota, Florida into an urgent mandate to respond and react to a terrorist threat against the United States that, at the time, was already *definitively* portrayed by the mainstream media as having come unexpectedly—without provocation and hence, seemingly without context.

The tableau of Bush ensconced in front of a Grade Two classroom in Florida’s Emma E. Booker Elementary School, looking “flummoxed and awkward, stunted by the immensity of the moment” (Friend 58) as he absorbed confirmed news of the World Trade Center under attack, became a memorable and controversial photograph from that September day in 2001. For just as this image captured the historic moment when Bush first learned about one of the defining events of his two-term presidency, so too did it conjure memories of the public doubt that was quickly cast upon his ability to lead in a time of international crisis. Looking again at this photograph, one cannot help but note the striking disconnect between Bush’s seemingly blank stare as he listened to Card’s hushed report, and the several million images of panicked and weeping eyewitnesses in New York and Washington, D.C. who were captured by the camera taking in the scenes of destruction unfolding around them.² At the time, the President’s long-drawn-out passive reaction certainly seemed incongruous in relation to the heightened anxiety viscerally felt by those who saw the event in person or watched it on the news. It was thus that the image of “Bush-in-that-classroom-on-‘9/11” generated debate and attracted scathing condemnations of his ability to lead the American people (and perhaps the

² For an insightful analysis of photographs of spectators watching the collapse of the World Trade Center unfolding in Lower Manhattan, see Sharon Sliwinski’s article about the *here is new york: a democracy of photographs* exhibit.

world?) through a time of unprecedented chaos in the United States. Put another way, thanks in large part to the rapid digital circulation of this particular photograph, Bush saw himself disparaged by some of his critics for failing to evince decisiveness and showcase his mettle on September 11, 2001 as the United States “Commander-in-Chief.”

Michael Moore’s popular documentary film, *Fahrenheit 9/11*, for instance, takes particular issue with the fact that even after Card retreated, Bush sat through a seven-minute class reading of a children’s book and feigned an odd mixture of ignorance and unwillingness to address a national emergency requiring his immediate attention. Bush is depicted in Moore’s film as uncomfortably caught in the no-man’s-land separating “the real world” from “the school classroom”—in other words, the imagined void that lies between the messy, often conflicted sphere of daily suffering, politics, and injustice, and the ostensibly insular, ordered, apolitical realm of “schooling” in particular, and “education” in general.³ In his assessment of the photograph that captured Bush’s initial

³ To further add credence to this characterization of schooling and education, shortly after the September 11, 2001 attacks and speaking in a strictly American context, Svi Shapiro notes in his article “Lessons of September 11: What Should Schools Teach?” that “[t]he lessons and concerns that constitute the usual stuff of school life have been little disturbed by war, social turmoil, and the death of thousands [...] Lessons focus on the same tired, if iconic, material that is so appallingly divorced from the critical issues that now confront us. The typical American classroom, trapped more than ever by the dead hand of ‘standards’ and ‘accountability,’ is a world that is emotionally, intellectually, and existentially disconnected from the real and pressing demands of the human condition. It is as if educational institutions have enclosed themselves in a bubble, sealing themselves off from the human storms raging outside” (13). According to Shapiro, a crucial factor that has created this educational atmosphere—wherein “so little of the world [makes] its way into the classroom” (13) and “educators shy away from dealing with disturbing and conflictual issues in the classroom, preferring a politically sanitized and emotionally neutralized, if hopelessly bland, curriculum”—is the fact that “teachers need to keep ‘on task’ with state mandated test materials—a job-determining

reaction to the attacks, David Friend could not resist flirting with this false dichotomy between the harsh, inescapable demands of “reality” and the innocence (or willful ignorance) of educational institutions. “The classroom setting,” Friend remarks of Bush’s infamous photograph, “reinforced an unflattering image, and suggested a salient if hackneyed axiom: inside every man resides a lost little boy” (58). As these critiques of Bush implicitly suggest, by virtue of the event’s unprecedented appeal as crisis and spectacle at the international level, the attacks that took place on September 11, 2001 constituted a rare, exceptional moment when the daily, unsavory aspects of embodied life should have breached the supposedly hallowed political “incorruptibility” or “purity” of the school classroom.

In response to such a popular interpretation of this memorable photograph and, more recently, in light of President Barack Obama’s rousing 2011 State of the Union speech naming education as a top priority for the United States since it is the most viable means of securing America’s economic future (Obama “Remarks” par. 22), this dissertation takes up a different premise, one rooted in the belief that there is no such thing as a “no-man’s-land” that provides a safe buffer which segregates the “real world” rife with politics and suffering from the purportedly sheltered cares and “strictly academic” or “training-oriented” concerns of education. Indeed, unlike President Obama’s fiscally reductive understanding of education as a national investment intended to secure America’s indefinite domination of the global economy, this project refuses to

factor that resists and undercuts teachers’ interest in creating a more flexible and relevant curriculum” (13).

minimize education's socially transformative force into a process that smacks of "mere training"—that is, the process of transmitting and consuming objects of "knowledge" with the primary purpose of acquiring future employment and hence, financial stability. Rather, "education" in this project is understood in more political terms as a culturally informed practice that, through the challenging, unpredictable, and often agonistically resistant process of teaching and learning, reproduces particular (and often normative) social values, beliefs, ideals, and goals. Just as important, "education" in this project also holds the potential to undo the cultural norms and everyday instances of violence that, in its mainstream, curricular, or institutional incarnations, it is primarily tasked with upholding or obscuring. Building upon the trajectory of critical pedagogy as a field, education in this project is regarded as first and foremost a constitutive element of the cultivation of social justice.

In the context of the September 11, 2001 attacks and their myriad aftermaths, this project therefore argues that what consequently arises from regarding education as always already informed by, but also itself actively influencing and conditioning, the world beyond its institutional walls, is a different mode of encountering the event—one that does not privilege the twin characterization of the attacks as a crisis of national security as well as a crisis of global terrorism. Instead of romanticizing the trope of the relatively safe and insular classroom setting in which Bush found himself uncomfortably placed on the morning of the attacks, I seek to regard this particularly iconic photograph of the 43rd President as a provocative invitation, the central aim of which is to reflect upon the attendant links between education—institutional and otherwise—and the

narratives and instances of public remembrance that render intelligible and continue to animate the event. In what follows, I argue that the remembrance of the attacks is not merely a crisis of public commemoration. That is, the dilemma of how best to remember collective loss from a national trauma ought not be solely preoccupied with the sentimental or innovative merit of the memorial, nor the fidelity of these commemorative gestures to preserve for posterity the “official” narratives of a wounded nation’s losses. Rather, I argue that remembering the event is a crisis *of* and *for* education, particularly because the educative—and hence, potentially hegemonic, normative, but also at the same time and most importantly, socially and politically transformative—power of this event derives from and is shaped by its commemorative appeal, as well as its commemoration as (media) spectacle. The project of focusing a critical analysis of the cultures of “9/11” public remembrance through the lens of education and—conversely—developing a critical analysis of education through the lens of “9/11” memorial work demonstrates, at the very least, that the inherently social act of publicly commemorating the attacks creates the event as an object of knowledge and hence, a dynamic as well as critical site of and for education.

As Roger Simon argues, public commemorations of the attacks call attention to the fact that the attacks proper—though catalytic elements of the event—do not completely encompass “9/11” as a constitutive whole. It is due to the contested remembrance and various (re)iterations of the attacks, through such instances of cultural production as film, memorials, memoirs, documentaries, art work, and literature, that the traumatic event often called “9/11” is transformed into something that can be taught,

learned, challenged, disputed, revered, and appealed to as the cause of, or justification for future actions and decisions. As Simon argues, “the event colloquially referred to as ‘9/11’ is not over: rather than something past, it is a social experience still in process, very much a present occurrence, something we are still living through” (“Altering” 353). In addition to proclaiming that the ongoing experience of the event is an ever-growing archive of desires, losses, anxieties, and multimedia artifacts that continually chronicles the attacks and the event’s diverse effects on sociality, Simon rightly reminds us that despite its specific temporal situatedness (that is: September 11, 2001, approximately 8:45 to 10:35 EST), the event resists total closure because it “monstrously feeds on its own remembrance and in the process, expands the boundaries of what is supposed to be the subject of cultural memory and historical appraisal” (“Altering” 354). The symbiotic nature of the relationship between the attacks proper and the commemorative acts that commit to memory the occurrence and after-effects *of* the attacks means that remembering the attacks is a more difficult and elusive endeavour than one would assume, since such diligent documentation and meticulous archiving become themselves caught up in the social, cultural, political, economic, and historical legacies that inform and shape the very thing they attempt to apprehend and taxonomize. Read in this light, the dynamic culture of “9/11” collective remembrance can no longer be regarded simply as an innocuous sphere of public life that—especially on the anniversary of the attacks—provides opportunities to come together and “grieve [the event’s] consequences, attempt to understand its causes, and appraise its significance” (“Altering” 354). To offer another view, let me suggest that collective remembrance of the attacks takes on a pedagogical

register that has the capacity, for example, to marshal public memory for the sake of reconfiguring national identity in global politics and redefining the parameters of democratic citizenship both internationally as well as within the borders of sovereign states.

One specific instance that demonstrates the inherently pedagogical nature of the event's burgeoning memorial culture is the widespread media coverage and public attention garnered by the *New York Times*' *Portraits of Grief* series. This series consists of weekly sets of obituaries published between September 15 and December 31, 2001 by the *Times*, devoted to those who lost their lives at the World Trade Center in Lower Manhattan on September 11, 2001.⁴ Although these 200-word portraits were framed as newspaper obituaries, David Simpson points out that "[t]hey did not seek to present the sort of total summary of a life that would be expected of a traditional obituary" (Simpson 22). Writing about the *Portraits of Grief* series and its deliberately mediated format, Nancy K. Miller argues that "[i]n the face of collective disaster, whose scale strained the imagination, the anecdote was seized upon as a form suited to rendering familiar acts of ordinary life. Like the snapshot, the anecdote, through the brevity of its narrative, catches life in its everyday dimensions" (Miller 115). Indeed, the anecdotal obituaries in the *Portraits of Grief* series exhibit the recurring tendency to emphasize the horrific and sudden interruption of either the productively promising or already well-established and accomplished life of a victim from New York. Put another way, this particular set of

⁴In researching and consulting the *Portraits of Grief* series for this project, I used the online archive of the portraits/obituaries compiled by *The New York Times*. (Huang, Jon et al. "Portraits of Grief: Interactive Feature.")

obituaries seems to be driven by very specific ideological aims that serve to promote and reinforce national ideals and normative subjectivities. In the words of David Simpson:

And yet powerful as they were, read in batches of a few at a time, the collective impression of these snapshots was and is troubling. They were clearly being put to work in the cause of a patriotic momentum [...] None here cheated on her spouse or abused his children, or was indifferent to community activities. One tends of course to speak only good things of the dead, but even with the expected bounds of memorial decorum, the notices seem formulaic. They seem regimented, even militarized, made to march to the beat of a single drum. (Simpson 23)

The politics of mourning implied in the *New York Times Portraits of Grief* series naturalize the insistence—most often circulated by state-sanctioned accounts of the attacks—upon absolute American innocence and blamelessness (and by extension, absolute American victimization) on all levels: civic, administrative, and military.

As well, these highly publicized and disseminated obituaries legitimize to a certain degree the assumption that “American” victimization takes primacy over that of its global Others; this, because through the portraits, those who died in New York City on the day of the attacks are posthumously imbued with characters and lives that come across as uncomplicated, unselfish, patriotic, and beyond reproach. Miller observes that each subject of the portrait is assigned a “trademark attitude” or “a catchy sign-off” that “always reveals something good, like virtue—often civic, or at least domestic, virtue” (Miller 117). It is also interesting to note that “[m]any of the portraits tell of immigrants who were working hard for a better life and believed that they had found it” (Simpson 37), and that “those notices about persons with Muslim names and/or from Islamic countries such as Pakistan and Bangladesh tend not to draw attention to matters of

religion” (46). One of the most relevant examples of how the *Portraits of Grief* series formulaically resolves the tensions that exist between reinforcing civic virtues and addressing the politically and racially conflicted grief of Muslim Americans who lost family members in the attacks can be found in “Portraits Redrawn,” the ten-year anniversary retrospective section on the series’ interactive website. Of particular note is the video interview segment on Talat Hamdani, a Pakistani-American Muslim mother who lost her son on September 11, 2001. During her interview, Hamdani describes her conflicted sense of what it meant to be “American,” at a time when the United States government publicly suspected her son Salman—a New York City EMT who died in the attacks while helping the injured—of being involved in the attacks. Although her son’s innocence was restored when his remains were found amid the rubble in March 2002, Hamdani recalls the pain of enduring the wrongful assumptions made about (and unjust accusations leveled against) her son, then goes on to explain her subsequent need to speak out against the American government’s treatment of its citizens who were from Islamic countries. As it reaches its conclusion, Hamdani’s interview shifts to a film clip of her describing her dramatic change of heart upon meeting President Barack Obama on the tenth anniversary of the attacks. Despite the troubling circumstances surrounding her son’s death, (including the public undermining of his innocence and reputation), Hamdani’s interview in “Portraits Redrawn” ends on a positive note. She voices her pleasure upon meeting Obama and assures her audience that her faith in America and pride in being American were restored the day she met the new President and availed herself of the opportunity to speak with him about her son Salman. Simpson eloquently

observes that the victims featured in the obituary series “have been made to figure in grander narratives of national futures and civic virtues than any of them could probably have imagined or perhaps desired” (29). Miller also comments that through the *Portraits of Grief*, the “creat[ion] [of] a coherent public persona [...] serves to protect both the victim and the mourners from the display of excessive or unsuitable emotions. The portraits take the private person into the public arena within recognizable conventions,” and the result achieved is that “the ‘emblematic’ anecdote is ‘endearing,’ not damning” (Miller 118). To be sure, Talat Hamdani’s narrative, especially because her interview was presented for an audience’s viewing consumption, demonstrates the extent to which the *Portraits of Grief* series glosses over the myriad complexities that attend the mourning of the September 11, 2001 attack victims in favour of putting forth emotionally appealing narratives that foment or reinforce civic as well as national pride.

That the heavily choreographed construction of the *Portraits of Grief* series did not hinder “the overwhelming public acceptance of the portraits” nor challenge “the assumption among journalists and readers that the anecdotes and details have delivered the truth of the beloved victim” (120) astounds Miller. This is so because she admits that she has “been unable to keep [herself] from wondering about the stories the details *aren’t* telling” (120, her emphasis). The normative and ideological tone of the portraits also leaves her pondering whether “the suppression of ambivalence in the portraits and comparable forums—along with other emotions tinged with negativity, like anger and resentment—[is] really the best way to carry out and represent the process of memorialization” (121). The strict policing of the content of these anecdotal obituaries

tellingly reveals the extent to which “[t]he codes of idealization in the ‘Portraits of Grief’ make the expression of certain kinds of feelings taboo in the public domain” (121).⁵

In tandem with the concurrent refusal on the part of American mainstream media to report in detail about, or document in equal measure, the number of civilian deaths framed as “collateral damage” in the U.S.’s retaliatory bombings of already impoverished and war-ravaged Afghanistan, the heavy and often “celebratory” media focus upon these obituary “portraits” of grief serves to privilege and maintain the hegemonic idea that individual Westerners’ deaths warrant public coverage and recognition over and above the deaths of the civilians overseas who lost their lives as a result of military mobilization and occupation in the War on Terror.⁶ According to Simpson, the obituaries “are telling

⁵ Damien Cave’s article, “Forbidden thoughts about 9/11,” seeks to point out that “cooperation and empathy were not the only emotions of the day; they were simply the publicly expressed emotions of the day. Many of us didn’t just feel sad or angry or proud in the face of the day’s horrors—or when President Bush and the media requested it. We also felt indifferent, confused, selfish, annoyed and, in some cases, even happy or excited. We had thoughts that we couldn’t explain or control, thoughts we didn’t express, except perhaps in whispered conversations” (Cave par. 5). As problematic as Cave’s use is of the universal “we,” his article at the very least publicly acknowledges and accounts for the existence of feelings and thoughts that, in the heavily policed realm of public remembrance of the attacks, would be considered inappropriate or taboo. In chronicling some of these “unleashed” and “forbidden thoughts” (par. 6), Cave argues that “they deserve to be part of the record of that day and its aftermath” because “[t]hey are necessary evils to be countenanced in an honest analysis of time. They keep us from creating a distorted, overly sentimental picture of our national reaction to disaster” (par. 7).

⁶ Judith Butler makes a similar point regarding the priority given to Westerners’ deaths in an anecdote she provides about a Palestinian-American’s desire to publish obituaries for family members living in Palestine who were killed by Israeli forces. In *Precarious Life*, Butler writes: “A Palestinian citizen of the United States recently submitted to the *San Francisco Chronicle* obituaries for two Palestinian families who had been killed by Israeli troops, only to be told that the obituaries could not be accepted without proof of death” (Butler 35). She continues her anecdote by adding that, “The

us, at this moment of extreme vulnerability, that corporate America (or international finance) in partnership with infinite reserves of personal charity were creating a wonderful life that has now so tragically been destroyed for so many” (Simpson 38). The framing of the attacks as an event that rudely and violently disrupted the benevolence of corporate America in turn serves to provide justification for brutal retaliatory violence against its perceived (and all too often racialized) enemies.

In her 2004 book *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, Judith Butler succinctly addresses the concept of a “hierarchy of grief” when she argues that especially in our post-“9/11” political climate, “[c]ertain lives will be highly protected, and the abrogation of their claims to sanctity will be sufficient to mobilize the forces of war” (Butler 32). She also makes the sobering observation that “[o]ther lives will not find such fast and furious support and will not even qualify as ‘grievable’” (32). Howard Zinn echoes Butler’s argument, especially with regards to a hierarchy of grief at work in government and mainstream media treatments of Afghan casualties who have died as a result of the American bombing campaign that began in October of 2001. In his poignantly titled article “The Others,” Zinn comments that while he “was deeply moved, reading those intimate sketches” (Zinn par. 3) that constituted the *Portraits of Grief* series, it occurred to him that if “all those Americans who declare their support for

staff of the *Chronicle* said that statements ‘in memoriam’ could, however, be accepted, and so the obituaries were rewritten and resubmitted in the form of memorials. These memorials were then rejected, with the explanation that the newspaper did not wish to offend anyone” (35). Butler excoriates the *Chronicle* staff’s consideration of this particular “public avowal of sorrow and loss” as “‘offensive’” (35), and wonders whether “these deaths are not considered to be real deaths, and that these lives not grievable, because they are Palestinians, or because they are victims of war” (35-36).

Bush's 'war on terrorism' could see [...] the real human beings who have died under our bombs" (par. 4), then they "would begin to understand that we have been waging a war on ordinary men, women and children. [...] [A]nd that the bombing that destroyed their lives is in no way a war on terrorism, because it has no chance of ending terrorism and is itself a form of terrorism" (par. 6). To attempt to redress the striking public absence of "available details about the dead men, women and children in Afghanistan" (par. 7)⁷—if only as much as the scope of his article will allow him to do—Zinn puts together the "scattered news reports" (par. 8) "that have been mostly out of sight of the general public (indeed, virtually never reported on national television, where most Americans get their news), and so dispersed as to reinforce the [erroneous] idea that the bombing of civilians has been an infrequent event, a freak accident, an unfortunate mistake" (par. 9). In compiling the news items for his article—which make up "only a fraction of those in [his] files" (par. 16)—Zinn makes it clear that his "intention is not at all to diminish our compassion for the victims of the terrorism of September 11, but to enlarge that compassion to include the victims of all terrorism, in any place, at any time, whether perpetrated by Middle East fanatics or American politicians" (par. 15). That Zinn's article calls for public compassion to have more of an inclusive global reach, and that Zinn himself feels obligated to explain that the purpose of his article is not to reduce the outpouring of grief over the attacks' victims, are themselves symptoms which confirm

⁷ Marc W. Herold's thorough study of the American aerial bombing of Afghanistan not only analyzes the causes of the "high level of civilian casualties" (par. 1), but also compellingly makes the case that "the critical element" in the bombings "remains the very low value put upon Afghan civilian lives by U.S. military planners and the political elite, as clearly revealed by U.S. willingness to bomb heavily populated regions" (par. 1).

that there currently is in place an unspoken, but no less powerful, system that values the grievability of certain lives and deaths over others.

As a result of the willful indifference, selective remembrance, and equally selective forgetfulness that have come to characterize the culture of collective public mourning especially in relation to the attacks, the implied “ungrievability” of these lives that have been robbed of any claim to dignified treatment—much less any claim for public acknowledgement upon their violent termination—informs and determines the value placed upon specific lives as opposed to others. In addition to the largely unacknowledged loss of Afghan lives, another case in point would be the fatal and near-fatal torture of Iraqi detainees at Abu Ghraib prison. In this specific context, the sweeping categorization of many detained men of Arab descent as “enemy combatants” rather than “prisoners of war”—and hence, conveniently designating them as outside the purview of existing bodies of international law—propelled the U.S. military’s justification for committing torture and other cruel, unconstitutional acts against the bodies of racialized Others. Such indignities were purportedly committed in the name of national security and for the sake of protecting and upholding freedom and democracy.⁸

In his own memorialization of the attacks’ victims, spoken word poet Emmanuel Ortiz protests this post-“9/11” hierarchy of grief in his piece “A Moment of Silence.”

⁸ For a more detailed discussion on the torture of prisoners at Abu Ghraib, see Judith Butler’s *Frames of War: When Is Life Grievable?* as well as Jasbir Puar’s article “Abu Ghraib: Arguing Against Exceptionalism” and her book *Terrorist Assemblages*.

Ortiz starts with a prefatory remark that acknowledges the ethical need to honour those who died in the attacks:

Before I begin this poem, I'd like to ask you to join me in a moment of silence in honour of those who died in the World Trade Center and the Pentagon on September 11th, 2001.

I would also like to ask you to offer up a moment of silence for all of those who have been harassed, imprisoned, disappeared, tortured, raped, or killed in retaliation for those strikes, for the victims in Afghanistan, Iraq, in the U.S., and throughout the world. (pars. 1-2)

The dramatic force of his preamble strategically defers and displaces the very moment of silence Ortiz calls for in remembrance of the “9/11” victims. Ortiz’s address also draws critical attention to the intense, almost fetishistic, mainstream media focus that has been placed on the first group of victims he names, to the detriment of publicly remembering those who have suffered and died in Iraq and Afghanistan as a result of U.S. military retaliation for the attacks, as well as those who have been subjected to the forms of suffering he lists above in the name of “homeland security,” in the United States and elsewhere. Further on in his poem, Ortiz expands his critique of the selective amnesia that he sees at work in the development of the commemorative culture of the attacks. He takes issue with the ways in which the event has been framed in Western political and media rhetoric as the event that “changes everything.” His poem poignantly criticizes the manner in which the characterization and articulation of the attacks as an event without precedent and that came without warning foster a kind of forgetfulness that forcefully occludes any remembrance or discussion of past collective traumas. That is to say, collective traumas that implicate the West in the poverty, displacement, and suffering of

its racialized others, and which have to do with such issues as state occupation, government- and military-sponsored terrorism, apartheid, and racialized violence.

Certainly a more nuanced collective understanding of such traumas would historicize and contextualize, rather than render exceptional and tragically unexpected, the attacks that took place on September 11, 2001.

But race and forms of racialized inclusions and exclusions also have a lot to do with who suffers or is relatively protected or shielded from specific forms of violence. Sunera Thobani, for instance, admonishes modes of white/Western feminist theorizations of the “War on Terror” that “reproduce white innocence and Western supremacy” through “the universalizing of the white imperial perspective and its representation of imperial subjects as vulnerable, victimized, and threatened by the Muslim Other” (Thobani, “White Innocence” 141).⁹ What Thobani takes particular issue with in this

⁹ In a similar vein, Immanuel Wallerstein comments that appeals to universalism have a history, and are hence far from universal: “The rhetoric of the leaders of the pan-European world—in particular, but not only, the United States and Great Britain—and the mainstream media and Establishment intellectuals is filled with appeals to universalism as the basic justification of their policies. This is especially so when they talk about their policies relating to the ‘others’—the countries of the non-European world, the populations of the poorer and ‘less developed’ nations. The tone is often righteous, hectoring, and arrogant, but the policies are always presented as reflecting universal values and truths” (xiii). Wallerstein goes on to elaborate that “[t]here are three main varieties of this appeal to universalism. The first is the argument that the policies pursued by the leaders of the pan-European world are in defence of ‘human rights’ and in furtherance of something called ‘democracy.’ The second comes in the jargon of the clash of civilizations, in which it is always assumed that ‘Western’ civilization is superior to ‘other’ civilizations because it is the only one that has come to be based on these universal values and truths. And the third is the assertion of the scientific truths of the market, the concept that ‘there is no alternative’ for governments but to accept and act on the laws of neoliberal economics” (xiii-xiv). Upon discussing these three modes of the appeal to universalism, Wallerstein goes on to say “that these universal values are the

context is the way in which certain modes of white/Western feminist thought willingly aligned themselves with the Bush administration's justifications for attacking Afghanistan in the name of "fight[ing] terrorism and secur[ing] women's rights" (128). For Thobani, "as the status of women in the Muslim world became a key concern of international politics" (128), the dominant white/Western feminist focus on "the violence that is done to Afghan women by Afghan men [...] implicitly downplayed the violence done to these women by the men *and women* of the Western imperialist nations that invaded and occupied that country" (140 her emphasis). Thobani is also strongly critical of how white/Western feminist declarations of solidarity with Afghan and, more generally, Islamic women in the face of "global misogyny" (Eisenstein qtd. in Thobani, "White Innocence" 139) obfuscate "the privileged location of white women as imperial subjects, albeit gendered ones, in relation to Muslim women *and men*" (137, her emphasis). Furthermore, Thobani also takes issue with Judith Butler's book *Prearious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, even though this text is vehemently opposed to "an expansion of the War on Terror" (132). Thobani's critique revolves around the book's tendency to treat "the injury to the U.S." (133) on September 11, 2001 as the exemplary event upon which Butler bases "her construct of the generalized suffering of a generic humanity," as well as "her philosophical and political deliberations on violence,

social creation of the dominant strata in a particular world-system [...] What we are using as a criterion is not global universalism but European universalism, a set of doctrines and ethical views that derive from a European context, and aspire to be, or are presented as, global universal values—what many of its espousers call natural law. It justifies simultaneously the defense of human rights of the so-called innocent and the material exploitation engaged in by the strong. It is a morally ambiguous doctrine. It attacks the crimes of some and passes over the crimes of others, even using the criteria of what it asserts as natural law" (27-28).

grief, and mourning” (133). Butler’s theorization of mutual vulnerability as the common ground for all of humanity in the context of the attacks and the subsequent “War on Terror” is what primarily troubles Thobani about this particular text. According to Thobani, “[t]he commonality of the human experience posited by Butler served to make the Other the same as the Self, erasing the experience of the Other as the Self moved back into a position of centrality, into the epistemically violent position of determining what constitutes *the* human experience” (134, her emphasis).

This latter critique that Thobani aims at Butler’s book and more generally levels at the white/Western modes of feminist thought that gained purchase in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks is echoed in Ortiz’s text. It is worth quoting Ortiz when he describes the rationale for his spoken word piece:

[...] this is not a 9-1-1 poem
This is a 9/10 poem,
It is a 9/9 poem,
A 9/8 poem,
A 9/7 poem...
This is a 1492 poem.
This is a poem about what causes poems like this to be written.

And if this is a 9/11 poem, then
This is a September 11th 1973 poem for Chile.
This is a September 12th 1977 poem for Steven Biko in South Africa.
This is a September 13th 1971 poem for the brothers at Attica Prison, New York.
This is a September 14th 1992 poem for the people of Somalia.
This is a poem for every date that falls to the ground amidst the ashes of amnesia.
(pars. 16-17)

By declaring that his poem is “not a 9-1-1 poem,” Ortiz effectively challenges the characterization of the September 11, 2001 attacks as a security crisis or a state of

emergency *par excellence*.¹⁰ The poet is steadfast in his refusal to regard “9/11” as a watershed moment that changed “everything.” His continued deferral of observing a moment of silence honouring the attacks’ victims is a performative act that reminds his audience of past injustices that also warrant (indeed, are long overdue in warranting) attention and remembrance. This strategic move in Ortiz’s poem demonstrates the poet’s unwillingness to fetishize the attacks to the detriment of sustaining awareness of, as well as active engagements with other narratives and experiences of mass violence and collective loss. Ortiz’s citing of past historical traumas around the world make it abundantly clear that, though seemingly coming from “out of the blue,” the attacks have a very long history rooted in the racial oppression of those who are not considered ideal imperial subjects. In his poem meant to remember and honour the September 11, 2001 attacks, Ortiz first calls to mind the following historical events: the forced and often violent colonization of the New World by European empires, which was largely ushered in by Christopher Columbus’s infamous, Spanish-sponsored first voyage and “discovery” of the Americas in 1492 (“This is a 1492 poem.”); the U.S.-backed, Cold War-era military coup d’etat of the socialist Allende government in Chile and its subsequent installation of the dictator Augusto Pinochet, who was responsible for the death and disappearance of thousands of Chileans (“This is a September 11th 1973 poem for

¹⁰ Marc Redfield astutely observes that “[i]n most of the United States and Canada, the numbers 9-1-1 have the further subliminal force of composing the telephone number for emergency help: this triple digit, since its adoption in 1968, has been drilled into the consciousness of most inhabitants of the American landmass north of Mexico [...] [I]n 1987 President Reagan proclaimed September 11 to be ‘9-1-1 Emergency Telephone Number Day.’ [...] From 1987 to 2001, ‘9-1-1 Day’ was celebrated in modest ways in many communities in the United States as a way to promote safety awareness; after the attacks, ‘9-1-1 Day’ was dropped from the official calendar” (Redfield 223).

Chile.”); the South African apartheid-era torture and murder of Black Consciousness Movement founder and anti-apartheid activist Steven Biko at the hands of officers of the Port Elizabeth security police force (“This is a September 12th 1977 poem for Steven Biko in South Africa.”); The Attica, New York prison riot that resulted from the largely African American prisoners’ call for greater political rights and better treatment and living conditions within a predominantly racist prison system (“This is a September 13th 1971 poem for the brothers at Attica Prison, New York.”); and the 1992 arrival of the first armed United Nations peacekeepers off of United States naval vessels during the civil war and drought in Somalia (“This is a September 14th 1992 poem for the people of Somalia.”). These events varyingly testify to the continued persistence of racial subjugation, cruelty, armed conflicts, injustice, inequality, and human rights abuses. For Ortiz, they urgently underscore the need to regard the September 11, 2001 attacks in the context of historical trauma—that is, trauma which has often been inflicted upon the Western imperial subject’s racialized Others. What Ortiz makes clear in his piece is that despite the media spectacle that has surrounded the attacks in the United States and the public mourning that has followed in the wake of the event, “9/11” ought not to have priority over previous instances of historical trauma.

Ortiz’s spoken word intervention in the fervently patriotic commemorations that the event of “9/11” has encouraged in the mainstream media demonstrates that public remembrance is still a viable site for progressive civic resistance and education to take place. This is so despite the fact that the memorialization of the attacks has, in large part, been mobilized for the sake of justifying extreme national security measures and

increasingly insidious modes of population management. Especially in the context of counter-hegemonic forms of remembrance, Ortiz's poem is an embodiment of "counter-memorial" work in the way that Angela Failler understands and defines the term. For Failler, counter-memorial work "does not seek to remember as a means of closing or burying a painful history once and for all" (Failler 171). Instead, "[it] tak[es] the risk of staying open to difficult memories and the difficult knowledge [...] [that] inevitably live[s] on in the present" (171). Ortiz's poem refuses to relegate specific instances of historical trauma to what he calls "the ashes of amnesia." He does not regard the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States as an isolated event free of any meaningful connections to the rest of American and world history, nor does he dismiss the legacies of the past historical traumas he cites as definitively over and thus hermetically sealed or isolated from any discussions about "9/11." To this extent, Ortiz's poem can be seen writing against what Beenash Jafri describes as the "implication [...] that colonial injustices have had a clear start and finish, and are now over" (10). Jafri, writing in a Canadian context and critiquing Canada's most recent citizenship guide for new immigrants preparing to take the citizenship test, warns of the ways in which officially sanctioned narratives of nationhood and nation-building are carefully constructed and "mobilised to establish distance between what are seen as racist and colonial moments that have run their course, while absolving the present and future [...] citizens of ongoing, continuing injustices. Everyday practices and experiences of racism and colonialism are thus effaced" (10). As a counter-memorial attempt to keep such effacements at bay, Ortiz's poem refuses to obediently fall in line with the widespread

calls to conspicuously remember and honour the victims of the attacks at the cost of banishing past victims of historical trauma to “the ashes of amnesia.”

“This is a 9/10 poem, / It is a 9/9 poem, / A 9/8 poem, / A 9/7 poem,” Ortiz says in his spoken word piece. In calling forth dates before and after (indeed, dates *other than*) “9/11,” this declaration highlights the ways that “hyperbolic commemorative efforts” (Redfield 221) seeking to remember the attacks’ victims not only dislodge public remembrance of past historical traumas, but also obscure the fact that violent mass deaths and collective injustices are visited upon many individuals around the world on a daily basis.¹¹ Furthermore, Ortiz’s reluctance to categorize his piece as a “9/11 poem” draws attention to the ways in which the event itself has been colloquially named and articulated through the numerical formulation of “9/11” or the year-less date of “September 11.” The common usage of these seemingly interchangeable terms is encountered not just in government and mainstream media invocations, but in scholarly, artistic, and everyday iterations as well. They seem to be “the only available term[s] for these attacks world-wide” (223).¹²

How and why have the hijackings of commercial airplanes over American airspace, and the subsequent deadly attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center via

¹¹ Additionally, as Marc Redfield points out, the attacks “were not of a society-threatening scale (as warfare, genocide, famine, or natural cataclysm have been for so many human societies)” (221).

¹² Of course, as Redfield also notes, “[e]lsewhere in the world the name-date often acquires an explanatory tag that makes for a less melodramatic synecdoche: ‘the attacks of 11 September 2001,’ *die Anschläge vom 11. September*, and so forth. [...] Rendered numerically, the term becomes an even more sharply American idiom, for it depends on and makes rhetorical capital out of the U.S. convention of citing the month before the day in numerical dating: ‘11/9’ would not pack the rhythmic punch that the double-trochee hammer-blows of ‘9/11’ do” (223).

these hijacked planes on September 11, 2001 become known simply as “9/11” or “September 11?” Redfield notes that the event has “left a mark on ordinary language” and thereby “offers a hint of [the attacks’] historical force” (220). He goes on to remark that despite the vast and readily available collection of photographs and video footage that chronicle the attacks and their myriad aftermaths, “far more available, endlessly and unavoidably available, whether for purposes of quotidian communication or political manipulation, are the keywords themselves: the name-date, ‘September 11’ or ‘9/11’” (220). Redfield puts forward the argument that the lingering appeal—or perhaps the lingering compulsion—to conjure the event through the articulation of these name-dates emulates “the structure of traumatic damage, on the one hand, and [...] the workings of technical reproducibility and mass mediation, on the other” (222). For Redfield the omission of the year (“2001”) in media and day-to-day references to the event’s name-date contributes to the historical amnesia that reinforces the continued lack of contextualization where the attacks and their underlying causes are concerned (224). The repetitive employment of the event’s name-date, through rather vague or imprecise terms of reference, works hegemonically in its overshadowing of, or totalizing claim to, past, present, and future September 11s.

At the same time, however, the routinized invocation of the name-date as the primary mode of calling to mind and articulating the attacks also exposes the event’s traumatic impact. In Redfield’s words:

[T]hat performative persistence or excess also gives criticism its chance. For if on the one hand the formal emptiness of the phrase “September 11” imposes knowledge and amnesia, [...] on the other hand this same formal emptiness registers and even loudly proclaims a trauma, a wound beyond words: an inability

to say what this violence, this spectacle, this “everything changing,” *means*. [...] If American usage, in its minimalism, hints that “September 11” or “9/11” signifies more than “the attacks” per se, what is this *more*? The sheer iteration of a date thus performs not just an imperious and quasi-theological act of erasure and inscription, but also, at the same time, a stutter, a gasp of incomprehension. (224-225, his emphases)

Jacques Derrida notes that the trauma associated with the attacks has to do with an anticipatory anxiety regarding the future: “the wound remains open by our terror before the future and not only the past [...] There is traumatism with no possible work of mourning when the evil comes from the possibility to come of the worst, from the repetition to come—through worse” (Derrida, qtd. in Redfield 226).¹³ Redfield adds to Derrida’s analysis when he says that “[t]his futural inflection of trauma may also be read in the name-date—the month-day minus the year. When we add the year we fix the date in calendrical history; when we omit it we obtain the vibrant urgency of a date that recurs; that insists on its recurrence” (226).

Given Redfield’s and Derrida’s insightful theorizations of the name-date’s usage and the ways this usage is symptomatic of both a hegemonic urge to silence all other narratives as well as a traumatized anxiety regarding the future, in this project I am mindful of the ways the attacks are invoked throughout its pages. Wherever possible,

¹³ In his essay “The Spirit of Terrorism,” Jean Baudrillard also hints at this future-oriented anxiety when he characterizes the prevalent “clash of civilizations” discourse and the “War on Terror” as illusorily (and impotently) dispelling the fear of future conflicts and traumas that the event of “9/11” is considered portending: “This is not, then, a clash of civilizations or religions, and it reaches far beyond Islam and America, *on which efforts are being made to focus the conflict in order to create the delusion of a visible confrontation and a solution based on force*. There is, indeed, a fundamental antagonism here, but one which points past the spectre of America (which is, perhaps, the epicentre, but in no sense the sole embodiment, of globalization) and the spectre of Islam (which is not the embodiment of terrorism either)” (11, my emphasis).

care has been taken to append the year “2001” to any references made to “September 11” (unless the name-date “as-is” is employed in the quoted words of other authors, of course). I have also sought to use “the attacks” and “the event” as terms of reference in order to minimize the risk of characterizing what transpired on September 11, 2001 as absolutely exceptional.¹⁴ That said, however, as Redfield’s analysis attests, the ubiquity of the name-date’s usage and appeal cannot be completely avoided. I would be hard-pressed to formulate alternative phrasing for such terms as “‘9/11’ public remembrance/discourse” and “‘9/11’ remembrance pedagogies” without the risk of sounding awkward or incoherent—such is the linguistic power of this name-date. To demonstrate my intention to slow down this efficient/economizing naming of the event by its name-date, I have put “9/11” in quotation marks to denote the contested terrain upon which the term’s frequent and routinized usage is based.

As I have discussed in the preceding pages, the connections between public pedagogy focused on the attacks and the culture of public remembrance that circulates around (yet at the same time also actively constitutes) the event demand urgent critical attention. This is the case because, in Simon’s words, “new memories of Ground Zero” (Simon, “Altering” 355)—that is, certain “cultural memories of loss” in regards to the attacks—“may help reconstitute a public sphere that contests specific prohibitions on what is knowable and worthy of public attention and concern” (370). New memories of

¹⁴ There are admittedly other attacks and other events, but at this point I have made it rather abundantly clear what the central subject matter of this project is; hence, when referring to “the attacks” and “the event” in the context of this project, it would not be that difficult to make the connection that I am speaking of the attacks or the event that transpired on September 11, 2001 in the United States.

the event are needed because these specific kinds of memories have the productive potential to “take note of the event and speak back to it” (355) and create from that event an object(ive) of transmissible knowledge. In an increasingly neoliberal society where privatization is revered over and above collective action, grassroots organization, the interests of community, and the notion of “the public good,” the commemorative act of collective counter-remembrance is imbued with the prospect of creating public spaces, cultural sites, and “communities of memory” (Simon, *Touch* 61) in which dominant forms of power can and must still be made visible, critiqued, resisted, and held accountable.

Roger Simon’s conception of “communities of memory” demonstrates the importance of “designat[ing] structured sets of relationships through which people engage representations of past events and put forth shared, complementary, or competing versions of what should be remembered and how” (61). Fashioning this particular mode of commemorative sociality is crucial for collective remembrance of past historical traumas because “[w]hat binds people within such relationships is the promissory relation of memory to redemption. At root is the question (and the possibility) of remembrance, of what could and should be preserved (or rescued) in view of the transience of life” (61).¹⁵ “This concern is addressed,” however, “not by denying death, but by establishing

¹⁵ Simon further elaborates on his concept of communities of memory in this way: “To participate in a community of memory is to struggle with the possibility of witnessing, a practice quite different from a passive attention to legalized interventions seeking to arrest time by prescribing and regulating what are to count as the significant memories of a community’s past. Rather than accept such ossifications, members of a community of memory pursue a redemptive course in the interminable return to and

temporal relations whose significance transcends the ego-framing of one's momentary existence" (Gibbs cited in Simon, *Touch* 61). It bears pointing out, though, that communities of memory are far from utopic entities, since the increased proliferation of difference(s) will lead not only to variegated subject positions, but also to conflicting concepts of collective commemoration (62). What must be a key aspect of communities of memory is "the ability to say 'we' while hearing difference and recognizing disparity through which these commemorations are engaged" (62). The formation of such alternative or counter-publics would provide much-needed opportunities to interrogate dominant power structures and hegemonic remembrance practices. But as Simon emphasizes, cultivating the critical energy required to sustain communities of memory should not, by any means, be the ultimate and only goal of such communities. It is the obligation of members of a community of memory to actively implicate themselves in their remembrance work, and hence acknowledge their responsibility to transmit or communicate what they deem are the legacies of the historical trauma they witness. But in claiming responsibility for their acts of witnessing and remembrance, a community of memory must also recognize and concede to the fact that neither consensus nor absolute equality will be achieved. My point here is that the kind of counter-remembrance exemplified by Simon's notion of "communities of memory" possesses the potential not only to transform spaces, but also to foster the creation of alternative publics.

renewal of their understanding and assessment of past events. This return and renewal is accomplished by argument and deliberations that inform performative retellings of what members deem significant to pass-on. In this context, one commits to historical narrations by performing (teaching) them. This is a poetic that must be done in ways that involve all members" (61).

According to Henry Giroux, critical public pedagogy is not simply about media literacy and honing one's critical and analytical prowess in the academic setting; it is most importantly "a form of civic education" that "draws attention to the ways in which knowledge, power, desire, and experience are produced under specific basic conditions of learning" (Giroux, *Mouse* 125). Thus, any "9/11" public pedagogy of remembrance that seeks to critically intervene in hegemonic and antidemocratic institutions and practices that have gained full force as a result of, or as a response to, the attacks ought to teach and empower citizens as cultural producers who mobilize their skills—whether artistic, creative, theoretical, or political—for the sake of social justice and a concern for what the future legacies of the event may come to constitute. In this way, Simon's hope that the "new memories of Ground Zero" produce narratives and discourses about the attacks that challenge the dominant, militaristic, and fear-mongering rhetoric popularized, normalized, and legitimated by the Bush administration in particular translates to a more wide-reaching hope that seeks to "de-privatize the experience of dread" characteristic of neoliberalism and, in place of this dread, "establish a basis for living on and confronting future violations and violence" (Simon, "Altering" 355). As Simon and Butler demonstrate, in the wake of the event, public remembrance has never been more evident not only as a terrain of cultural and political struggle, but also as an important site where civic education can and does take place. With the attacks fearfully heralded as the harbinger of never-before-experienced and hence worse crises promised by the new millennium, it is thus the central aim of this project to enact a commemoration of the attacks that first and foremost remembers the event as a crisis of and for education.

Because I emphasize here the importance of regarding the event and its remembrance as a crisis of and for education rather than as a crisis of national security and global terrorism, a few words must first be said about how the attacks proper have been—in a widespread cultural imaginary—rendered legible through the language of crisis in the first place. The concept of “‘9/11’-as-crisis” invites numerous, multi-faceted readings which vary depending on whom one asks and how one came to witness and/or survive that day. On the one hand, and as concerned individuals across the globe were quick to recognize, the airborne attacks against the United States constituted a “life-and-death” emergency not only for those who happened to be in the targeted areas, but also for those agonizing over what was, at the time, the unknown fate of loved ones aboard the hijacked planes and inside the burning buildings. On the other hand, the geographically localized crises that took place in New York City, Washington, D.C., and Shanksville, Pennsylvania were also rapidly dwarfed by the event’s national and global implications, and this anxiety over the attacks’ disruptive impact on geopolitics and international relations was symptomatically manifested in the media’s quick labeling of the event as either an “Attack on America,” or “America Under Attack”—a purportedly “historical” occurrence by virtue of the much touted sentiment that “the world will never be the same after ‘9/11.’” News reports were quick to argue that September 11, 2001 marked a moment when the myth of national invincibility faltered in the face of public realization that, despite its “business-as-usual” posturing, the United States was—indeed, has always been, even before the attacks—as vulnerable to experiencing mass death and destruction as other nation-states.

The attacks have also been characterized within the framework of a “wartime” crisis. Prior to September 2001, the continental United States (the world’s strongest superpower) had not been attacked by another nation. The event was represented in the mainstream media as a landmark, “critical” incident in U.S. history when, for the “first time,” a “foreign enemy” has assailed Americans in the homeland.¹⁶ Even when the Imperial Japanese Navy seized upon U.S. naval troops in 1941 at Pearl Harbor, that act of aggression was not committed directly against U.S. civilians and did not occur on American “home soil” proper. It took place in what was, at the time, the *territory* of Hawaii, where the U.S. Pacific Fleet had been stationed prior to official American involvement in World War II. The attack on Pearl Harbor on December 7, 1941—“the date which,” according to President Franklin D. Roosevelt, “will live in infamy”—is widely regarded as putting an end to American isolationism because it pushed the United States to join the Allied Forces in Europe.

Like the attack on Pearl Harbor, the attacks that took place on September 11, 2001 succeeded in pulling the United States once again towards a declaration of war. But the connections that have been made between Pearl Harbor and “9/11” exceed the dramatic consignment of both events as “days that will live in infamy,” for both Pearl Harbor and the September 11, 2001 attacks have been widely read as events that proved beneficial opportunities to secure even further, with little public resistance, the United States’ status as a global superpower. One document in particular helps make chilling connections

¹⁶ It bears pointing out that this historical observation is rather imprecise, as it ignores the Mexican-American war that took place between 1846 and 1848.

between Pearl Harbor, U.S. hegemony, and the September 11, 2001 attacks, with “9/11” standing in as the “new Pearl Harbor” that will facilitate contemporary American domination of “rogue” nation-states threatening to destabilize the New World Order. In its September 2000 report, “Rebuilding America’s Defenses: Strategy, Forces and Resources for a New Century,” The Project for a New American Century (PNAC)—a neoconservative think-tank established in 1997, with members such as former George W. Bush administration officials Richard Cheney, Donald Rumsfeld, and Paul Wolfowitz—makes the following observations:

At present the United States faces no global rival. America’s grand strategy should aim to preserve and extend this advantageous position as far into the future as possible. There are, however, potentially powerful states dissatisfied with the current situation and eager to change it, if they can, in directions that endanger the relatively peaceful, prosperous and free condition the world enjoys today. Up to now, they have been deterred from doing so by the capability and global presence of American military power. But, as that power declines, relatively and absolutely, the happy conditions that follow from it will be inevitably undermined. (Donnelly i)

Read in a post-“9/11” context, the PNAC’s argument favouring increased military funding for the sake of prolonging the United States’ “benevolent” global hegemony uncannily alludes to the usefulness of catastrophic events malleable enough to be manufactured by the media as national traumas to publicly legitimize American military expansion.¹⁷ “The process of transformation,” the document concedes, “even if it brings

¹⁷ In a more Canadian context, Angela Failler makes a similar argument in her discussion of the Harper government’s 2006 inquiry into the 1985 Air India Flight 182 bombing. Situated as it was after the September 11, 2001 attacks, Failler argues that the federal inquiry’s insistence upon the Air India bombing’s continued significance or relevance “is not only the state’s response to a loss of lives but to an incident that presents a crisis for the maintenance of its own systems” (Failler 157). This is so because

revolutionary change, is likely to be a long one, absent some catastrophic and catalyzing event – like a new Pearl Harbor” (51). One year after the publication of the PNAC’s “Rebuilding America’s Defenses” report, the attacks took place and, in the media, were quickly likened to the attacks on Pearl Harbor in terms of scale and the number of casualties claimed. Speculations continue to abound regarding the extent to which Bush administration officials, several of whom were also members of the PNAC, seized upon, foresaw, or even themselves fomented the media-saturated aftermaths of the attacks as an opportunity to realize their vision of uncontested American domination across the globe. There is no doubt the PNAC, “through its reports, its periodic letters and statements signed by right-wing notables, and a steady flow of opinion-pieces and essays[.]” succeeded in its nine-year role as a “‘letter-head organisation’ that acted [...] as a mechanism for developing consensus on issues among different political forces [...] and then pushing them in public” (Lobe par. 12; 13).¹⁸ Certainly, the events of September 11, 2001 have been politically and rhetorically mobilized in the hands of neoconservative groups such as the PNAC to help expedite “the process of transformation” the United States is currently undergoing; that is, from a democratic welfare state to a warfare state incessantly defined by “state of emergency” declarations and wide-reaching militarized

“in the face of an overwhelming number of testimonies pointing to the impotencies and failures of the government and its agencies to heed the warnings of what may have been a preventable tragedy,” a “strategic remembering [of the Air India bombing] is more than needed to recuperate and secure public confidence in [state] power and authority” (157).

¹⁸ In the same article dated 13 June 2006 (“New American Century’ Project Ends With A Whimper”), Jim Lobe notes that the group “has been inactive since January 2005, when it issued the last of its ‘statements,’ an appeal to significantly increase the size of the U.S. Army and Marine Corps to cope with the growing demands of the kind of ‘Pax Americana’ it had done so much to promote” (par. 3).

campaigns both domestic and international. Though less blatant, this troubling transformation continues under the administration of Barack Obama, especially in light of his administration's weak health care reforms and "shock and awe" apprehension and assassination of Osama bin Laden in May 2011—yet another "historic" event which I will later discuss in greater detail.

Quite different from World War II, however, the contemporary war the United States has waged in response to the attacks is one that was unilaterally declared. Additionally, it is a war waged not on a specific nation-state, political body, ideology, or particular group of people, but rather on the concept of "terror." The U.S.-led "War on Terror," which began via the invasion of Afghanistan on October 7, 2001, was initially promoted as a means of apprehending Osama bin Laden—the suspected Saudi-born mastermind behind the attacks—with the U.S. threatening to wage war on all "rogue" nations harboring him. Less than two years after the invasion of Afghanistan, and, purportedly, with no leads as to the whereabouts of Bin Laden,¹⁹ the "War on Terror" was expanded on March 20, 2003 to include the U.S. invasion of Iraq where, allegedly, Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein was stockpiling weapons of mass destruction (WMD) to use in an imminent plan to obliterate "the West." But no WMDs would be found; inadvertently proving the United Nations' armaments inspectors correct in their earlier

¹⁹ Numerous books, articles, and documentaries currently abound outlining the amicable corporate and personal ties between the Bush and Bin Laden families. Though far from being the first to report on these mutually beneficial connections, Michael Moore's 2004 film *Fahrenheit 9/11* is perhaps the most successful in widely exposing and popularizing knowledge about the long history between the two families, especially in the context of the petroleum industry.

reports, the only weapons of mass destruction posing likely threats to the people of Iraq at the time the U.S. invaded and occupied the country were the very bombs and artillery fire the American troops brought with them.²⁰

A study published in the medical journal *The Lancet* reports that from the period of March 2003 to September 2004, “[a]n excess mortality of nearly 100 000 deaths was [...] attributed to the invasion of Iraq” (Burnham et al. 1). Seeking “to update this estimate,” the study’s researchers conducted a “national cross-sectional cluster sample survey of mortality in Iraq” between May and July of 2006. Their findings “estimate that as of July, 2006, there have been 654 965 [...] excess [civilian] Iraqi deaths as a consequence of the war, which corresponds to 2.5% of the population in the study area. Of post-invasion deaths, 601 027 [...] were due to violence, the most common cause being gunfire” (1). Furthermore, in September of 2006, it was reported that the U.S. military death toll in Iraq and Afghanistan totaled 3 031, surpassing the number of victims (2 973) who died on “9/11” in New York, Washington, and Pennsylvania (“War

²⁰ Nicholas Lemann’s article “The Next World Order” precedes the 2003 invasion of Iraq by over a year, yet it provides an accurate assessment of the process by which the United States managed to justify the invasion. It is worth quoting Lemann at length here: “This spring, the Administration will be talking to other countries about the invasion, trying to secure basing and overflight privileges, while Bush builds up a rhetorical case for it by giving speeches about the unacceptability of developing weapons of mass destruction. A drama involving weapons inspections in Iraq will play itself out over the spring and summer, and will end with the United States declaring that the terms that Saddam offers for the inspections, involving delays and restrictions, are unacceptable. Then, probably in the late summer or early fall, the enormous troop positioning, which will take months, will begin... [T]he chain of events leading inexorably to a full-scale American invasion, if it hasn’t already begun, evidently will begin soon” (par. 35).

Casualties” pars. 3; 16). At the time of writing, that tally has since grown alarmingly,²¹ alongside the number of civilian deaths.

It is equally important to recognize and acknowledge the innumerable individuals who have increasingly been rendered disabled by becoming maimed or injured, or falling ill as a result of the “War on Terror” and the subsequent military invasions and occupations of the Middle East and parts of Asia. Nirmala Erevelles points out that:

[w]hile upper- and middle-class disabled people may enjoy a certain level of social and economic accessibility in advanced industrialized nations in Europe and the Americas, poor disabled people, particularly poor disabled people of color, experience both social and economic oppression. This oppression is exacerbated in the third world. Thus, while disabled U.S. war veterans may be able to anticipate at least a minimal level of services and social support when they return from war, disabled veterans and civilians in war-torn areas of the third world face an inadequate, overburdened, and/or nonexistent infrastructure in service provision for disabled people. In contexts where subsistence is a struggle, third world disabled people in general, and third world women who are themselves disabled and/or caregivers for disabled family members/clients, face the social, political, and economic consequences of invisibility. (117-118)

How has a vow to bring to justice the perpetrator(s) of the September 11, 2001 attacks transmogrified into a “War on Terror” that grossly decimates and incapacitates not only military personnel, but also civilian populations in the global South-East? To be sure, this particular war insidiously racializes “the Enemy,” even and especially when its unattainable quest to obliterate the concept of “terror” and the tactic of “terrorism”²²

²¹ As of March 18, 2013, the total number of U.S. military deaths in Iraq is 4,486, while the total number of U.S. military fatalities in Afghanistan since the 2001 invasion is 2,189. (“Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom Casualties.”)

²² Retired U.S. Army general William Odom perhaps says it best when, in November 2002, he critiqued the “War on Terror” on C-SPAN thus: “Terrorism is not an enemy. It cannot be defeated. It’s a tactic. It’s about as sensible to say we declare war

suggests a colour-blind, post-racial engagement with supranational global conflicts. If one readily believes the prophetic announcements of the Bush administration and uncritically overlooks the tacitly racist discourse²³ informing the conceptually faceless and raceless “War on Terror,” the roots of the attacks can and must be traced back to racist or Orientalist assumptions about Arab nations and the Islamic people who are their residents and citizens. As this Orientalist logic goes, the attacks are perhaps the most recent and most horrific manifestation of Islamic people’s purported hatred for Western-style democracy; a civilizational conflict so steadfastly polarized that appeals to the moral

on night attacks and expect we’re going to win that war. We’re not going to win the war on terrorism. And it does whip up fear. Acts of terror have never brought down liberal democracies. Acts of parliament have closed a few.” (quoted in Solomon, “9/11 and Manipulation of the USA,” par. 13).

²³ Despite the fact that the “War on Terror,” by linguistic implication, is a war against a concept (i.e., terror) rather than a particular racial, ethnic, or religious group, the association of “terror” and the perpetrators of “terror” with anyone having an Islamic, Arab, or non-Caucasian background was rampant in mainstream media discourse in the immediate and long-term aftermaths of the September 11, 2001 attacks. This was especially true in the context of public responses to subsequent airport security screening measures put in place in the United States and around the world as means of combating future terrorist activity in the sky. Paul Sperry, for example, condemns as “doomed to fail” (par. 2) New York City Mayor Michael Bloomberg’s anti-terrorism security measure of ordering police searches of subway riders’ bags. Sperry says that the primary cause of this security measure’s failure is Bloomberg’s vow that “there will be absolutely no [racial] profiling” during the searches (par. 1). To further bolster his defense of racial profiling in the name of winning the “War on Terror,” Sperry goes on to say that “with the system as it stands, [the] terrorist could easily slip in through the numerical window of random security screening. By not allowing police to profile the most suspicious train passengers—young Muslim men who fit the indicators [...]—Mr. Bloomberg and other leaders not only tie one hand behind law enforcement’s back, but they also unwittingly provide terrorists political cover to carry out their murderous plans” (Sperry par. 9). For additional evidence of the racist discourse informing public support of racial profiling in the “War on Terror,” see also Charles Krauthammer’s “Give Grandma a Pass.” For critiques of the kind of racist discourse evident in the pieces by Sperry and Krauthammer, see Colbert I. King’s “You Can’t Fight Terrorism with Racism” and Malik Miah’s “Racist Undercurrents in the ‘War on Terror.’”

absolute of “good” versus “evil” are deemed the only necessary means of truly discerning “friend” from “foe,” with high-tech warfare serving as the ideal backdrop for distinguishing who is “for us” or “against us.”

A more historicized and significantly less dogmatic analysis of the attacks as a geopolitical crisis would, at the very least, prudently steer clear of such sweeping moralistic character judgments and instead focus upon past colonial and Cold War encounters between “the East” and “the West”—finding in these dealings and histories a far from clear-cut, binary distinction between foreign, darker-skinned, evil-doing perpetrators and innocent, white-washed, democracy-loving victims of Muslim rage.²⁴ Furthermore, a U.S. administrative office less driven by the neoliberal urge to invest in the economically profitable business of military occupation and war-mongering²⁵ would take greater pains to avoid violent conflict and instead focus upon, firstly, ending the

²⁴ See Bernard Lewis’s article, “The Roots of Muslim Rage” and Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*. Huntington borrows the term “clash of civilizations” from Bernard Lewis’s article.

²⁵ Naomi Klein provides a pointed analysis of the ways in which seemingly interminable wars boost the economy of nations waging them. She focuses on Israel’s booming military and homeland security industries as stock market favourites and argues that “Israel learned to turn endless war into a brand asset, selling its uprooting, occupation and containment of the Palestinian people as a half-century head start in the ‘Global War On Terror.’” (153). Furthermore, Klein regards Israel’s economic dependence on the war and homeland security industries as a warning to the United States: “The fact that Israel continues to enjoy booming (if poorly shared) prosperity, even as it wages war against its neighbors and escalates the brutality in the occupied territories, demonstrates just how perilous it is to build an economy based on the premise of continual war and deepening disasters. This is what a society looks like when it has lost its economic incentive for peace and is heavily invested in fighting and profiting from an endless and unwinnable War On Terror” (166-167). See Klein’s contribution “Building a Booming Economy Based on War With No End: The Lessons Of Israel” in the anthology *War With No End*, published in conjunction with Stop the War coalition and United for Peace and Justice.

“War on Terror” rather than prolonging and exacerbating it, and secondly, on developing “security” throughout the country “in the more mundane ‘homeland’ sense of providing jobs, adequate health care, child care, or a living wage” (Giroux and Giroux 42), especially in light of the most recent financial crisis that has gripped America and the world.²⁶ Sadly, however, what has proven as toxic a legacy as the powdery coating of debris from the World Trade Center towers is the miasma of terror and fear that has been rendered synonymous with public remembrances of the attacks, the mainstream manifestations of which have themselves largely overshadowed organized opposition against the military occupations of Afghanistan and the Middle East.

It is the public commemorations of the attacks that this project specifically focuses upon. This is the case, since such invocations have much to teach about, first of all, the genealogy and normalization of emergency state(s) that have emerged ever since the attacks; and secondly, the modes of resistance that could be taken up or the kind of hope that could be conjured in order to transform the post-“9/11” politics of fear that threatens to snuff out what little remains of the lively, sustained democratic citizenship for the sake of which the “War on Terror” is supposedly being waged. In a world that

²⁶ The state’s neoliberal tendency to absolve itself of providing sustained social services to its citizens in times of domestic crises was also demonstrated through the 2005 man-made disaster that was the fallout from Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans. During and in the aftermath of the hurricane, disenfranchised citizens (who were primarily Black) were left to fend for themselves during and in the aftermath of the hurricane, receiving little if any help from government disaster agencies such as the Federal Emergency and Management Agency (FEMA). For a keen, in-depth analysis of how the Katrina disaster demonstrates the “politics of disposability” in increasingly neoliberal and militarized America, see, in particular, Henry Giroux’s *Stormy Weather: Katrina and the Politics of Disposability*.

has come to normalize the demonization of informed critique, the favouring of intellectual laziness over rigorous thought and deliberation, the militarization of purportedly democratic societies, and the deployment of warfare as the primary means of “resolving” international conflicts and stimulating a nation’s economy for the financial benefit of the corporate elite, “transforming the future” here implies a move beyond simply overhauling policies and legislature. Instead, to transform the future is to undertake the pursuit of what Martin Luther King, Jr. has referred to as “peaceful tomorrows” (King, Jr. par. 29). On the one hand, this phrase could potentially suggest a sterile future characterized by what Immanuel Kant worried would be the “perpetual peace” that results from a “war of extermination” (Kant 115)—that is, the kind of peace that is absent of any conflicts whatsoever, since the steep price of such peace is the total annihilation of humanity. But on the other hand, given the war-fixated and war-ravaged present in which we live today, the notion of “peaceful tomorrows” could also productively offer an alternative and sustainable means of living in the world. Put another way, seeking more “peaceful tomorrows” may be interpreted as a mode of inhabiting the world and dwelling with others that is “peace-able”—by which I mean that it is open to, and in fact *welcomes* a future that is neither over-determined by violently inflexible categorizations of pure “good” and “evil,” nor impervious to vulnerability and fallibility. Hence, the pursuit of “peaceful tomorrows” would require bearing, as Simon phrases it, “the risk of being dispossessed of one’s certainties” (Simon, *Touch* 10). Rather than definitively realizing the goal of perpetual peace that Kant argues can be achieved “only in the great graveyard of the human race” (Kant 115), the pursuit of “peaceful

tomorrows” suggests an ongoing, necessarily deferred work in progress that is laboriously cultivated through sustained remembrance of and education about the past; this, in order to “deter [the further] multiplication of violence” (Simon, “Altering” 358). I will continue to discuss in greater detail the intricacies attending the concept of peaceful tomorrows in the following chapter, when I critique the highly politicized mourning work of the September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows—a group comprised of family members who lost loved ones in the September 11, 2001 attacks, and whose central mandate of preventing further historical traumas from unfolding as a result of international conflicts is very much a future-oriented endeavour.

In light of the indefinite rise in the tally of deaths associated with the “War on Terror,” such a focus on the collective memorial work of remembering the attacks must therefore be addressed as a significant form of public pedagogy: one which has the capacity to challenge and enact resistance against the hegemony of “official” narratives; (re)legitimize bodies, lives, and deaths that heretofore were deemed “ungrievable” and “disposable” by many; and throw into question and render more open-ended the conventional, taken-for-granted accounts and interpretations of the attacks. The important task at hand is to encourage and enable the collective and public enactment of “9/11” memorial work that refuses to conflate historically situated acts of terrorism with ahistorical, Manichaeian understandings of pure evil, but rather remembers and rewrites the attacks in ways that challenge the heavily policed (because historically removed) memorial accounts of terrorism and victimization.

At first glance, it may seem odd to make such a fuss over the commemorative culture of the event. Surely, one might insist that, in the “emergency time” of war and in the throes of a harrowing economic crisis, there are more pressing issues than worrying over how the attacks and the victims are collectively and publicly remembered, or how the anniversaries of the event are annually observed. And media critic and antiwar activist Norman Solomon could not have been serious, when—in his critique of mainstream media treatments of the event’s anniversaries—he made the assertion that “[t]he ultimate demagogic weapon is to exploit the memory of September 11, 2001” (Solomon, “Will News” par. 2).

In the larger scheme of post-“9/11” moral panics over homeland security, the health of the national and global economy, and the rise of terrorist fundamentalism, the commemorative culture of the event may indeed seem a subject of comparatively oblique significance, were it not for the fact that the “War on Terror” was and continues to be itself framed, justified, and rhetorically bandied about as a memorial to the victims of the attacks—albeit a rancorous and murderous memorial insatiably seeking to take more lives in the name of the casualties on September 11, 2001. Robert Higgs astutely describes how state-sanctioned observances of the attacks can teach the public to hate and demonize those who are deemed “different” or “other” from them based on pre-established physical—more often than not, physiological—categories of (non-) belonging: “Every time that Americans relive the tragedy of September 11, their blood boils and they yearn to lash out at the responsible parties, or, if not at them, then at

somebody who bears a vague resemblance to them” (Higgs, par. 8).²⁷ Higgs also communicates how effective memorials are in garnering public support (and thereby legitimacy) for state-sanctioned killings:

So, we can expect from here on to be bombarded with annual observances that are on the one hand tearfully sentimental and on the other hand implicitly if not explicitly jingoistic. The core message will remain: weep, but don't just sit there crying forever; get up and kill somebody – or better yet, support with great cheer your government as it does the killing in your name. (par. 9)

Such a stance was, indeed, mobilized by the Bush administration. Seeming willfully to shed his earlier public image as a President who could do nothing but sit awkwardly in a classroom as his country was attacked, President Bush expressed this desire to lash out violently at perceived enemies as an earnest pledge to the American people during a speech he delivered in September 2002: “In the ruins of two towers, under a flag unfurled at the Pentagon, at the funerals of the lost, we have made a sacred promise to ourselves, and to the world [...] We will not relent until justice is done and our nation is secure.

²⁷ As a result of this post-“9/11” racialized and racist backlash, visible racial minority groups have sought means of avoiding the possibility of becoming potential targets and victims of hate crimes. For example, Jasbir Puar and Amit S. Rai discuss the adoption of “docile patriotism” on the part of Sikh individuals living in America who sought to avoid discrimination and hate crimes as a result of being mistaken as Muslims, Arab Americans, or “the kin and national compatriots of Osama bin Laden” (136): “Much mainstream Sikh response has focused on getting the attention of white America, intent on renarrating themselves through American nationalism as respectable, exemplary, model minority citizens who have held vigils, donated blood and funds to the Red Cross, and were quick to cover their *gurdwaras* [temples] in American flags. Many national Sikh media outlets, attempting to counter the ‘mistaken identity’ phenomenon, have put out messages to the effect of ‘we are not them’ (Muslims), encouraging Sikhs to use this opportunity to educate people about the peaceful Sikh religion” (138).

What our enemies have begun, we will finish” (qtd. in Solomon, “Will News” par. 6).

The disconnect between Bush’s befuddled initial reaction to news of the attacks and his unequivocally vengeful demeanour one year after the event is telling, for it symbolically illustrates the absence of alternative, collective public responses to the attacks *beyond* the widely accepted norms of being shocked and awed, or the extreme opposite—being roused to help exact revenge on one’s designated enemies. The state declaration of a “War on Terror” in the name of the victims and, conversely, the yearly conjurations of the attacks to rationalize the further siphoning of government funds into the military’s budget—these occasions not only exploit and trade on the currencies of mourning and remembrance, but also plumb the depths of collective national grief over the attacks in order to validate mobilization of the armed forces abroad, and justify at home “heightened state authoritarianism, the militarization of culture, and the suspension of civil liberties [that are] crucial to the cultivation and sustenance of a democratic society” (Espiritu and Moore 201).²⁸

²⁸ For example, the American Council of Trustees and Alumni’s (ACTA’s) reading of the events of September 11, 2001—as the devastating result of American patriotism’s glaring absence in university and college curricula across the United States—cites the attacks not only as the ultimate expression of the Islamic world’s long-standing contempt for “Western” freedom and democracy, but also as “the West’s” long-overdue call to arms against terrorists from without as well as from within. By “within,” the ACTA refers to American scholars circulating across the spheres of American higher education, who critique U.S. foreign policy and withhold their blind support for the War on Terror—all of whom were painted by the Council as treasonous to the country and thereby deserving of surveillance at best and denouncement at worst. Sandra Silberstein provides a detailed account of ACTA’s “blacklisting” of academics critical of the “War on Terror” as well as of U.S. foreign policy in the weeks and months following the attacks (Silberstein, Sandra. *War of Words: Language, Politics and 9/11*). See, in particular, Chapter 6: “The New McCarthyism” (127-148). For ACTA’s full manifesto

Normalizing a causal connection between the attacks and the “War on Terror”—to the extent that the majority of the public firmly believes that waging war is the only viable (national) response to the attacks and future crises involving terrorism—requires that the collective remembrance of the event is constantly policed and superintended. The administration headed by George Bush, Jr., with the invaluable help of the mainstream media, succeeded in harnessing public memory of the attacks in the interests of American neocolonial expansion and occupation abroad. It is for this reason that I engage the commemorative culture of “9/11” as a crisis of and for education. Despite the dominance of state-controlled and mainstream media versions of the September 11, 2001 attacks that promote a sense of closure or of dogmatic knowing about the event, I contend that the very memories and legacies of the attacks—that is, whose deaths and which narratives are remembered and forgotten in relation to the event of “9/11”; which groups of people are valorized and demonized in the formation of the event’s “official” story; as well as what is done in memory or in honour of these past losses and legacies—are and will continue to be contested terrains, the struggles over which shape and influence not only the actions we commit in the future, but the very conditions of the future itself. It is thus important to engage with the contestatory possibilities of the event’s memorial legacies because, as Angela Failler argues in the context of the 1985 Air India disaster, “incorporating and attending to interpretations that either resist or are curiously missing

on the subject of higher education curricula in post-“9/11” America, see their document “Defending Civilization,” co-written by Jerry L. Martin and Anne D. Neal.

from dominant accounts of this traumatic history challenges the mechanisms of power through which hegemonic and strategic forms of remembrance are substantiated” (154).

In this project, I consider and deliberate upon how the memorials we build and the commemorative rituals we observe and practice can educate us to improve the collective endeavour of living not only with one another, but also with the innumerable specters of the past. Commenting on his own work on the testamentary “remembrance of events informed by systemic mass violence” (Simon, *Touch* 4), Roger Simon also states that his primary “concern [...] is not with memory as a component of the founding ethos of national or communal identity, but rather a condition for the learning necessary to sustain the prospect of democracy” (5). While I fully agree with Simon on the importance of public memory as a vital pedagogical condition necessary for the prospect of democracy to thrive in the future to-come, I also argue that the transformative aims of education, if actively recognized as a driving component in the ethos of critical remembrance, imbue public acts of commemoration with new modes of understanding and talking about knowledge production and circulation, as well as ethics and the fostering of communities of memory. Also, and equally important, critical pedagogy—insisting upon its intimate connections with memory—itself becomes a very specific kind of memorial practice, a mode of remembrance and commemoration that is perhaps the most hospitable to an understanding of the work of mourning that, according to Jacques Derrida, “is in the name of *justice* [...] for those others who are no longer or for those others who are not yet *there*, presently living, whether they are already dead or not yet born” (Derrida, *Specters* xix, his emphasis). I take up this task here *not* by simply rehearsing the over-determined

narrative of the attacks as a national crisis that victimized and temporarily overwhelmed the United States—but ultimately unified the country in the eyes of the Bush administration. Rather, the following pages revolve around the question of the event's commemorative culture as being in a state of educational crisis. Thus, the subsequent chapters focus on the triangulation of critical public pedagogy, the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, and this event's various modes of public remembrance.

One of the underlying convictions of this project is that there must be much more to the remembrance of the attacks than the waving of Old Glory at half-mast and the red, white, and blue *leitmotif* of stars and stripes predictably recurring in well-meaning—though unrelentingly patriotic and programmatic—memorials to the attacks. Paying particular attention to the attacks' expansive commemorative culture and how this culture of remembrance has appropriated and mobilized public memory of the event in disturbingly polarizing ways, the project explores the substantial bearing that memorials to victims of the attacks continue to have upon American public opinion, as well as U.S. government legislations and foreign policies in the wake of the attacks. But this project also moves beyond merely surveying and sampling memorials commemorating the event. In the subsequent chapters I actively seek and dwell upon public remembrances of the attacks which not only honour the memory of the dead, but through the work of mourning also attentively regard the losses of the past (anguished and traumatic as they continue to be) as pedagogical inheritances. It is from these pedagogical inheritances that those who survive the dead can learn, and—especially in the wake of the attacks—for which the many futures of democracy will be responsible. Carefully teasing out the connections

attending public memory, the collective remembrance of the attacks, and education is especially important, for what is remembered and communicated “for posterity” regarding what transpired on September 11, 2001 crucially informs, shapes, and justifies the present and the future. Such an argument is painfully demonstrated and rendered forebodingly ominous, especially if one is to pay closer attention to today’s vengeful “War on Terror” on Middle Eastern soil, the insidious attacks on civil liberties in North America for the sake of “Homeland Security,” and the heightened racism that currently fuels hate crimes and discriminatory acts against Arabs, Muslims, and other visible racial minority groups.

As the later work of Jacques Derrida teaches us, what memory work capaciously offers are the legacies and aftermaths of the attacks—legacies and aftermaths the lessons, implications, and consequences of which require informed debate and sustained critical remembrance to be understood and responsibly taken up and addressed—even and especially when, as concerned citizens of the world, we grapple with the future *now*. Like the work of mourning they undertake, the memorial responses this project focuses upon are works in progress, never completed and unpredictable in their process of undoing and reconfiguring themselves. These memorial responses come with no guarantees: that is, even though every memorial seeks to assign particular meanings to the attacks and the deaths of the victims, what these memorial responses teach and pass on to those who encounter them are not necessarily civic virtues or magnanimous promises that profess the benefits of never forgetting and always remembering the dead. Indeed, some of the memorials that hold my interest do not regard themselves as taking part in or richly

contributing to the commemorative culture of the event at all. Additionally, the memorial responses I focus upon in the chapters that follow take unconventional forms. They refuse to “shoulder the memory-work” and thus “relieve viewers of their memory burden,” as Holocaust memorial scholar, James E. Young, claims is the risk inherent to “assigning monumental form to memory” (*Texture* 5). Most important, then, my dissertation also envisions memorials to the attacks and their victims that occasion the pursuit, imagination, and active creation of modes of collective remembrance that are themselves sites of critical pedagogies that foster informed questioning and debate; and that demonstrate a regard for affect as potentially productive in the context of sociality (as opposed to a certain kind of Enlightenment regard of affect as something to be approached with suspicion and distrust);²⁹ and, lastly, anticipate and work towards a

²⁹ Many scholars in the field of Cultural Studies have focused upon the importance of the affective turn in the discipline. For example, Lauren Berlant argues “that our current view of the communication of affect and emotion is too often simply mimetic and literalizing,” and her paper “aim[s] to counter the unfortunate tendency in much contemporary affect theory to elide the difference between the structure of an affect and the experience we associate with a typical emotional event” (4). With regards to the affective response that something is or is not found to be “interesting,” Sianne Ngai examines how “[t]he very indefiniteness of the [category of] interesting, and its capacity to toggle between nonaesthetic and aesthetic judgments, can help [...] [count] as evidence when we are trying to convince other people of the rightness of our aesthetic judgments, given their foundation on subjective feelings of pleasure or displeasure” (778). Patricia Clough et al seek “to reconceptualize labor power in relation to affectivity” (62) and “offer a consideration of what politics might be, and could be, in such a context” (60). Lastly, I have already noted/cited these two texts earlier in the introduction, but Sharon Sliwinski’s work on the photographs of New York City bystanders’ uncannily uniform body language as they affectively respond to the sight of the World Trade Center towers burning and collapsing before them is also relevant here. In the same special journal issue as Sliwinski’s article, Martha Nandorfy critiques the ways “critical thought” is “too closely associated with theory and philosophy” (316), and “focus[es] on literary journalism or creative nonfiction, ethics of liberation, and

vibrant, self-reflective democracy that exceeds the current, received (neo)liberal understandings of the term.

What would such counter-memorials look like? In the specific case of “9/11,” memorials that are also sites of critical pedagogy not only take under serious consideration, but also speak back to, the crisis of education that the attacks’ commemorative culture instigates. These memorials may take up as well as responsibly address and challenge, for example, the militarism, nationalism, and patriotism informing and saturating “mainstream” public remembrances of the attacks. Further still, the alternative modes of memorialization this project actively seeks and calls for would oppose a characterization of the attacks as the ultimate and unquestionable justification for the bloody and seemingly interminable “War on Terror” currently concentrated in the Middle East; a “war” which also ominously threatens to be waged against any and all—whether individual, alleged “ sleeper cell,” or sovereign state—who so much as critique American foreign interests and openly oppose U.S. military mobilization and occupation as acceptable harbingers of freedom and democracy in a “post-September 11” world.

Rather than simply continue the investigation of how highly dichotomized memorial representations of the “victims” and “terrorists” have contributed to justifying the supposed benevolence of American military presence in the Middle East, this project critiques existing memorial discourse itself and queries the concept of the public memorial as first and foremost a pedagogical apparatus of the state. An earnest inquiry

aboriginal storytelling to examine how these are connected in terms of reuniting affect with intellect and imagination” (316).

into the (im)possible futures of public mourning and remembrance has never been more timely, since the event of “9/11” significantly renders the connections between “homeland” security and public memorialization more open to interrogation and reconceptualization. Far from lobbying for an end to all forms of public memorials, this dissertation in fact imagines and actively calls for modes of public remembrance the discourses and gestures of which always already exceed the concerns of legitimizing state sovereignty and restoring the equilibrium of “homeland” security. Are there means of effecting resistance against the fate of the public memorial as a compelling representational instrument of not only the state, but also of private corporations and other institutions that seek to use memorials towards amnesiac or ideological objectives? Are there modes of public mourning and remembrance today that foster such resistance? What would a public memorial to the attacks look like if, rather than fearing the future of terrorism and the terrorism of the future, it were to open itself up *to* the future? These are some of the concerns that animate my project.

Chapter One, as I have previously mentioned, focuses on the “September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows” organization. The “Peaceful Tomorrows” group is comprised of family members of victims who strongly maintain that despite their inconsolable losses as a result of the attacks, “9/11 could be,” in the words of founding member Barry Amundson, “a ‘teachable moment’ – and that [the victims’ families] had had enormous responsibility thrust into [their] lives to make sure that [their] loved ones’ names were not used for violence, but to teach peace” (qtd. in September 11th Families 143-144). One of the organization’s key objectives is to dissociate mourning and grieving

over victims of the attacks from exacting vengeance and revenge upon the suspected perpetrators. Self-identifying as an organization dedicated to fostering non-violent approaches to global conflicts, the “Peaceful Tomorrows” group seeks to obtain public support of their cause by appealing to the organization members’ status as having been personally and devastatingly touched by “9/11,” and yet despite their loss, openly opposing military-oriented responses claiming to avenge the deaths of those who died in the attacks. The “Peaceful Tomorrows” organization brings to the fore the tensions attending the privatization of personal loss and the politicization of grief. In doing so, however, I argue that the organization’s widely publicized act of taking up members’ collective experience of loss as a “teachable moment” for the rest of the world inadvertently risks reproducing an implicitly colonial relationship to the West’s racialized Others. The organization’s status as a collective of bereaved family members who lost loved ones in the September 11, 2001 attacks at times threatens to obscure not only the suffering of others touched by historical trauma, but also the long-standing and well-established political activism and critical agency of the Afghan and Iraqi civilians on whose behalf the organization passionately claims to speak. This chapter, which critically assesses the political and racial implications of the mourning work undertaken by the “Peaceful Tomorrows” group, provisionally begins my exploration of “9/11” memorials—and, to some extent, communities of memory—that respond to the attacks’ commemorative culture as an educational crisis. The questions, discussions, and tensions that unfold from this first chapter allow for the subsequent consideration of other modes

of memorialization that refuse to foreclose or evade the difficult impasses that come with addressing the attacks and their remembrance as a crisis of and for education.

Chapter Two engages with the graphic narrative as both a memorial and pedagogical medium that contemplates the many afterlives of a cultural trauma as well as the many afterlives of its remembrance.³⁰ In light of the graphic narrative’s burgeoning popularity and effectiveness as an educational text in high school and university classes, James E. Young has pointed out that this visual-verbal mode “suggests itself as a pointedly antiredemptory medium that simultaneously makes and unmakes meaning as it unfolds” (Young, *Memory’s Edge* 22). I focus my attention here on Art Spiegelman’s 2004 graphic narrative *In the Shadow of No Towers*. This chapter considers the political import of Spiegelman’s text, especially as it pertains to the crisis of democracy in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States. In particular, I argue that *In the Shadow of No Towers* draws effectively on distinctive formal and cultural-political elements of the graphic narrative genre in order to mobilize a critique of government and mainstream media representations of the attacks. The text draws readers’ attention to the potential of the genre to ask important questions about the nature of trauma, representation, and the construction of affect and community around the events of September 11, 2001. The chapter begins by situating *In the Shadow of No Towers* within the context of *Maus I* and *II* (1986 and 1991, respectively)—Spiegelman’s

³⁰ Hilary Chute has importantly suggested the use of the term “graphic narrative” instead of “graphic novel” in order to encompass the increasingly non-fictional subject matter addressed in this genre. I will address Chute’s suggested change in nomenclature in greater detail in Chapter 2 of this project.

award-winning, two-volume account of his father's experiences as a Holocaust survivor. The successful reception of *Maus* encouraged further exploration of the comics genre's capacity to address historical events that pose serious representational issues for graphic and cartoon artists. Spiegelman continues his exploration of these issues in his post-"9/11" graphic narrative, but in *No Towers* there is a more conscious effort on his part to approach his recent work as personally cathartic: trauma therapy that helps "sort out the fragments of what [he had] experienced from the media images that threatened to engulf what [he] actually saw" (*No Towers* 2). *No Towers* taps into and employs Spiegelman's personal trauma to disrupt and unsettle the prevalent notion of "democracy" with which the artist feels at odds: that is, the kind of *depoliticized* democracy that staves off or contains "vigorous criticism" as "part of our business as usual" (2). I argue that Spiegelman's caricatured "slow-motion diary" (2)—which, in its non-linear layering of images and texts, engages in what Charles R. Garoian and Yvonne M. Gaudelius call "collage pedagogy" (5)—gestures towards the greater project of rethinking, and even (re)configuring or recuperating, the notion of democracy as well as of citizenship in a post-"9/11" community that has only recently experienced "how ephemeral even skyscrapers and democratic institutions are" (2). Given that *In the Shadow of No Towers* disrupts any kind of confident posturing that triumphantly declares absolute or authoritative "knowledge" about "9/11," I also briefly consider the ways in which Spiegelman's text—despite thoroughly demonstrating the promising counter-memorial potential of the graphic narrative genre—at times also risks re-centering "white" or "Western" injury, in its calls for the repoliticization of democracy. This chapter

concludes by reflecting upon the graphic narrative as both memorial and pedagogical site; indeed, as a capacious locus of interaction, in which personal narratives like Spiegelman's possess the potential not only to challenge and undermine dominant narratives about historical traumas, but also to transform contemporary democratic culture itself through anti-redemptory pedagogies of remembrance.

Chapter Three's primary focus is on *God, Construction and Destruction*, a short film by Samira Makhmalbaf that is part of the 2002 international film project *11 '09 '01 – September 11*. This chapter examines the mobilization of film in particular, and art in general, for the purpose of critiquing and making more ethically accountable the practice of "9/11" remembrance pedagogy. I take up the film's portrayal of education as a seemingly ineffective mode of critical citizenship and resistance and argue that it is in fact through Makhmalbaf's ambivalent depiction of pedagogical failure that the film succeeds in communicating how the blanket imposition of traditional forms of knowledge and public remembrance practices threatens the transformative aspects of education itself. Exploring the film as an optic through which to closely unpack Deborah Britzman's theory of "difficult knowledge," I also contend that the film performatively enacts what Britzman calls education's "own ethical implication" that it "must interfere" (Britzman 11), and it does so by consciously exposing the challenges that conventionally adopted forms of "9/11" remembrance pedagogy must, but have yet to, address. To further explore the factors that may help determine the futures of this particular remembrance pedagogy, in this chapter I address three central issues that preoccupy Makhmalbaf's film: distinguishing between "learning from" versus "learning about" traumatic events;

contextualizing historical trauma; and lastly, assessing the role of art and artists in education and public remembrance.

The project provisionally concludes by reflecting upon the ongoing futures of “9/11” public remembrance, despite the fact that the May 2, 2011 U.S.-led ambush and subsequent death of Osama Bin Laden have come to be regarded as the historic “closure” to the attacks that Americans have purportedly long desired and hoped for. I argue against this popular parading of bin Laden’s death as the triumphant end to the painful legacy of the event. As an alternative, I consider the implications of not only remaining “committed” to the memory of “9/11,” but also framing the remembrance of the attacks as an ongoing crisis of and for education—a characterization that certainly detaches the attacks from simplistic, singular associations with any one individual or group. In closing, I also address a few issues for consideration in potential future projects that may seek to continue the work begun by this current one, which articulates and maps out some of the more salient connections that bind together education, public remembrance, and the event now commonly referred to as “9/11.”

Writing from the vantage point of one who could be considered relatively “removed” or at a considerable (geographical) distance from the attack sites, thinking and writing about September 11, 2001 north of the Canada-United States border, I anticipate and hope for yet more work that ought not be abandoned, but ought never to see its completion, either—that is, the work of more hospitable remembrance rather than censorious forgetfulness; the work of more (self) critical memorialization rather than rote

memorization; and the interminable labour of *learning* to remember. This is difficult work that cannot and will not be undertaken without first of all *remembering* to learn. It is with these hopeful aims that I focus this project upon remembering—and thereby continually addressing—the event as a crisis of, and for, education. Rigorously considering what this theorization of the attacks might mean and interrogating the kinds of responses this crisis of education might entail certainly yields more questions about the event and its remembrance—questions that, perhaps, have not yet been raised nor asked sufficiently often or deeply enough.

CHAPTER ONE

“Not in Our Names”: The Politics of Mourning and The September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows

[I]t will be a pity if, instead of using this as an opportunity to try to understand why September 11 happened, Americans use it as an opportunity to usurp the whole world’s sorrow to mourn and avenge only their own.

--Arundhati Roy (“The Algebra of Infinite Justice” 365)

We know of course there’s really no such thing as the ‘voiceless.’ There are only the deliberately silenced, or the preferably unheard.

--Arundhati Roy (“Peace & the New Corporate Liberation Theology” 4)

In a televised speech before a Joint Session of Congress, U.S. President Bush responded to the event of “9/11” by declaring that the nation’s collective “grief” over the attacks “has turned to anger, and anger to resolution” (Bush par. 6). After stating that one is either with the “force of good” or with the “evil” terrorists, Bush also proclaimed that while “grief recedes with time and grace,” the nation’s quest to vanquish terror ought to remain timeless and absolute. “[American] resolve must not pass,” Bush reminds his Congressional and television audience, because—purportedly *unlike* the work of mourning—the war on terror is “a task that does not end” (par. 51).³¹

Such disavowals of grief in public discourses about “9/11,” however, have been critiqued by Judith Butler, who contests that “mak[ing] grief itself into a resource for

³¹ Ironically enough, Bush’s reminder to the American people concerning the interminability of the war on terror would also suggest that if it is indeed a task without end, then the war on terror will never be won. Consequently, the ultimate triumph of democracy over terroristic oppression cannot ever be fully realized.

politics, is not to be resigned to inaction” (Butler 30). As I have indicated earlier, one of the central aims of this project is to investigate how modes of memorializing the victims of the September 11, 2001 attacks are themselves reflections upon the meanings, goals, and ideals of collective remembrance. In the preceding introductory chapter, I discussed the pedagogical importance of public responses to historical trauma and argued that, for the living, these responses bring to the fore the multi-faceted, and at times conflicting, legacies of collective loss. I also elucidated the ways in which memorial encounters with historical trauma not only make visible and provide insights into prevalent ideologies and dominant subjectivities within a society, but at times also present opportunities to critique and challenge them for the sake of fostering more comprehensive and inclusive modes of social justice. Thus, taking up Butler’s theorization of loss and shared vulnerability as resources for a new kind of politics, and yet also querying the limits and consequences of such an ethical dream,³² this chapter focuses upon responses to “9/11” and global terrorism that teach neither the demonization nor eradication of the Other in the name of justice. I consider how collective mourning and public remembrance—as affective social experience and cultural practice—might provide the empirical as well as theoretical conditions necessary for the cultivation of non-violent alternatives to the “War on Terror.” Conversely, I also critique the ways in which such alternatives to war are, at times, informed and constituted by colonial ideals (such as notions of a benevolent,

³² As I discussed in my introduction, Butler’s “ethical dream” of fostering greater awareness of mutual vulnerability and grievability has been criticized by Sunera Thobani and others for its tendency to frame and center American victimization during the attacks as the quintessence of suffering and traumatic experience; this, over and above many other instances of historical trauma and mass violence that implicate the West and Western colonial expansion.

unified, Western “we” coming to the aid of its racialized subjects) that, in turn, risk promoting symbolic violence by forcefully occluding not only the alterity of the Other’s experiences, but also the voices with which the Other articulates those experiences. In essence, this latter aspect of my analysis interrogates the historical and political trajectories of memorial responses to the attacks that seek to foster social justice at the global scale. My rationale for this line of critique is to draw attention to the ways in which non-violent or peaceful memorial responses to the attacks—despite their well-meaning humanitarian aims—might also inadvertently risk re-centering the events of “9/11” as a penultimate source of injury and suffering, reconfirming the “West’s” status as “victim.”

Writing within this context, I turn to the September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows organization and explore how it negotiates the ways public sentiment has been, and continues to be, mobilized “in the name of” those who perished on September 11, 2001. In particular, I argue that the organization’s public outreach offers a counter-memorial challenge to dominant “9/11” remembrance pedagogies that legitimate the widespread eradication of America’s perceived enemies through violent, state-sanctioned invasions and occupations overseas. In their own words, the Peaceful Tomorrows organization “recognize[s] the necessity to respond to violence and destruction,” yet “refus[es] to lapse into easy answers to hard questions” (September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows 143). Through their enactment of “9/11” public remembrance, group members fashion engagements with loss and historical trauma that promote peaceable, humanitarian, and non-violent solutions to international as well as

supranational conflicts. Resisting former President Bush's advice to let grief recede and fade away with time and grace, members of Peaceful Tomorrows struggle to imbue their bereavement with productive potential and, in the process, model new political subjectivities for themselves and those who share experiences of trauma and grief akin to what the members continue to endure in the aftermath of their loved ones' deaths.

Yet the organization's work is by no means an undertaking free of complex challenges. This is especially the case, since a significant and long-standing critique of the kind of Western humanitarian endeavour taken up by Peaceful Tomorrows draws attention to its (inadvertent) complicity in forms of imperialistic violence, which are persistently masked by the very rhetorics of universalism, sameness, mutuality, and benevolence employed by the discourses of humanitarian aid itself. For instance, in his compelling interrogation of, and challenge to, the democratic thrust of the North American-based "Me to We" social enterprise that aims to raise funds for the non-profit humanitarian agency Free the Children, David Jefferess argues that the "'Me to We' phenomenon [...] impedes social action by foreclosing the possibility of recognizing how 'we' are implicated in the structures that produce suffering and inequality" (19) around the world. Furthermore, Jefferess goes on to say that the "Me to We" enterprise—though intended to raise greater awareness of global poverty and commended by young people and educators alike as a life-changing and eye-opening experience for participants—"prevents us from recognizing how we might connect ourselves to the ideals and strategies of social movements around the world that seek not aid but the transformation of these structures of inequality and the worldviews that normalize them" (19).

Taking into account this compelling interrogation of, and challenge to, the democratic thrust of humanitarian projects, in this chapter I also discuss how, in its desire to pursue non-violent solutions to world conflicts, the Peaceful Tomorrows group itself risks committing a symbolic kind of imperialistic violence; this, through its claims of commonality with victims of other historical traumas—victims disproportionately racialized as “Other”—and its conflation of members’ experiences of loss from the “9/11” attacks with the grief experienced by displaced and marginalized people.³³ I contend that this type of violence, though symbolic in nature, carries with it real and disturbing consequences, not the least of which is the eclipsing and silencing of the critical agency, sustained forms of resistance, and vibrant modes of activism possessed and enacted by the marginalized groups the organization insistently claims would benefit greatly from their representation and support.

In spite of the rather colonialist framework within which the Peaceful Tomorrows group, as a humanitarian organization, is at times seen to operate, I maintain that the group’s grassroots peace advocacy is still a viable example of a kind of public pedagogy that does not regard what Achille Mbembe calls “necropolitics”—that is, “the generalized instrumentalization of human existence and the material destruction of human bodies and populations” (14)—as the only solutions to conflicts. Rather, the group instead looks to the productive potential of the politics of memory to transform the deaths from the attacks “into the birth of a new paradigm for the planet” (Potorti 9). In light of how

³³ I speak in particular about marginalized people whose plight, as I have commented earlier in my discussion of Emmanuel Ortiz’s spoken word piece “A Moment of Silence,” varyingly implicates the foreign policies and interventions of Western states.

Peaceful Tomorrows members advocate for non-violent and non-retaliatory responses to global conflicts triggered by forms of both state and non-state terrorism alike, the organization's impassioned *calls for peace* are, in fact, themselves *acts of peace*. This is perhaps the most salient way in which their "9/11" memorial work is also an instance of public pedagogy geared towards the cultivation of alternative, non-violent responses to global terrorism.

In the pages that follow, I explore the history of the organization's formation, its founding tenets, as well as the various approaches to peace advocacy that the organization's group members embark upon to demonstrate how their own traumatic experience of grief and mourning—rather than moving them to vindictive calls for vengeance or jingoistic American patriotism—instead propels them to actively work towards preventing global powers such as the United States from further inflicting politically motivated, militarized violence upon other civilians around the world. As member Anne Mulderry explains in an interview, the Peaceful Tomorrows group honours the memory of loved ones by “working and struggling to create a world where there's less [...] loss due to political hatred or personal hatred.” According to Mulderry, this undertaking “is [...] the most wonderful monument of all.” What I seek to demonstrate in this exploration of Peaceful Tomorrows is the organization's capacity to marshal its public memorial work towards counter-memorial goals that reach beyond the immediacy of nursing personal loss; this, in order to mobilize its desire to endorse peaceful solutions to world conflicts and thereby help ensure the future well-being of its global Others—

especially those in Afghanistan and Iraq, whose lives have become more imperiled since the U.S.-led “War on Terror.”

It is first necessary to outline a brief history of the organization’s inception, especially because such an account provides greater insight into the group’s overall aims and objectives. Comprised of loved ones of those who perished in the airplane hijackings over New York City, the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., and Shanksville, Pennsylvania on September 11, 2001, the organization collectively regards “[t]he deaths of [its] family members [...] not as a legacy of hatred and fear but as a challenge to aspire to better things” (8). The founding of the September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows organization can be traced to public statements made by various victims’ families through local newspapers as well as television and radio broadcasts across the United States in the days following the attacks. Despite the geographical distance that separated the families from one another, a striking commonality that bound the public statements together was their unequivocal opposition to the Bush administration’s calls for retributive justice for the “9/11” victims, which would be pursued in the name of their loved ones through aggressive military mobilization against the nation’s perceived enemies in the “War on Terror.” Another feature shared by the statements that victims’ families made in the aftermath of the attacks was the concern that the U.S. government’s plans to avenge itself would in no way end terrorism, but rather create more violence in the future and inflict further and worse forms of suffering upon other people around the world. Among the first of these statements that gained public attention on the Internet and eventually on other forms of news media was “Not in Our Son’s Name,” written by bereaved parents

Phyllis and Orlando Rodriguez. The couple, whose son Greg perished in the South Tower of the World Trade Center, primarily circulated the statement by e-mail to friends and relatives of the family on September 14, just three days after the attacks took place. However, like many of the other statements that were initially written to and published in local newspapers by family members of other “9/11” victims, the e-mail soon found its way to various websites around the world (22). In their statement, Greg Rodriguez’s parents warn of the troubling consequences of choosing war as a vindictive response to the loss of loved ones in the attacks:

We see our hurt and anger reflected among everybody we meet. We cannot pay attention to the daily flow of news about this disaster. But we read enough of the news to sense that our government is heading in the direction of violent revenge, with the prospect of sons, daughters, parents, friends in distant lands dying, suffering, and nursing further grievances against us. It is not the way to go. It will not avenge our son’s death. Not in our son’s name. (qtd. in Potorti 22)

Their increasingly publicized opposition to the Bush administration’s rhetoric of seeking vengeance on behalf of the United States in general, and the “9/11” victims and their families in particular, gradually gained the attention of American mainstream media—so much so, that according to organization member David Potorti, “CNN’s Maria Hinojosa, who would emerge as the only American television journalist consistently giving voice to alternative views on the war, saw the statement and interviewed the Rodriguez’s [*sic*] for a segment on the September 25 edition of the network’s *Live at Daybreak*” (24).

Around the same time, in other parts of the United States, other family members were wrestling with the ways in which President Bush was appropriating their loved ones’ deaths for propagandistic purposes. Rita Lasar, in particular, objected to Bush

publicly mentioning her brother Abe Zelmanowitz's last moments on the 27th floor of the North Tower for rhetorical and patriotic effect. In one of his speeches, Bush says the following in regards to Lasar's brother, who willingly opted to stay with his friend Ed Beyea until firefighters could help Beyea, who was in a wheelchair, descend the fire exit stairs:

It is said that adversity introduces us to ourselves [...] This is true of a nation as well. In this trial, we have been reminded, and the world has seen, that our fellow Americans are generous and kind, resourceful and brave. We see our national character in rescuers working past exhaustion; in long lines of blood donors; in thousands of citizens who have asked to work and serve in any way possible. And we have seen our national character in eloquent acts of sacrifice. Inside the World Trade Center, one man who could have saved himself stayed until the end at the side of his quadriplegic friend[.] (qtd. in Potorti 26)

Although Bush praised Zelmanowitz for his selfless decision to stay behind, Lasar was quick to observe that “[her] country [was] going to use [her] brother’s heroism as justification to kill innocent people in a place far away from here” (qtd. in Potorti 27). It was this realization that her brother’s death “was going to be a justification for somebody else dying” which motivated Lasar to write a letter to the editor of the *New York Times* on September 17. Lasar concludes her editorial letter by remarking that “[i]t is in my brother’s name and mine that I pray that we, this country that has been so deeply hurt, not do something that will unleash forces we will not have the power to call back” (qtd. in Potorti 27). Like Phyllis and Orlando Rodriguez and other victims’ families who were also in the process of publicly voicing their concerns over the U.S. government’s appropriation of their loved one’s deaths, Lasar’s personal struggle with loss became increasingly politicized the more she shared her opinions as a “9/11” victim’s family member. Her subsequent guest appearance on Amy Goodman’s *Democracy Now in*

Exile on Pacifica Radio Network further immersed her in public debates about the attacks and the impending “War on Terror” that would eventually be waged by the United States against Afghanistan starting in October 2001 (27).

Despite the individual family members’ increasing involvement in public discussions about the U.S. government’s intended response to the attacks, it was not until the human rights group Voices in the Wilderness collected the various statements by “9/11” family members opposed to the war, posted them on their website, and later invited the statements’ authors to join with other activist groups in a peace walk (35), that the “goal of organizing a coalition of [“9/11” victims’] families opposed to the war” (36) began to take shape. By December 2001, “the consensus among the family members” was “that they’d like to keep going” in their desire to “organize as a group” (52), a collective whose cohesion would be founded upon the members’ unanimous refusal to allow the American government to appropriate the deaths of their loved ones as the U.S. government’s rationale for waging the “War on Terror.” Furthermore, owing to their intimate experience of losing family to horrific, violent, and highly publicized deaths that the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 brought about, it was widely agreed upon that the organization would, in principle, also commit itself to speaking out against war, nuclear armament, and other aggressively militaristic responses to geopolitical conflicts across the world.

The first joint statement ever written by the organization communicates the group’s mandate by using the language of claiming rights: “We are claiming our right to demand that alternatives to war be considered, explored, and enacted; [...] Claiming our

right to spare innocent families in Afghanistan and other nations from feeling the pain and loss that we have felt in our own families” and “Claiming our right to express a common bond with other innocent victims of terrorism and tragedy all over the world without being labeled unpatriotic or un-American” (49-51). This strategy of articulating the organization’s central objectives through the language of “claiming rights” suggests a deliberate desire on the part of the “Peaceful Tomorrows” group to align their (inter)national work with aspects of the civil rights movement of the 1960s, which sought to secure the rights of all people—especially those belonging to racial minority groups—through equal protection by the law. Additionally, that the organization identifies as a peace group also echoes the ways in which the civil rights movement sought to effect profound political and social changes through non-violent, peace-able forms of resistance. But perhaps the most prominent feature that demonstrates the organization’s conscious decision to align itself with the legacies of the 1960s civil rights movement—indeed, even to identify *as one of* the legacies of the civil rights movement—lies in the members’ act of naming their organization “The September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows.” The idea to incorporate the phrase “peaceful tomorrows” in the organization’s official name was, as group members attest, inspired by a February 1967 speech delivered by civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr. on the topic of the Vietnam War (54-55). In “The Casualties of the Vietnam War,” Martin Luther King, Jr. argues that in addition to the gruesome physical casualties of the war in Vietnam, “[t]he casualties of principles and values are equally disastrous and injurious. Indeed, they are ultimately more harmful because they are self-perpetuating. If the casualties of principle

are not healed, the physical casualties will continue to mount” (King par. 2). As he concludes his speech opposing the continued involvement of the United States in the Vietnam War, King remarks:

The past is prophetic in that it asserts loudly that wars are poor chisels for carving out *peaceful tomorrows*. One day we must come to see that peace is not merely a distant goal that we seek, but a means by which we arrive at that goal. We must pursue peaceful ends through peaceful means. *How much longer must we play at deadly war games before we heed the plaintive pleas of the unnumbered dead and maimed of past wars?* (par. 29, my emphases)

Beyond deriving from King’s words a memorable name under which participating “9/11” victims’ family members could organize and work towards the goals of their peace activism, the group’s primary rationale for opposing the Bush administration’s “War on Terror”—that is, its unwillingness to allow the continued militarized response to the attacks to negatively impact yet more lives in other parts of the world—is also rather powerfully communicated through this particular speech written by King thirty-four years before September 11, 2001. Furthermore, the organization’s belief that “[t]he greatest danger [the United States] faced” in the aftermath of the attacks “was [...] the danger of ignoring the truth that the only way to triumph over hate and destruction is to not hate and to not destroy” (September 11th Families 139) also mirrors King’s concern in his essay that the continued involvement of the United States in Vietnam would undermine not only American integrity in the eyes of the international community, but also pose an obstacle to the achievement of world peace. Of course, in the context of the Peaceful Tomorrows group, King’s call to put an end to American involvement in Vietnam is supplanted by the organization’s more recent plea for the United States to retract its

decision to invade and occupy Afghanistan and Iraq as retaliation for the September 11, 2001 attacks.

The peace work undertaken by the Peaceful Tomorrows group provides salient examples of how invocations of loss through collective remembrance point to the porous nature of the public/private divide. In doing so, the organization's peace work brings to the fore the intimate connections between individual loss and the public remembrance of historical traumas. It also facilitates politicized personal engagements with the legacies these traumatic experiences leave in their wake. It can thus be said that the organization's memorial gestures challenge the disavowals of grief in public discourses about the attacks. In fact, the group enacts Butler's proposal to "make grief itself into a resource for politics," and thereby lends credence to her argument that grieving does not mean that one is "resigned to inaction" (Butler 30). In speaking out against the government and mainstream media rhetoric of vengeance, and by taking up the slogan "Not in Our Names" as a means of expressing the organization's opposition to the employment of their loved ones' deaths and their own grief as rationales for the "War on Terror," the September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows not only collectively invokes its members' individual losses in a political context, but also publicly opposes state attempts to appropriate the deaths from the September 11, 2001 attacks for propagandistic purposes. In doing so, the organization makes visible and poses challenges to the conventional connections that have been made between the social act of public mourning and the project of nation-building. In other words, while the majority of "9/11" commemorations in the aftermath of the attacks sought to reinforce American

unity and the steadfastness and continued dominance of the United States in the face of adversity and tragedy, the Peaceful Tomorrows group undertook their work of mourning the dead by seeking to expand the bounds of who and what is grievable in America in particular, and the West in general. Their peace work effectively differentiates their memorial response to their loved ones' deaths from those propelled by the need for vengeance and a greater sense of security: "While September 11 remains for many the genesis of new fears, new suspicions, and a redoubling of efforts to secure themselves and their possessions, for us it was a day that demolished the belief that we could ever be truly independent of each other," and "a day when we realized that our weapons could no longer protect us. And that our children would never be safe unless unseen children on the other side of the world were safe as well" (Potorti 8).

The Peaceful Tomorrows group has also garnered further public attention through trips that specific members have taken to Afghanistan and later to Iraq. These trips were facilitated by Global Exchange, a not-for-profit NGO based in the United States that offers tourists "Reality Tours" intended to raise awareness about living conditions in countries beset by extreme poverty and/or human rights abuses. Global Exchange characterizes the services it offers tourists as a means of promoting social justice. Upon the invitation of Global Exchange, members of the Peaceful Tomorrows group embarked upon these trips prior to and during the earlier years of the "War on Terror." Through these trips, the organization sought to demonstrate to the international community that rather than seeking revenge and calling for more deaths, some bereaved Americans—and, at that, some family members of "9/11" victims—were starkly opposed to the Bush

administration's militaristic response to the attacks and were actively seeking ways to make their resistance and solidarity with civilian victims of the war in Afghanistan publicly known. The organization's attempts to raise awareness about the plight of Afghan civilians during the "War on Terror" helped contribute to the creation of a small private relief fund for Afghan families who lost loved ones as a result of the American military's bombing campaigns (246). In addition to the establishment of this admittedly modest private relief fund, the Peaceful Tomorrows organization has strongly urged the U.S. federal government under both George Bush, Jr. and Barack Obama to officially create a victim relief fund for Afghan and Iraqi civilian casualties in the "War on Terror."³⁴ The group has not only supported and helped fund a Global Exchange survey

³⁴ This undertaking proves quite crucial, especially since October 2006, when NATO "took command of operations in Afghanistan" (Synovitz par. 1). According to Ron Synovitz, Sarah Holewinski, the Executive Director for the U.S.-based Campaign for Innocent Victims in Conflict (CIVIC), claims that "[i]n Iraq and Afghanistan, millions of dollars are given [by the U.S. government] to help rebuild communities," and that "the U.S. military has a compensation mechanism—which means as soon as your house is bombed or you lose a family member, you can file a claim with the U.S. military. And that gets you a symbolic gesture of dignifying that loss. Now that NATO has taken over Afghanistan, NATO doesn't have these mechanisms" (pars. 10-11). But even though the U.S. military had a compensation mechanism in place for Afghan and Iraqi civilian victims, this mechanism was still not enough to sufficiently address the need for reparations of victims; nor did it automatically translate to an easily accessible victims' fund for those who needed aid in Afghanistan. According to the Peaceful Tomorrows group: "in July 2002, State Department officials [expressed] concerns over admitting to civilian casualties and setting a precedent for future assistance [, which may in turn be seen as] overshadow[ing] the benefits to American security" (Potorti 246). Furthermore, the compensation to which Holewinski may be referring might have to do with elements of a supplemental appropriations bill for 2002 and 2003 which called for "repairing homes of Afghan citizens that were damaged as a result of military operations,' and further, that 'assistance [...] be made available to communities and families that were adversely affected by the military operations'" (246). Commenting on what seemed to have been positive developments in the struggle for establishing a legislated Afghan civilian victims' fund in the United States, the Peaceful Tomorrows group observes that

of Afghan civilian casualties since the U.S. invasion, but also contributed resources for the publication of *Afghan Portraits of Grief: The Civilian/Innocent Victims of U.S. Bombing in Afghanistan*. Citing the ways in which the *New York Times* “Portraits of Grief” obituary series “communicated the preciousness of each individual and helped to underscore the utter horror of the attacks” by making “the human costs of the atrocity [...] real” (Global Exchange 3), this document, in contrast, seeks to rectify the “scant attention [paid] in the U.S. media” to “the Afghan civilians who died during the U.S.-led military campaign,” and opposes general understanding of these losses “as ‘collateral damage’—a dehumanizing term that denies their humanity [...] and amounts to a terrible refusal to acknowledge Afghans as fellow human beings” (3). To this end, the document provides the results of Global Exchange’s survey and, “in an effort to honor the lives of the innocent victims and [...] acknowledge the suffering of those who survived them,” offers personalized accounts of some of those who have died or (at times, barely) survived the various U.S. bombing raids in Afghanistan (3).³⁵ Coupled with the intention to “humanize” the Afghan victims and their families, the *Afghan Portraits of Grief* document and the arduous investigation that produced it were also “intended” by Global

the supplemental appropriations bills do not in any way specify the forms that the stated “compensations” would take (246).

³⁵ In terms of the survey conducted by Global Exchange, the document is firm in its insistence that the figures provided in the survey results are extremely conservative, and hence do not at all offer a comprehensive assessment of the U.S. invasion’s impact upon the entire country of Afghanistan. According to the survey, “at least 824 Afghan civilians were killed between October 7 and January 2002 by the U.S.-led bombing campaign. However, it was impossible for our survey to be exhaustive and comprehensive. Continued bombing and inaccessibility prevented our surveyors from reaching many of the affected provinces. What we were able to document, are some of the circumstances of those 824 civilian deaths and the tragic repercussions they had on families” (3).

Exchange and by extension, Peaceful Tomorrows, “to disclose the human costs of the conflict and generate support for programs to aid those people whose families were harmed by the U.S. military campaign” (3).

Despite the well-meaning desire of both organizations to foster greater awareness of the plight of Afghan civilians in the wake of the “War on Terror,” however, the practice of social justice tourism that enabled the Peaceful Tomorrows members to visit Afghanistan and bear witness to the suffering of Afghan civilians has also come under criticism. Gada Mahrouse, for instance, has specifically critiqued the “Reality Tours” offered by Global Exchange. In her analysis, she notes that “what sets [these tours] apart is their explicit aim of offering tourists a glimpse at certain ‘realities’” (374). Mahrouse further comments that “as their name suggests, these tours aim to show, rather than to conceal, the harsh realities of poverty and oppression that many of the local and indigenous communities in the global South face, as well as displaying their agency and resourcefulness” (374). “Framed as educational vacations,” Mahrouse goes on to say, “a Reality Tour consists of visiting various local communities to see and learn about the social conditions people live in” (374). Mahrouse also quotes Global Exchange’s website as stating that tourists who travel with them can become “citizen ambassadors” who can build “people-to-people ties” and, upon returning from their educational vacation, “act as eyes and ears for the outside world” (qtd. in Mahrouse 374). Her critical analysis of the kind of social justice tourism offered by Global Exchange revolves around “questions of race and class privilege and positioning,” particularly because tourism of any sort “is concerned with the voluntary movement of people who have the resources of money,

time, and official documents to undertake leisure/educational journeys” (380). Regarding Global Exchange’s specialized tourist program, Mahrouse further observes that “the tours paradoxically obscure the most foundational of realities: the fact that the participants are there as consumers” (385). Though it is beyond the current scope of this project to fully engage in a detailed discussion about social justice tourism, it does warrant mentioning that this type of tourism, “for all its appeals to world peace and the need for intercultural understanding, [...] continues to feed off social, political and economic differences” (Graham Huggan qtd. in Mahrouse 386). Furthermore, as Mahrouse suggests in relation to “well-intentioned transnational travel,” the “good intentions and collaborative efforts” that underpin this type of travel “obscure power relations insofar as they falsely imply that a ‘common ground’ is being shared” (386-87) between the locals and the tourists. It is this latter aspect of extant criticisms regarding socially responsible tourism that will inform my own critique of Peaceful Tomorrows’ transnational activist work later in this chapter.

In the intervening years, the public profile of the September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows as an organization striving towards the achievement of global peace has further increased as a result of its ongoing collaborative work with other activist groups across the world—most notably, with *hibakusha* (survivors of the U.S. atomic bombs that were dropped on Japan during World War II) who are members of the Hiroshima and Nagasaki Alliance for Nuclear Weapons Abolition (HANWA and NANWA, respectively). Also, the group’s intensive utilization of the internet and various social media platforms has helped further publicize and gain support for its

various projects and campaigns.³⁶ For example, in addition to establishing greater awareness of the impact of the “War on Terror” upon Afghan and Iraqi civilians and calling for a victims’ relief fund for those countries’ affected citizens, in the approximately twelve years since its founding, the organization’s website and social media platforms have spread word about the many other projects and campaigns that Peaceful Tomorrows currently supports. These projects and campaigns include the following: creating partnerships with various social justice advocacy groups across America to battle Islamophobia; calling for greater transparency in relation to the military commissions at the Guantanamo Bay detention camp; supporting the closing of the prison at Guantanamo Bay to restore the rule of law; lobbying against legislation that would negatively affect immigrants to the United States and curtail civil liberties; and establishing the International Network for Peace, which the Peaceful Tomorrows’ website describes in its “Campaigns” section as “a project that grew out of Peaceful Tomorrows’ groundbreaking international conference ‘Civilian Casualties, Civilian Solutions,’ which took place on September 11, 2006, the five-year anniversary of 9/11.” The group goes on to state that the International Network for Peace is “a truly

³⁶ In addition to their website, which provides a detailed archive of the organization’s governing documents, timeline, awards, recognitions, and e-newsletters, the Peaceful Tomorrows group also maintains regularly updated accounts on popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube. The organization’s YouTube account (“9/11 Stories”) is used primarily to disseminate videos of members sharing their personal reflections on the September 11, 2001 attacks and their individual experiences participating in the organization’s various peace activism projects. The Facebook (“September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows”) and Twitter (“PeacefulTomorro”) accounts maintained by the organization, on the other hand, mainly keep subscribers and followers abreast of upcoming projects and activities that are either organized or supported by the Peaceful Tomorrows group.

international network of organizations from 17 different countries, formed by survivors of political violence to promote justice, reconciliation and genuine peace.” On its own website, the International Network for Peace proclaims the network’s “dedicat[ion] to identifying and addressing the root causes of violence, and to promoting non-violence as the most effective strategy for resolving conflict.” As evidenced by its involvement in a variety of collaborative projects and campaigns, the Peaceful Tomorrows organization certainly demonstrates its central goal of cultivating post-“9/11” social justice movements in both national and global contexts.

“Warmongering” and the “Peaceful Tomorrows” Organization: Not in Their Names

Former President Bush’s post-“9/11” insistence upon waging an indefinite war on terror must be read as a symptom of his administration’s eight-year militarized privileging of preventive war over preemptive war when managing conflicts abroad. To briefly clarify, in the language of military conduct and international law, “preemptive war” is the strategic act of striking first before a known, *imminent* attack takes place. The *Oxford Canadian Dictionary* definition of the word “preempt” is to “act in advance to render (something) unnecessary [or] ineffective.” Implicit in the concept of preemptive war is confirmed evidence that one is about to be attacked, and one’s best defensive tactic is the advanced timing of countermeasures against the incoming attack. In the instance of preventive war, however, the “enemy” may or *may not* be planning to launch an attack—and in some cases the “enemy” may yet remain unidentified, yet it is this absence of

certainty or clarification that serves as the very rationale for waging war against anything that rouses suspicion, absent any direct provocation from a particular party. Here a larger emphasis is placed on the absolute avoidance of risk, or of being rendered vulnerable to the world beyond one's borders at any given time. Prior to the event of "9/11," the waging of preventive war by one sovereign state against another was largely regarded as a violation of customary international law, and if considered the only viable option, required the approval of the United Nations Security Council. As stated in *A more secure world: Our shared responsibility*, the United Nations Executive Summary Report of the Secretary-General's High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change: "The UN Charter provides a clear framework for the use of force [...] Long-established customary international law makes it clear that States can take military action as long as the threatened attack is *imminent*, no other means would deflect it, and the action is proportionate [...] States that *fear the emergence of distant threats* have an obligation to bring these concerns to the Security Council" (4, my emphases).

In the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks, however, and with a remarkable touch of media savvy, the underlying doctrines of preventive military engagement became increasingly legitimated and deemed relatively sound (and therefore acceptable) combat tactics when yoked to the "War on Terror" led by the United States. Unlike other wars, this war rallies against the faceless and landless concept of "terror," has nevertheless spread from Afghanistan to Iraq, is still ongoing twelve years since the fall of the World Trade Center towers, and also continues to redefine American national identity on the global stage. Playing on the post-"9/11" atmosphere of fear and terror that

permeated America in the weeks and months after the attacks, the United States government under President Bush appropriated the images and memories of “9/11” in the interests of justifying a state of emergency, during which the issue of the potential illegality of specific acts of war (such as engaging in preventive combat) was glossed over for the sake of ensuring homeland security and shoring up nationalistic fervour. The Bush administration succeeded in shaping dominant public memory of “9/11” as the justification for launching preventive war against its perceived and imagined enemies, who were at worst made to fall under the rubric of “evil terrorist,” and at best categorized as “suspected enemy combatants” to be detained indefinitely (as in the case of the Guantánamo Bay detention camps in Cuba),³⁷ and stripped of their right to *habeas corpus* (as was the case with Canadian citizen Omar Khadr, one of the youngest captives detained, interrogated, tortured, and imprisoned at the Guantánamo Bay detention camps).³⁸ Furthermore, the Republican Party’s controversial use of images from the September 11, 2001 attacks for Bush’s re-election campaign in 2004 utilized the iconic status of “9/11” as a means of swaying American sentiment and convincing the majority of the populace to vote for Bush for a second term as President. This particular public

³⁷ In *Chain of Command: The Road from 9/11 to Abu Ghraib*, Seymour Hersh provides a detailed account of the U.S. government’s detainment of “enemy combatants” at this particular detention camp. Also, Alison Howell examines the conflicting narratives of suicide at Guantánamo Bay provided by the Bush administration and human rights groups, and the conditions informing these suicides at the detention camp in her article “Constituting Terrorist Pathologies: Narratives of Suicide at Guantanamo Bay.”

³⁸ For details surrounding the controversy of Khadr’s detention at Guantánamo Bay, see, for example, Alex Neve’s article “Canada must bring Khadr home without further delay,” and the October 2012 Amnesty International article on Khadr’s repatriation to Canada, entitled “USA repatriates youngest Guantanamo detainee to Canada.”

relations undertaking sought to characterize Bush as a formidable leader who, through the Bush Doctrine,³⁹ did not sit idly by as terror swept through the homeland, but instead went above and beyond the public's expectations by waging a war on the concept of terror itself and thereby—as this claim goes—rendering America “safer.” Of course, his administration's use of the Guantánamo Bay detention camps in Cuba as a means of circumventing the rights accorded by the Geneva Convention to detained individuals in times of armed conflict demonstrated the extent to which the United States' all-encompassing “War on Terror” threatened to bring about, and at times even enacted, gross violations of international human rights legislation. The post-“9/11” framing of preventive war as the norm rather than the exception in dealing with supranational conflicts not only marks a profoundly critical shift in the way war is now “legally” conducted around the world; equally important, the fear-saturated representation of “9/11” as the harbinger of worse specters of terrorism to come forecloses the future

³⁹ Mackubin Thomas Owens explains that one of the principles of the Bush Doctrine “is the recognition that after 9/11 the traditional approaches to threats—deterrence, containment, and *ex post facto* responses—are inadequate when dealing with terrorists and rogue regimes seeking to acquire weapons of mass destruction. Thus, under the Bush Doctrine, the United States reserves the right to undertake *preventive* war. While international law and norms have always acknowledged the right of a state to launch a *preemptive* strike against another when an attack by the latter is imminent, it has rejected any right of preventive war. President Bush argued that in an age of globalization, catastrophic terrorism, and weapons of mass destruction, this distinction had become meaningless. If an attack is imminent, it is now too late to preempt it” (26). Owens goes on to argue that “[t]he Bush Doctrine is only the latest manifestation of the fact that U.S. national interest has always been concerned with more than simple security—it has always had both a commercial and an ideological component,” and that “the Bush Doctrine is in fact well within the mainstream of U.S. foreign policy and very much in keeping with the vision of America's founding generation, as well as the practice of the Early Republic's statesmen” (25). For Owens, “the suggestion that the Bush Doctrine is an innovation attributable to neo-conservatism alone is simply a-historical” (29).

through the normalization of the “War on Terror,” and what Richard J. Bernstein refers to as the “abuse of evil”—more specifically, the frequent “appeal to [the rhetoric of] evil” that is “used as a political tool to obscure complex issues, to block genuine thinking, and to stifle public discussion and debate” (Bernstein viii).

Indeed, the connections the U.S. government made between the September 11, 2001 attacks and the necessity of preventive war would have been neither effective nor convincing without the work of memory and the political power of public remembrance and collective mourning. Nevertheless, the Bush administration worked quickly to frame the collective grief felt over the attacks as a hindrance to politics by urging the American public to stop mourning and start acting.⁴⁰ In the very midst of grieving their personal losses, however, members of the September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows recognized a critical opportunity to bridge the state-imposed divide that anxiously separated mourning from action. For organization members, dwelling with their privatized grief in public was not a cumbersome hindrance to undertaking political action; rather, it was a necessary condition for effecting the kinds of significant social and political changes they felt were sorely needed in the aftermath of the attacks.

In “Not In Our Names,” an article that appears in *War With No End*—an anthology of essays published in 2007 by Stop the War Coalition and United for Peace and Justice—the “Peaceful Tomorrows” group outlines their stance against U.S. military

⁴⁰ Ironically enough, the kinds of meaningful actions the Bush administration then insisted were necessary to unify and strengthen America required the widespread circulation of mourning and grief to instantiate them.

mobilization overseas as a means of exacting justice and avenging the deaths of those who perished in the “9/11” attacks. The article quotes the organization’s official statement on the Iraq War, and it is well worth quoting at length here:

September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows condemns unconditionally the illegal, immoral, and unjustified US-led military action in Iraq. As family members of September 11th victims, we know how it feels to experience “shock and awe”, and we do not want other innocent families to suffer the trauma and grief that we have endured. While we also condemn the brutality of Saddam Hussein’s regime, it does not justify the brutality, death and destruction being visited upon Iraq and its citizens by our own government.

[...]

This war will not make America safer. On the contrary, it has already resulted in heightened anti-American sentiment around the world, and is likely to promote further terrorist attacks, not just today, but years from today. It will not protect American families from another September 11.

Therefore, members of September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows will continue to oppose this war and to draw attention to its civilian victims. We will demand compensation for them, as we did for innocent civilians killed and injured by our bombs in Afghanistan. These casualties must be included as we tally the costs of choosing to wage war.

Finally, we will keep the faith with millions of people across the United States and around the world who have formed a truly international community favoring peace and declaring this war immoral. We are confident that, in spite of the events of today, the wisdom of their views will prevail as the 21st century unfolds, and as we continue to build a global community that honors humanity, keeps families whole, and renders war obsolete. (September 11th Families 141-143)

The central tenets communicated by the Peaceful Tomorrows organization in the extensive passage I cite above are notable in at least two ways, both of which are at odds with the dominant, militarized discourse on the “War on Terror,” as well as with the Bush administration’s characterization of the American people (specifically the “9/11” victims’ family members) as revenge-seeking supporters of indefinite war. First, in place of the

American government's armed, unilateral response to the "9/11" attacks, the Peaceful Tomorrows group adopts a more nuanced, diplomatic approach—one that carefully considers from a historical standpoint the long-term consequences of warfare and occupation for both the United States and the countries it invades. At the heart of the group's belief that warfare is not the solution to international conflicts is the members' collective desire to prevent other civilians—regardless of their geographical location—from experiencing the anguish they felt from losing a loved one to spectacular, "shock and awe" displays of violence. Members of the Peaceful Tomorrows organization refuse to inhabit the over-simplified caricature of grieving "9/11" family members who *must* be feeling vengeful over their loss—a caricatured subjectivity ascribed to them by mainstream media with the help of the crusade-inflected rhetoric bandied about by Bush during his many speeches in the wake of the attacks. The members of the organization choose instead the more difficult route of letting their bereavement transform not only their sense of belonging in the world, but also how they imagine themselves living (better) with others regardless of their race, ethnicity, citizenship, or religion. That they strive to take an active part in building a "global community that honors humanity, keeps families whole, and renders war obsolete" (143) speaks volumes vis-à-vis their disavowal of the Bush administration's claims to righteousness through his waging of the "War on Terror" in the name of "9/11" victims and their families. According to the organization, the crisis of terrorism that took place in America on September 11, 2001 is a crisis that ought to bring together every human being as a citizen of the entire world, rather than establish or further aggravate enmities between nation-states and their respective

inhabitants. But given the critiques I raised earlier regarding the ways in which the attacks have been implicitly framed by Judith Butler's work as the default (and hence, by implication, universal) paradigm of human vulnerability, the organization's assessment of the event's capacity to unite a global (yet U.S.-centric) community of vulnerability is, admittedly, rather idealizing.

Secondly, by openly counting civilian deaths among the casualties of this particular war and insisting upon their equal eligibility to be compensated for wrongful damage, suffering, and death, Peaceful Tomorrows members illustrate their unwillingness to discriminate between human lives and deaths based on race, ethnicity, and/or political, national, and religious affiliation. They aim to provide support to everyone who has been tragically affected and devastated by state decisions to engage in armed combat, and seek to establish formal channels for seeking reparations for the civilian populations whose livelihood and very lives the "War on Terror" has further disrupted and—ironically enough—*terrorized*.

In light of its anti-war activism, no one is disposable in the eyes of the Peaceful Tomorrows group; and this viewpoint stands in stark opposition to the escalating global deployment of necropower when dealing with populations of designated "enemy" states. As I have briefly mentioned earlier, for Mbembe, necropower is a newly emerging form of governmentality the ultimate aim of which is the economic, political, and infrastructural destruction of specific populations designated as "enemies," to the point of disposing of these so-called enemies' lives and bodies for the sake of one's own survival.

Whereas Michel Foucault's concept of "biopower" is preoccupied with managing the preservation and reproduction of life through "strategies of control"—such as surveillance—"that transcend those institutional frameworks which were important for societies at a time when domination was founded on punishment and discipline" (Gržinić par. 18), necropower concerns itself with debilitating "enemy" populations to (the point of) death. Mbembe distinguishes the concept of necropower from biopower thus:

This form of governmentality is different from the colonial *commandement*. The techniques of policing and discipline and the choice between obedience and simulation that characterized the colonial and postcolonial potentate are gradually being replaced by an alternative that is more tragic because more extreme. Technologies of destruction have become more tactile, more anatomical and sensorial, in a context in which the choice is between life and death. If power still depends on tight control over bodies (or on concentrating them in camps), the new technologies of destruction are less concerned with inscribing bodies within disciplinary apparatuses as inscribing them, when the time comes, within the order of the maximal economy now represented by the "massacre." (34)

Mbembe's concept of necropower encompasses both the act of killing and the act of letting die, since necropower targets civilians rather than soldiers and other military personnel who are conventionally designated as the defenders of one's country and citizens. The escalating and increasingly frequent deployment of necropower in global conflicts suggests that the practice of killing only soldiers and other members of the military—those deemed to be on the 'front lines' protecting the civic population whenever conflicts with foreign or external threats arise—is quickly falling out of fashion, at least in the world of warfare. This is no longer the case, as Mbembe's discussion elaborates, since the exercise of necropower can also entail the imposition of sanctions against a particular population: an act that, in conjunction with military

occupation, and in Mbembe's poignant words, "results in shutting down the enemy's life-support system" (31). The efficient termination of the enemy's life-support system obviously does not—indeed, *cannot*—distinguish between who is a soldier and who is a civilian, hence the "management of the multitudes" via what proves tantamount to massacre. The insights of Mbembe's analysis are borne out in the words of one of the Iraqi doctors that Peaceful Tomorrows members met during their visit to war-ravaged Baghdad in January 2003. While in the process of discussing with the group members the life-threatening and often fatal effects of the "War on Terror" on the civilian population in Iraq, the doctor went as far as telling the American peace group that "[s]anctions [...] are the real weapons of mass destruction" (qtd. in Potorti 195).

In the process of anticipating the wars that would eventually be waged against the alleged perpetrators of the "9/11" attacks, members of the Peaceful Tomorrows group were adamant in their conviction that pursuing retribution in the form of military campaigns overseas was neither the ethical nor practical response to an event that required less aggression and more empathy—especially towards civilians at risk of becoming collateral damage in the "War on Terror." On the surface, the organization's impassioned statement comes across as simply an eloquent formulation of the Christian dictum to resist taking an eye for an eye, even and especially when a grievous wrong has been visited upon oneself or one's person. While the organization's statement above may very well be inspired and informed by the gospels that constitute the philosophical foundations of Christian conduct, Roger Simon reads more closely into the organization's mobilization of their collective desire *not* to subject others to similar or worse forms of

loss and traumatism as they have had to endure. There is, for Simon, a more ethical rather than religious imperative at work behind the group's yearning to prevent further (necropolitical) violence from marring other bodies and lives as a fallout from the attacks, and this ethical imperative is animated through the mobilization of desire: in this case, the desire first of all to shield and protect others, whether stranger or close acquaintance, from being subjected to the pain of loss that the organization members continue to bear; and secondly, the desire to learn from, be transformed by, as well as transform others through, one's experience of loss. According to Simon, this desire bears with it the objective of

provok[ing] people to work together to protest an unsustainable spiral of death and destruction, telling their stories and supporting each other as they attempt to explore the political possibilities of new forms of civil society and counter-narratives to the hegemonic scripts of entrenched global antagonisms. (Simon, "Altering" 369)

Though far from sufficient to stop the waging of wars altogether, the voice of the Peaceful Tomorrows organization serves as a crucial affective and pedagogical intervention in the "War on Terror," especially at a time when the imposed disposability of Afghan and Iraqi lives and the purported ungrievability of their deaths functions to legitimize the waging and conduct of war through necropolitical means. Rather than mobilize their grief to help legitimate the Bush administration's "War on Terror," and thus contribute to the dehumanization of the Afghan and Iraqi lives counted among the "collateral damage" of the war, the members' affective response to their personal losses becomes for them an occasion to consider alternative ways of perceiving and relating with their global Others.

September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows, Public Pedagogy, and the Rhetoric of Humanitarianism

That Peaceful Tomorrows' labour of peace advocacy is founded upon and propelled by their relationships with their deceased loved ones as well as the violence that characterizes "9/11" is a testament to the organization's fashioning of a kind of critical involvement in public life that rejects the rampant, blind optimism of the "post-political" vision, which openly discourages the "mobiliz[ation of] passions towards democratic designs" (Mouffe 6). In spite of the members' strong misgivings about being thrust—and sometimes even willfully thrusting themselves—into the vicious maelstrom of media scrutiny,⁴¹ they acknowledge "the public nature of [their] losses" and through their

⁴¹ Not surprisingly, the most challenging and painful experience with the media the organization has encountered has been with mainstream talk shows like FOX News' *The O'Reilly Factor* and *The Oprah Winfrey Show*. For example, during organization member David Potorti's December 19, 2001 appearance on *The O'Reilly Factor*, Bill O'Reilly "compared the Taliban to Hitler and the Afghan people to the German people: Weren't the Germans responsible for Hitler? So aren't the Afghan people responsible for the Taliban? And shouldn't we take them out, just as we did the German people in World War II? 'You need to rethink this,' [O'Reilly] demanded. 'We had to defeat these people with as few casualties as possible. That's why we bombed.'" (Potorti 56). While Potorti felt frustrated that the organization's arguments were misrepresented by O'Reilly, fellow organization member Kelly Campbell felt that the group was forcefully silenced into merely making an appearance on *The Oprah Winfrey Show*: "A producer said this was not going to be a show where we talk about whether we should have bombed Afghanistan or not," Campbell noted. "She assured me that we *could* talk about Afghan civilian casualties, and so it seemed like it was worth it" (117, his emphasis). However, after the members walked on stage, "Oprah asked a single question of each of them," then "[t]he show moved on to other guests. Afterward, Campbell made no bones about how angry she was to one of the show's producers. 'She said, 'I told you it wasn't going to be political'" (118). Of her experience appearing on *Oprah*, Campbell says it "was the most restraining TV experience I ever had [as a member of the organization]. Everyone else was perfectly fine with me presenting my point of view in whatever way I wanted to. But I guess Oprah's in the entertainment business" (119).

involvement with Peaceful Tomorrows make “public statements that frequently [are] at odds with *conventional wisdom* about what families of the victims *must be* feeling” (Potorti 8, my emphasis). Despite the difficulty of negotiating the intimacy of their grief with the public nature of their loss, members dwell with the pain of their loved one’s deaths and resist not only its privatization, but also its depoliticization. As Anne Mulderry says:

This is the legacy I work to keep alive – a legacy of love. There are hard days, when I go into a dark place, where the temptation to despair is strong. Coming out of that place demands determination, as we all know [...] The wisdom, the leadership, the commitment of peacemakers allow me, not only to persevere, but to work to persuade others that peace-making – not war-making – is the only path to justice, and to the peaceful tomorrows we all long for. (148)

For Mulderry, it was because of her desire to honour her 33 year-old son Stephen, who died at the World Trade Center, that she initially became more actively involved in the organization’s peace advocacy work. “When the media interests surrounding the families of those who had died was [*sic*] at its peak,” Mulderry explains in an interview, “the question was whether to be available.” Despite the ongoing internal struggle of whether and to what degree one renders oneself vulnerable to media scrutiny, members of Peaceful Tomorrows are cognizant of the fact that the public’s interest in their loss provides a space as well as a captive audience for them to challenge and critique the U.S. administration’s hasty calls for military mobilization in memory of the victims. Mulderry describes the Peaceful Tomorrows members’ unique predicament in the public eye:

[W]hen I found Peaceful Tomorrows I realized that they had come to the same conclusion I had; that others’ interests in us as individuals was tied to our loss and the drama of our loss. And in some ways, it makes you want to cringe and hide, and we had to turn that desire to cringe and hide into a desire to be respectful of

the interests, and insistent that if they wanted to hear us speak that they listen to our words [...] I'm introduced as a person representing people who all lost a [family] member, and that's the dramatic interest that has come, and I have to accept it and I have to realize that they are interested in knowing who my son, Stephen, was, and who I am. And so any part of my message has to touch on that and give the folks listening—having the patience to listen—that I have to give them the foundation on which to say, well, I can understand this loss, I can understand this woman to a degree, and I can understand what she's giving as a message [...] And it was a hard thing to decide that I would stand up and tell strangers about my son, Stephen. It was a very hard thing. And the people of Peaceful Tomorrows, I could see it was a very hard thing for them[.] [...] What I hope that brings to understanding is that people are dying everyday [...] And that the loss that they feel, and the anger that they feel, is what the world feels, and what we do with that to prevent it from happening that matters. But adding to it is not really what you would want if you thought it through.

Despite the harrowing difficulty of allowing innumerable strangers to glimpse the intimate vicissitudes of their grief (which is now a possibility—thanks to the networking power of new media technologies), the Peaceful Tomorrows group members strategically accommodate this kind of publicity in order to provide or offer alternative ideas that challenge dominant discourses about the attacks. More specifically, the Peaceful Tomorrows group treats this new-found publicity as part of the legacy they inherit from their loved ones' deaths as a result of the attacks. Here Jacques Derrida's theorization of the concept of "inheritance" proves significant. In discussing the question of inheritance, Derrida addresses the ultimate responsibility bequeathed to the heir—the one who inherits, the one who is the recipient of the inheritance—and argues that "[a]n heir is not only someone who receives, *he or she is someone who chooses, and who takes the risk of deciding*" (Derrida and Roudinesco 8, my emphasis). Instead of privatizing their mourning work by protectively shielding their grief and preserving it in all its raw power along with anger and a desire for revenge, the organization openly seeks to transform

(American) public opinion about “9/11” and its corresponding support for war. They undertake this project of “9/11” (re)education in this way because as family members of victims whose highly publicized deaths became the focus of national as well as international news media, the family members’ engagements with the public about the “War on Terror” inevitably take a detour through their private experience of loss. It is this convergence between the national loss felt by the public in the wake of the attacks and the personal loss suffered by the organization members that helps them garner the sustained interest of others and render their peace advocacy more conducive to collective engagement.

There is no doubt that such gestures towards restorative rather than retributive justice established a sense of solidarity and common purpose among the members of the September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows organization, especially since the group’s inception was founded upon members’ collective opposition to the U.S. government’s swift militaristic response to the “9/11” attacks. It could also be said that some level of fellow-feeling was established even between the organization’s members and the global Others whom they met over the course of their international outreach; that is, individuals specifically from Afghanistan and later, Iraq, who considered themselves similarly touched by past historical traumas or violently affected by the event of “9/11” and its subsequent aftermaths. Indeed, the peace activism—which can also be viewed as the politically inflected and peace-oriented mourning work—that the organization has undertaken as a memorial tribute to their deceased loved ones is admirable; especially in light of the members’ courage in not only speaking publicly about their painful personal

losses, but also speaking in a time of rabid patriotism *against* U.S. national defense and foreign policies that (especially in the years immediately following the September 11, 2001 attacks) blatantly disregarded the value, well-being, and safety of non-American lives. Writing about the Peaceful Tomorrows group, Roger Simon comments that “members of this organization decided it was time to create community among their counterparts from around the globe and to work together to create a safer and more peaceful world for everyone” (Simon, “Altering” 367). Furthermore, he argues that “the politics” of the Peaceful Tomorrows group “suggests what it might mean to undergo the mobilization of desire and the challenge of responsibility when faced by the suffering of others” (369).

But what is the historical and racial trajectory of this sense of responsibility? Given the incommensurability of loss—and in the context of “9/11” and the “War on Terror,” of loss that results from historical trauma—what cannot be ignored in critiquing the work of the organization is the issue of whether it is, in the first place, ethical for the Peaceful Tomorrows group to view racialized and marginalized survivors of other historical traumas as “counterparts within a global community.”⁴² Declarations of

⁴² Writing in a Canadian context, David Jefferess presents a critique of the concepts of global citizenship and global community by arguing that the contemporary understanding of “global citizenship presupposes, or seems to enact, an end to race,” and in this way assumes the equality of all who are considered part of this global community. However, what Jefferess makes clear in his essay is that “[t]he *performance of benevolence* is not bound by race, but is indebted to, and rearticulates, race thinking in a way that *belies the ongoing dynamics of colonial racism*” (“Benevolence” 77 my emphases). I take up this interpretation of the vicissitudes of ‘global citizenship’ in my critique of the Peaceful Tomorrows group members’ declarations of solidarity and commonality with their Afghan and Iraqi counterparts.

solidarity and commonality become less feasible when, especially in the case of the most recent wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the suffering of Others that the organization claims is much the same as their own has been brought about by Western intervention and hegemonic influence across the world. In light of my assessment of the mourning work of the Peaceful Tomorrows group, it is my objective in the remaining pages of this chapter to demonstrate that even counter-memorial modes of “9/11” remembrance pedagogy like the one enacted by the organization, which challenges the further proliferation of violence and terror through calls for peace and claims of solidarity, must neither overlook nor underestimate the profoundly colonial framework that structures such benevolent, universalizing calls for pursuing peace and speaking on behalf of the so-called “voiceless” of the world. Indeed, my contention here is that overlooking or underestimating the extent to which colonialist discourses of benevolence and universality enact other forms of violence—which are no less insidious than military invasion and occupation—drastically undermines the efficacy of, and well-meaning intentions behind, “9/11” remembrance pedagogies seeking to effect more just forms of global relationality in a time of war and terror.

For the moment, I would like to read against the grain of the arguments I have put forward earlier, which insist upon the organization’s development of remembrance pedagogy that treats the experience of loss from the attacks as a basis for conducting a new kind of global politics based on a sense of compassion for, and common human vulnerability with, the Other. One aspect of the organization’s peace activism that I desire to trouble is the way in which the group’s utopic visions of achieving world peace

tend to gloss over long-standing global realities that not only shape and inform material differences among cultures and individuals, but also present serious barriers to engaging in meaningful and equitable dialogue. I am, of course, speaking of the vast racial, economic, social, and political divides that inevitably separate and differentiate the organization members from the global Others with whom they claim solidarity. The Peaceful Tomorrows group's claim that their victimized status as individuals bereaved by "9/11" forms the foundational basis for sharing common ground with the Afghan civilians is troubling, especially given the fact that this purported insistence upon commonality does not take into significant account the kinds of privileges that the group members can and do mobilize and benefit from, while their global Others cannot and do not. My objective in making this observation is not to put forward monolithic portrayals of the Peaceful Tomorrows group as "privileged" in contrast to the Afghan and Iraqi groups who "lack privilege," for there are of course significant types and gradations of diversity (e.g., gender, sexual, racial, ethnic, class, religious, educational, etc.) that exist within each group. I am instead arguing that the organization's claim to commonality does not sufficiently acknowledge the kinds of privileges that result from being associated with, in Thobani's words, "the world's only—and militarily unmatched—superpower" ("White Innocence" 135), which "occup[ies] and invad[es]" (134) as well as renders "vulnerable to violence [...] the impoverished societies that have been the victims of its colonial and imperial aggression" (135). In comparison to civilians in Afghanistan and Iraq, these privileges that are enjoyed and yet inadequately acknowledged or addressed by the Peaceful Tomorrows group manifest themselves, for example, in the

organization members' ability to live (as Americans) in relative freedom from the insecurities, hardships, losses, violence, and injuries that threaten those Afghan and Iraqi individuals forced to endure the prolonged military invasion and occupation of their homelands. More specifically, many citizens of both Afghanistan and Iraq have had to face harsh(er) living conditions in the face of widespread infrastructure losses caused by the military bombings and invasions conducted at the behest of global superpowers (in Afghanistan's case, this phenomenon dates back to the Cold War, when the Soviet Union invaded the country in 1979; and in the case of Iraq, the Gulf War in 1990 preceded America's second invasion of the country in 2003). The extent to which Afghanistan's infrastructure has eroded over decades of invasion and war was even remarked upon by Rita Lasar, one of Peaceful Tomorrows' founding members. Lasar observed that during the group's first day visiting the country, "the drive to the city revealed more destruction and devastation than this privileged American had ever imagined. This was not a picture-book landscape or a television documentary. This was the reality of war" (qtd. in Potorti 70). Furthermore, the loss of infrastructure and the constant threat of bombings are not the only things that incommensurably differentiate the daily living conditions of citizens in invaded and occupied countries from those of citizens living in the countries conducting the invasions and occupations. The widespread, indefinite inaccessibility of necessities such as potable water, safe shelter, and basic medical supplies as a result of sanctions imposed upon "enemy" states is another way in which the lives and experiences of Afghan and Iraqi civilians have become disproportionately different from those who do not live in occupied and invaded nations. As well, the psychological impact of prolific

violence and the constant threat of danger and injury due to intermittent bombing raids are aspects of living in these types of environments that visitors cannot claim to understand or equate with their own personal experiences of hardship. Organization member Colleen Kelly's anecdote about visiting war-torn Basra, Iraq illustrates the empirical divide that separated the organization members from those on whose behalf they wished to speak: "When we were going back to our minibus," Kelly recalls, "the air-raid sirens went off. All of us [organization members] flinched and looked around, trying to see if there was a bomb shelter. But to the [Iraqi] children, it meant nothing—they were desensitized to the chronic sound of the sirens" (qtd. in Potorti 198). Kelly reflects on this event by revealing that for her, "[t]here was the realization of what it means to live with violence every day—in order to survive psychologically, you have to turn yourself off, because you can't live constantly on high alert" (qtd. in Potorti 198).

Taking into account Lasar's frank admission and Kelly's implied acknowledgement of the group members' relatively privileged living conditions in comparison to those of the Afghan and Iraqi civilians they met during their visits, what proves disquieting is the organization's continued insistence upon sameness and commonality with their global Others despite or regardless of their own first-hand observations and acknowledgements to the contrary. Of course, I do not mean to gainsay here the fact that the members' trips to Afghanistan and Iraq provided them the opportunity to acutely recognize their privileged positions as Westerners; nor do I dismiss the affective bonds that were sincerely formed between the members and the locals they met who, like them, also lost loved ones to violent attacks against their respective

countries. To be sure, it is these emotionally charged experiences of loss and vulnerability that, in the first place, enabled the organization members to glean a momentary identification with the Afghan and Iraqi people they visited; an identification that, in turn, further galvanized them to take action and oppose the “War on Terror.” My point in this discussion is that in the group’s profound and understandable desire to establish bonds of fellow-feeling and camaraderie (especially in regards to the notion of common human vulnerability) with those from the global South East, this tentative (imagined?) perception of a unified “we,” of the imperial subject’s sameness with its colonial Other, not only risks shirking the important and necessary responsibility of acknowledging such irreconcilable differences, but also—in spite or because of these differences—avoids grappling in a sustained way with the difficult task of establishing a relationality that does not negate nor subjugate the alterity of the Other. In other words, for the imperial subject, forming an affective bond with the colonial Other—one that focuses on grounds of commonality rather than privilege or inequality—is certainly a crucial step towards social justice. But what happens beyond the initial formulation of this bond (which, admittedly, inspires and enables the imperial subject’s undertaking of actions and gestures geared towards more egalitarian treatments of the colonial Other) has greater and perhaps more dangerous implications, especially when this momentary identification of sameness is subsequently presumed as universal and begins to permeate all modes or future instances of relationality with the Other.

Among the consequences of foregoing a relationality that is hospitable to difference in favour of one that insists upon sameness is that the Other is incorporated

into the subject; or, put another way, the Other is colonized by the self. This is in part the reason why Thobani, though appreciative of Butler's opposition to the "War on Terror," nevertheless rejects the latter's theorization of loss and politics in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States. As I have noted much earlier in my discussion of Thobani's critique of Butler's work on mourning and mutual vulnerability,⁴³ for Thobani the existence of such a thing as "common human vulnerability" cannot but be skeptically called into question. This is so especially when, historically, embodied human life remains categorized and hence mediated by race, class, geography, age, gender, and myriad other markers of difference—to the extent that vulnerability to violence and trauma may be impossible to universalize, since it is so unevenly distributed and lived. In Thobani's words: "[Butler's] use of the Self's experience of a 'primal vulnerability' [...] eject[s] the analysis of power relations in the geopolitical order put on the global agenda by the 9/11 attacks," and "situate[s] it instead in an abstract, liberal, individualist frame. With this move, the specific forms of vulnerability and violence that *sustain* imperialist relations became invisible" ("White Innocence" 134, my emphasis). Thobani further adds that "Butler's imposition of the collective 'we' [...] for both the Western Self and its occupied Other [...], denie[s] recognition to the specific forms of vulnerabilities, injuries, and losses experienced by the invaded and occupied Other, which are significantly different from those experienced by imperial subjects" (134). Thobani certainly raises important criticisms of Butler's

⁴³ It should be noted that Giorgio Agamben's concept of "bare life" and his exploration of the figure of the refugee as the only human category upon which to build a meaningful politics bear some similarities with Butler's notion of common human vulnerability. See Agamben, Giorgio. *Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life*.

conception of a post-“9/11” collective “we” that can conceive of and engage with mutual human vulnerability in egalitarian ways. But while Thobani categorically rejects the possibility of Butler’s theorization having any transformative potential in achieving social justice for those living in the global South, I am not as willing to outrightly dismiss or abandon Butler’s concept of common human vulnerability. I posit instead that despite Thobani’s important and legitimate problematization of Butler’s concept of common human vulnerability, in the context of the “9/11” attacks and the “War on Terror,” such a theory offers much by way of challenging (as in the case of Afghanistan and Iraq) the tendency to dehumanize civilian casualties and victims of war in alleged “enemy states” as mere “collateral damage,” and hence not worthy of grief, public remembrance, or reparation/compensation.

Notwithstanding the sincerity and good intentions that propel their peace activism, the troubling mode of relationality that Thobani expounds upon in her critique of Butler does at times permeate the work of the Peaceful Tomorrows organization, as evidenced, for example, by the following statement that David Potorti—one of the organization’s founders—makes in regards to the power of gestures:

We can also plant the seeds of peace, and nurture them, deliberately, because in the end I believe we have a choice to create the world we want to live in. So much of what we are told today, particularly about the “war on terrorism,” is that we have no choices. This is a lie. Individuals have choices. Nations have choices. Freedom is about having choices, and when we stop having choices, we stop being free.

This is our choice: to make a gesture of kindness to a child in Afghanistan, or a mother in Iraq, or to a peace group in the United States, not to bear tangible results, not to change the world or to save them, so much as to save ourselves and create a moment. It is our gestures they will remember—for a minute, for an

hour, for a lifetime. And *those moments of peace*, when strung together, *will create a peaceful world*. (Potorti 143, my emphases).

Potorti makes several claims that warrant some unpacking here, most of which are articulated alongside his frequent uncomplicated uses of the pronoun “we,” and laced with overtones of Western exceptionality or superiority. In this passage, Potorti characterizes Western subjects as savior-figures who can and do play key roles in fulfilling his idealistic (perhaps even utopic) exhortation that this “we” ought to make impactful gestures towards the vulnerable and marginalized that, taken together, will eventually lead to world peace.⁴⁴ David Jefferess, in his critique of the “Me to We” humanitarian enterprise, argues that the use of the active, benevolent universal “we” “relies upon common tropes of development discourse that simplify global relations of power. For instance, the Other in need is produced as an object of pity, and social inequalities are represented as reflecting a dichotomy of the fortunate and the unfortunate” (“Me to We” 20). This critique is fully illustrated in Potorti’s assumption that the unified “we” possess the choices, the resources, and hence the freedom to shape and influence the world around them.⁴⁵ Jefferess elaborates on his critique by saying that

⁴⁴ An objection might be raised that my criticism of Potorti’s use of the pronoun “we” in the context of this quote risks rejecting any acceptable usage of “we” or any feasible notion of collective action. This is not the intention of my critique. My point here is not to deny the fact that in his use of the pronoun “we” in this passage, Potorti is describing and addressing American/Western subjects—not a global/universal “we.” Rather, I criticize his use of “we” in this particular context to draw attention to what I see as an overestimation or idealization on Potorti’s part, especially as it concerns the ability or success of a unified American or Western “we” to “create the world [they] want to live in.”

⁴⁵ Admittedly, in this context, Potorti’s comments are primarily directed at the American public. His choice of words could thus be interpreted as an attempt to motivate Americans to take action against their own government’s rejection of any alternatives to

“[s]uch formulations of [...] ‘our’ place in the world [...] avoid the complexity of global relations and ignore the possibility that *we* might be complicit in structures of inequality [...] [T]hose who experience harm are produced as subjects of pity, to be helped.

Implicitly, ‘we’ are distinct from them and our relation is defined only by our act of aid” (20, his emphasis). Potorti’s recommendation that gestures of kindness be made first towards a child in Afghanistan and secondly to a mother in Iraq highlights the ways in which two of the most vulnerable populations in these respective countries (especially during the “War on Terror”) are stereotypically regarded in the West as either perpetual victims of forces beyond their control, or severely needy dependents of the powerful and benevolent, who can do nothing for themselves and thus simply wait upon every gesture or act of kindness that is sent their way. Regarding the widespread recommendation that the Western subject behave benevolently towards its global Others, Jefferess rightly points out “that the emphasis on the moral obligation to help or aid—to be benevolent—

the “War on Terror” as a response to the attacks on September 11, 2001. In this way, Potorti’s diction could be his way of consciously/strategically employing the rhetoric of unity and freedom that the American people have responded to in the wake of “9/11.” That being said, however, what is troubling about his use of this rhetoric—that is, the “can-do” rhetoric that implies the American or Western subject’s purportedly given status as exemplars of ambitious yet noble conduct in the “Free World”—is that, to a certain degree, it reproduces the “us versus them” dichotomy that informed the Bush administration’s successful campaigns to garner Western and American support for the “War on Terror” (e.g., “They hate our freedoms.”). What is additionally problematic about mobilizing this rhetoric in pursuit of socially just goals—and, more importantly, doing so without first reflecting upon and publicly challenging or addressing the limitations of that rhetoric—is that such an act risks validating and further normalizing notions of Western or American superiority. Ironically enough, the counter-memorial work of the Peaceful Tomorrows group, in its desire to promote a more egalitarian regard for all human life and suffering, is undermined by this very rhetoric that seeks to distinguish a “we/us” who engage in acts of kindness towards a “they/them” who are the passive receivers of such acts.

in fact serves to do more harm than good, in that it elides the material conditions both of suffering and of the global citizen's capacity to help" ("Benevolence" 80). Additionally, Jefferess notes that "[b]enevolence normalizes the position of the global citizen as helper and constructs the relationship between caregiver and beneficiary as beginning with the act of aid" (80).

Potorti's suggestion to "make a gesture so as to save ourselves and create a moment" also proves problematic, when one is to consider the observation made by David Jefferess that within the rhetoric of humanitarian aid, gestures of kindness are very rarely completely altruistic. In fact, according to Jefferess, "the 'helped'" often "provide a means of transformation and happiness for the 'helper'" ("Me to We" 21), and the gesture of kindness or humanitarian aid "functions as the site of transformation for the benefactor; it is where the privileged [Western] traveler can have [...] a 'moment of truth'" (22). Furthermore, the group's collective, two-pronged anxiety regarding the implication of their deceased loved ones in the "War on Terror" and the protection of the United States from future attacks as the primary reasons for members' peace activism also warrants close reading in the context of Potorti's comments, since these rather inward-focused concerns also risk normalizing the priority and centrality of Western imperial subjects' lives and experiences over those of their global, racialized Others. More specifically, the organization's primary objectives of: a) preventing the tainting of *their* loved ones' memory by opposing the association of their deaths with state-sanctioned mass killings; and b) arguing that "waging war would not make *us* any safer, and would in fact increase the likelihood of future terrorist attacks on *our* own soil"

(Potorti 209, my emphases), implicitly suggest that the organization members' rationales for undertaking global peace work initially stemmed more so from a certain degree of self-interest than out of sincere concern for the well-being of others living in war-ravaged countries.⁴⁶ That is, had the "9/11" attacks *not* occurred, the innumerable instances of previous historical trauma that have taken place in parts of the world *except* the United States and other Western nations may have remained of least concern and thus negligible to the group members. It therefore warrants pointing out that a double standard may be at work in the organization's peace activism, which ardently insists upon the importance of establishing universal world peace, but has only begun calling for this so-called universal world peace because, and only after, its own country had been recently imperiled and victimized.⁴⁷ In fact, it can even be said that the organization's members, in the words of

⁴⁶ Though these two motivations are not mutually exclusive, they are also not valued or regarded equally because the former (self-interest) takes greater priority over the latter (sincere concern for the well-being of others living in war-ravaged countries). This is perhaps best demonstrated in a statement from Potorti that I quoted earlier, in which he says that "9/11" was "a day when we realized that our weapons *could no longer* protect us. And that *our children would never be safe unless* unseen children on the other side of the world were safe as well" (8, my emphasis). In the context of this particular comment, Potorti's words imply that since weaponry has finally failed to ensure the safety of the United States (and, by extension, the West), the second-best means of securing the safety of the American (and Western) people is to ensure that the unseen children on the other side of the world are also granted safety. In this way, the betterment of the lives of unseen children in other parts of the world is treated as a necessary means to an end (i.e., keeping America and the West safe), rather than an end in and of itself.

⁴⁷ Of course, it would be quite difficult to determine the kinds of peace activism (if any) that each member of Peaceful Tomorrows was involved in prior to the deaths of their loved ones on September 11, 2001. Also, my intention is not to minimize or demean the significance of the fact that the attacks and the deaths of loved ones brought about the organization members' recognition not only of their vulnerability and the vulnerability of others, but also the need for global peace activism. That the sense of loss they felt after the attacks propelled their peace activism and influenced them to challenge hegemonic official government responses to the attacks are, indeed, the key reasons why

Thobani, “[were] primarily disturbed by the war because of the violent *response* it was likely to generate in the future, and not because of” any “unconditional opposition to the violence done to its Other” in the first place (Thobani “White Innocence” 133).

Additionally, the organization’s emphasis on futurity—as evidenced by their name, “Peaceful Tomorrows,” as well as the group’s anxious concern that the “War on Terror” may destabilize rather than re-establish the safety and security of the United States in the years to come—bespeaks an urgent desire to guarantee or, at the very least, recuperate “the freedom to be unconscious about the internal limits to [one’s sovereignty]” (Berlant 5). Such an anxiety over the future thereby also risks eclipsing the practice of historical thinking and engagement in the present time, which Lauren Berlant describes as the state of being open to “a situation [that] arises,” which “provokes the need to think and adjust, to slow things down and to gather things up, to find things out and to wonder and ponder. What’s going on? [...] [T]o think [in this way] is primarily formal, an interruption” (5). Roger Simon, in his theorization of “the touch of the past” as a means of encountering difference by bearing witness to historical trauma, likewise warns against a programmatic reaction to the future in his call for “a form of public history that opens one to both the demand of, and responsibility to, the alterity of the historical experience of others—an alterity that disrupts the presumption of the ‘self-same’” (Simon, *Touch* 4).

I have taken up their work as a powerful counter-memorial response to the attacks in the first place. My objective here, rather, is to draw attention to and make more visible the tendency of benevolent humanitarian gestures to continue to operate and be informed by self-interest at best and, at worst, colonial discourses of the utmost priority of the Western subject.

It is this presumption of the “self-same” that permeates the troubling rhetoric of peace work employed by the Peaceful Tomorrows organization, and which I argue serves as a significant obstacle that undermines the group’s aim of fostering non-violent responses to the “9/11” attacks. Undeniably, the group does offer up a means of challenging dominant discourses about the event, discourses which favour violent, retaliatory responses to the United States’ perceived enemies. However, in its vigorous insistence upon the global and historical significance of the attacks and its reinforcement of the centrality of Western subjectivity and victimhood, Peaceful Tomorrows’ counter-memorial work threatens to and, at times, succeeds in eclipsing the injuries inflicted upon and endured by their racialized Others.⁴⁸ What their work also risks overshadowing are the critical agency, vibrant modes of activism, and sustained resistance that have long been actively taken up by the racialized Others on whose behalf the organization repeatedly claims to speak. For instance, this displacement of the existence and continued persistence of resistance movements established prior to the September 11, 2001 attacks by Afghan civilians is evident in a letter the organization wrote to President Bush announcing the formation of not only the Peaceful Tomorrows group, but also the establishment of the Afghan Sister Families Campaign that members, upon their return from their visit to Afghanistan, launched in partnership with Global Exchange. The

⁴⁸ In thinking through this issue, I am reminded of Sherene Razack’s comprehensive analysis of how international public focus on the traumatic experiences and work-related stresses endured by members of the Canadian Peacekeeping Forces during their time in Somalia eclipsed the brutal (at times fatal) violence and racist injustice that several of these very soldiers willfully committed against (mostly young) Somali civilians during what is now widely referred to as “The Somalia Affair.” See Razack, Sherene H. *Dark Threats & White Knights: The Somalia Affair, Peacekeeping, and the New Imperialism*.

letter's focus upon how the organization seeks to turn into reality the purportedly as yet unarticulated and unvoiced goals, aims, and beliefs of Afghan civilians reduces these very civilians to nothing more than passive, congenial citizens and helpless (yet in the decontextualized framing of their expectations of the United States government, belligerently demanding) victims:

[“]The families we met with were grateful for the U.S. help in overthrowing the Taliban, know that the U.S. did not intend to harm them, and believe that the United States is their friend,” the letter read. “Many of these families also believe that the U.S. will provide some compensation to help them rebuild their homes, get the medical care they need, and enable them to contribute to the revitalization of a democratic Afghanistan. We would like to turn that belief into a reality.[”]
(Potorti 84)

First, that the Peaceful Tomorrows organization conveys such a generalized impression of uncomplicated gratefulness on the part of Afghan civilians for the U.S.-led “War on Terror” and their country’s purported “liberation” from the Taliban overlooks and undermines the impassioned (and far from passive) claims put forward, for example, by Afghan (primarily women’s) organizations such as the Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA). Insisting upon the importance of engaging with the *history* of the political shifts in Afghanistan, RAWA argues that the Northern Alliance—the United States’ local allies against the Taliban in the “War on Terror”—are, in fact, no better (if not worse) than the Taliban in their wielding and abuse of power in Afghanistan.⁴⁹ RAWA’s adamant condemnation of the Northern Alliance is made palpably clear in its appeal to the United Nations and the world community:

⁴⁹ Similarly, the network Women Living Under Muslim Laws (WLUML) not only draws attention to the need for a historicized approach in understanding the history

The people of Afghanistan do not accept the domination of the Northern Alliance!

[...]

The world should understand that the Northern Alliance is composed of some bands who did show their real criminal and inhuman nature when they were ruling Afghanistan from 1992 to 1996.

The retreat of the terrorist Taliban from Kabul is a positive development, but entering of the rapist and looter NA in the city is nothing but a [*sic*] dreadful and shocking news for about 2 million residents of Kabul whose wounds of the years 1992-1996 have not healed yet.

Thousands of people who fled Kabul during the past two months were saying that they feared coming to power of the NA in Kabul much more than being scared by the US bombing. (“Appeal” 193)⁵⁰

of the Taliban in Afghanistan, but also explicitly points out that the concerns and interests of Afghan people are not restrictively preoccupied with Bin Laden and the Taliban. The network also rightly implicates the United States in the ordeals of Afghanistan prior to “9/11”: “It should be remembered that Bin Laden and the Taliban emerged in the context of Cold War confrontation and the vacuum of its aftermath. Global reaction should not be determined by US political and economic interests alone [...] Furthermore, Bin Laden and the Taliban are not Afghanistan” (55). Also, “Fatima,” a member of RAWA whose name was changed to ensure her safety by preserving her anonymity, likewise conveys this need to historicize not only the current conflict the United States has brought to Afghanistan, but the ways in which the American government’s support of fundamentalism in the region contributed to creating the conditions that made the “9/11” attacks possible. For “Fatima,” terrorism did not start with the “9/11” attacks because it, too, has a long history that implicates the United States and challenges the popular sentiment in the West that “9/11” happened out of the blue and for no reason: “We can understand their sorrow because we also suffered this terrorism for more than twenty-three years. We were already victims of this tragedy. [...] [U]nfortunately, we warned the United States government about this many, many times, as well as other countries that are supporting and creating the fundamentalist parties. They helped create these terrorists during the Cold War; they supported Osama Bin Laden [during the Russian occupation of Afghanistan]. Fundamentalism is equal to terrorism; it’s equal to crime. We said, this germ won’t just be in Afghanistan, it will spread out all over the world. [...] We warned them but they never listened to our cry, to our voice” (Brown 101).

⁵⁰ “Fatima,” a member of RAWA whose real name was changed to ensure her safety upon speaking out against the Taliban, elaborates as well upon RAWA’s stance regarding the Northern Alliance, as well as the United States’ choice of allies: “We condemn the cooperation of the United States with the Northern Alliance. This is another nightmare for our people—the Northern Alliance are the second Taliban. The Northern

It bears pointing out here that RAWA's very formulation, including in particular its focused and outspoken approach to critiquing Afghan politics as well as American intervention in the region, did not suddenly take shape in the shadows of the "War on Terror." In fact, RAWA has a history and an archive of activist work that far pre-dates,⁵¹ but is nonetheless intimately entwined with, the attacks on September 11, 2001. Through their official statements addressing the "War on Terror," the association—thoroughly thwarting Western stereotypical representations of Afghan women as illiterate, uneducated, passive, meek, and politically infantile figures in dire need of saving and benevolent patronage—communicates members' collective awareness of, and criticisms against, the CIA's Cold War cultivation of Bin Laden into a radical terrorist militant, as well as ongoing American support of fundamentalist leaders in the region:

But unfortunately we must say that it was the government of the United States who supported Pakistani dictator General Zia-ul Haq in creating thousands of religious schools from which the germs of Taliban emerged. In the similar way, as is clear to all, Osama Bin Laden has been the blue-eyed boy of CIA. But what is more painful is that American politicians have not drawn a lesson from their pro-fundamentalist policies in our country and are still supporting this or that fundamentalist band or leader. In our opinion any kind of support to the fundamentalist Taliban and Jihadis is actually trampling democratic, women's rights and human rights values. ("Afghani Women's Resistance" 37).

Despite the serious and often life-threatening challenges that their activist work compels them to face on a daily basis, the women who count themselves among the RAWA

Alliance are hypocrites: They say they are for democracy and human rights, but we can't forget the black experience we had with them. Seventy-year-old grandmothers were raped during their rule, thousands of girls were raped, thousands were killed and tortured. They are the first government that started this tragedy in Afghanistan" (Brown 102).

⁵¹According to their official website, RAWA was founded in 1977, concomitant with or, in many cases, prior to many feminist organizations in the US and Canada. See: <http://www.rawa.org/index.php>

contingent are not the utterly helpless females the “War on Terror” needs to “liberate” through military “shock and awe” tactics; nor are they the pitifully powerless but admirably long-suffering victims the Peaceful Tomorrows organization is so eager to sponsor and provide with a supplemental voice ‘back home’ in “the West.” Quite the contrary, in fact, for the members of RAWA demonstrate a prescient awareness that “[d]espite the claim of the US that only military and terrorist bases of the Taliban and Al-Qaeda will be struck and that its actions would be accurately targeted and proportionate, [...] this invasion will shed the blood of numerous women, men, children, young and old of our country” (“Statement” 121).

If, then, they are not totally helpless women who have no means of exercising their agency in the face of the fundamentalist and extremist patriarchy of the Taliban and Northern Alliance, just who are they? RAWA, founded in 1977 “as an Afghan feminist group focused on women’s rights,” broadened “its mandate [...] when fundamentalists rose to power” (Brown 98). In their desire to raise (inter)national public awareness of human rights abuses committed by the Taliban and contribute to the struggle against fundamentalism in general, association members took up various (often dangerous) modes of resistance in the pursuit of their objectives. For example, the women in the group “began to hide video cameras under their burqas [to] document the executions and public floggings which take place every day under the Taliban”; “smuggle[d] female journalists [...] into the country, in hopes of bringing attention to their cause”; “began run[ning] clandestine home-based schools for girls”; started “teach[ing] handicrafts” “for women, who are forbidden to work,” to sell over the Internet; and established a system

that “provides medical assistance, housing and education for impoverished and terrified fugitives of Taliban rule” (98). According to Janelle Brown, RAWA is “the most prominent Afghan-run organization to oppose the Taliban,” and “has become one of the fundamentalists’ greatest enemies” (98). Brown further remarks that “[p]erhaps the aspect of the group most infuriating to its opponents—and a surprising key to its effectiveness—is that it consists entirely of women, nearly 2000 in Afghanistan and Pakistan, who use the cover of their burqas and the seeming powerlessness of their status to strategic advantage” (98). When asked about RAWA’s current needs, “Fatima,” an association member, straightforwardly replies in this way: “We are in a very bad financial condition. We need anything we can get—for our mobile team, for medicine, for our schools. Maybe \$1 is nothing for them, but for us it means a lot. To run our struggle with empty hands is impossible for us” (102). It is important to note that at no point in “Fatima’s” response does she state that either she, RAWA, or the citizens of Afghanistan need, or are asking the United States or the rest of the international community for, “liberation,” “freedom,” or “democracy.” As well, and of direct relevance to my critique of the Peaceful Tomorrows organization’s “benevolent” colonialist approach to the Afghan civilians’ plight, “Fatima’s” response seeks to *differentiate* (“Maybe \$1 is nothing for them, but for us it means a lot”) rather than impose sameness upon the Afghan people’s collective experience of grief and vulnerability, and the grief and sense of vulnerability experienced by members of the Peaceful Tomorrows group.

Although, as I have quoted above, Peaceful Tomorrows member Rita Lasar also makes a comment that differentiates between the visiting organization members and the

Afghan and Iraqi locals on the basis of economics, the context in which she makes this comment is as an ambassador for Peaceful Tomorrows, and also as a tourist travelling through Afghanistan with the NGO Global Exchange (which aims to take people on social justice tours of war-ravaged Afghanistan). I emphasize the context in which Lasar makes her comment because her status as a tourist in Afghanistan at the time she acknowledges her comparatively more privileged life as a Westerner is problematic in that, as Graham Huggan argues, “tourism [...] provides ample opportunity for the expression, not to mention the projection, of liberal angst” (qtd. in Mahrouse 379). Additionally, as Mahrouse remarks, “despite [the tourist’s] awareness of [...] privilege, at a very fundamental level, she takes as given the entitlement and privilege of access and mobility of people like herself from the ‘first world’” (381). Mahrouse clarifies her observation by saying that, “[the tourist’s] understanding of privilege stop[s] short of her seeing the network of power relations that enables her to assert [the] right to gaze upon the Other” (381). Furthermore, Mahrouse points out that what is also not “question[ed] [is] the assumption of natural curiosity that is embodied by the tourist who is free to explore at will” (381). These critiques of social justice tourism suggest the importance—indeed, the necessity—of interpreting Lasar’s comments as those not only of a peace activist, but also of a Western consumer who has the freedom, resources, and ability to avail of the tourist service offered by Global Exchange in order to come to Afghanistan and experience for herself the Afghan way of life in a post-“9/11” climate. Sara Ahmed even goes as far as arguing that openly acknowledging one’s privilege (as Lasar does) helps reinforce power imbalances, in that “the declarative mode involves a fantasy of

transcendence” (qtd. in Mahrouse 382). Mahrouse sums up the racially-inflected criticisms of tourism—whether in its conventional or more socially just form—when she says that in tours such as the one offered by Global Exchange in Afghanistan, “white privilege can be reproduced through its very articulation because such acknowledgments can serve as evidence of a commitment to social justice,” which in turn is seen as “justif[ying] travel through what [is] perceive[d] to be ‘honourable’ motives and objectives” (382). Of course, this is not to say that Lasar was commenting on her privileged status as a Westerner in order to consciously reproduce white privilege, nor is it to say that the organization members’ proclaimed commitment to peace activism amounts to nothing more than lip service that assuages liberal angst. Rather, I problematize Lasar’s acknowledgement of her privilege as a Western tourist in Afghanistan to demonstrate the extent to which “the most basic issues of privilege as they emerge through [...] tourist encounters are minimized or somehow reconciled” (382); this, at the expense of much-needed critical “discussion[s] of the notion of innocence and moral comfort” which “can be gained [inadvertently or not] through socially responsible travel” (376). By contrast, “Fatima’s” differentiation between the West and Afghanistan on the basis of economics implies a rejection of the possibility that Afghans living in Afghanistan will ever get to experience what life is like in the West. Whereas Lasar’s observation of her privileged status upon seeing/experiencing the destruction and lack of infrastructure in Afghanistan functions as an oblique claim to finally apprehending what it is like *not* to live in privilege, “Fatima’s” plea for financial assistance is rooted *not* in a desire to establish sameness (e.g., “Even though I’m from a different culture, I myself

have experienced and know now what it is like to live as one of you.”), but rather in a desire to attend to the challenges that are unique to her own community.

Concerning Afghan women, Sunera Thobani observes that “[i]n the West they became nothing but poor victims of this bad, bad religion, and of these backward, backward men. The same old colonial construction. The women were in the front line, but we did not take the lead from them then. We could see them more as victims, only worthy of our pity” (“It’s Bloodthirsty Vengeance” 94). Thobani’s critique focuses more upon the ways in which the rhetoric of “liberating” colonial female subjects from their fanatical and oppressive male counterparts obscures the fact that these same women do not in any way need nor ask for the kind of “liberation” that takes the form of unsolicited military invasions and indefinite (and often violent) foreign occupations. My point in citing Thobani’s critique here, however, is to emphasize her suggestion that the West allow its racialized (and gendered) Others to “take the lead” in their *respective* desires, attempts, and struggles to better their living conditions and pursue their *respective* projects of determining what is in the best interests of their *respective* well-being. Let me be clear that I am not in any way advocating an abandonment of responsibility and accountability on the part of Western states and subjects, whose positions of privilege were and continue to be, for the most part, indisputably reinforced through the exploitation, subjugation, and rendering disposable of its myriad imperial Others. Rather, I am advocating the kind of global civic engagement akin to what Sedef Arat-Koc promotes when she discusses the need for “a more engaged feminism” that is in sustained dialogue “with an array of issues from foreign policy, to immigration, to civil liberties, to

sovereignty”; this, in order to “have a better and a critical understanding of power relations of intervention and their complex implications” (63). In her work on the role feminism has played in the recent war in Afghanistan, Arat-Koc focuses on the urgent need to transform global or international feminism into a project that “rethink[s] a whole number of issues in new ways: Civil liberties, human rights, ‘terrorism,’ imperialism, internationalism and national sovereignty, among others” (63). I am arguing here that similar objectives would make the work of the Peaceful Tomorrows group more socially just, because in the context of its activist work, allowing the organization’s racialized Others to “take the lead” poses an ethical demand for group members to seriously and critically rethink not only their assumptions of sameness and commonality with Afghan and Iraqi civilian victims of the “War on Terror,” but also the ways in which they frame and characterize the collective grief they experienced from the “9/11” attacks as the central, exemplary, and hence, authoritative narrative of loss that forms the basis for a new, peace-able mode of global relationality and politics. This is a necessary undertaking because, as Arat-Koc warns, “[i]f critical rethinking about these issues is ignored, we face the possibilities of remaining complacent, or at least indifferent or acquiescent to changes towards a totalitarian world (and national) order being created not just in front of our very eyes, but also (partly) in our name” (63).

Difficult and Necessary Undertakings

The book published by the Peaceful Tomorrows organization in 2003, which outlines their history as well as their central mandates, incorporates within its pages

several compiled e-mail messages received by the group as they travelled throughout America and other parts of the globe to participate in various public anti-war demonstrations and speaking engagements. Of note among these collections of cyber-feedback dispersed throughout the text are harshly phrased, scathing criticisms of the group's work, as well as what they are seen to stand for. "By not supporting your country and not supporting the war against Saddam," one correspondent argues, "you indirectly support a bloodthirsty killer named Saddam Hussein. YOu [*sic*] all make me sick... you can move to Iraq so you can be closer to your buddy, Saddam Hussein. Fucking traitors!!!!" (qtd. in Potorti 199). Another correspondent specifically castigates the family members for choosing to walk the path of peace rather than march to the drums of war: "Of all people, victims of the Sep. [*sic*] 11, 2001 terrorist attacks in lower [*sic*] Manhattan and the DC area should be supporting the elimination of the greatest threat to the future of the United States and our brothers and sisters in Israel: ISLAM" (qtd. in Potorti 199). By now this kind of virulent, knee-jerk, and Islamophobic reaction to suggestions that the attacks be addressed in more nuanced and complex ways has become quite familiar, and such an understanding of the attacks serves to incite and inflame rather than redress (or at the very least negotiate) perceived extant enmities between the so-called "secular" world and that of "religious fundamentalists." It is thus a difficult but necessary undertaking to cultivate acts of public remembrance that neither teach, preach, nor parrot state interests, but instead call for yet more nuanced and non-violent struggles for global equality, rather than the world domination envisioned by a unilateral force.

What may provide hope in this daunting scenario is the fact that the kind of “unpatriotic” behaviour purportedly fomented by the Peaceful Tomorrows group is undertaken with counter-hegemonic ends in mind. The organization takes up the challenge of working towards global co-habitation and security that go above and beyond the successful policing of national borders, and strives for freedom not just for “American” citizens, but for the citizens of the world. At the very least, it is for this reason that the memorial work taken up by the September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows fashions is an ongoing and arduous labour of remembrance and compassion. That said, however, the organization’s collective hope for the transformative re-education of the world cannot be sufficiently realized until the Peaceful Tomorrows group first grapples with not only the limits of shared human vulnerability as the unifying concept underpinning their peace activism, but also the colonial modes of relationality that continue to inform and render problematic humanitarian and global social justice movements, to which their work is intimately bound.

In his book *Postcolonial Melancholia*, Paul Gilroy voices the foremost dilemma faced by those committed to challenging the hegemonic and racist ideologies that have become so predominant in the contemporary moment—especially in the wake of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States:

As the postcolonial and post-Cold War model of global authority takes shape and reconfigures relationships between the overdeveloped, the developing, and the developmentally arrested worlds, it is important to ask what critical perspectives might nurture the ability and the desire to live with difference on an increasingly divided but also convergent planet? (3)

Though Gilroy steers clear of providing a programmatic solution to this ethical dilemma, he does insist upon the necessity of cultivating “an increased familiarity with the bloodstained workings of racism—and the distinctive achievements of the colonial governments it inspired and legitimated” (4). For Gilroy, doing so “yield[s] lessons that could be applied more generally, in the demanding contemporary settings of multicultural social relations” (4). He elaborates that this “detour through modern histories of suffering must be mandatory,” since “[i]t provides an invaluable means to locate ethical and political principles that can guide the work of building more just and equitable social relations” (151). But although Gilroy argues for the importance of being cognizant of and reflecting upon racialized historical traumas, he warns that this awareness “should not imply the exaltation of victimage or the world-historic ranking of injustices that always seem to remain the unique property of their victims” (4). Rather, what is central to Gilroy’s vision of “[t]he hard work of postcolonial culture building” is “the realization of a more worthwhile liberalism”; one that is “prepare[d] to be profaned by systematic reflections upon its own colonial habits and implications” (146). Indeed, over and above enduring vicious attacks on one’s purportedly diminished sense of American patriotism, unlearning a colonially complicit liberalism and adopting a more historically conscious, self-critical mode of relationality with the Other are perhaps the more crucial challenges that ought to be collectively taken up by all who desire to remember the events of “9/11” otherwise.

CHAPTER TWO

“Putting Grief into Boxes:” “9/11” Graphic Narratives and the Politics of Remembrance⁵²

In the introduction to the 2010 school and library catalogue of graphic novels published by Random House Incorporated, Robin Brenner writes that “[a]ny kind of story can and has been told in this format, from compelling biographies and memoirs to meticulous historical dramas to speculative fantasy” (2). Brenner goes on to say that as “narrative[s] of images and words across the page[,] ... [g]raphic novels are written with every kind of audience in mind, from a ten year-old fantasy fan to a forty year-old true-crime junkie” (2). The recent popularity of the graphic novel as a “hybrid” text and pedagogical tool that employs both words and images in the unfolding of a vast array of narratives has led to the genre’s increasingly frequent appearance in course syllabi (from the middle school to high school and college/university levels), as well as on recommended reading lists intended to develop and improve literacy among children and youth. Because of its purportedly more facile “readability” when compared to print-only texts, an increasing number of educators now view the graphic novel as a medium that is

⁵² An earlier, condensed version of this chapter, entitled, “‘Putting Grief into Boxes’: Trauma and the Crisis of Democracy in Art Spiegelman’s *In the Shadow of No Towers*,” has been published in *The Review of Education, Pedagogy & Cultural Studies* 28.2 (April-June 2006): 179-201. Also, portions of this chapter have been presented as papers at the following conferences: “The Trauma of the New Millennium.” *Communities in Crisis: Isolation, Desecration, Transformation in the 20th Century*. University of South Carolina-Columbia, Columbia, SC. 2-3 April 2005; and “‘I-Witness’: Life Writing (and) the News.” *Association of Canadian College and University Teachers of English (ACCUTE) Congress of the Canadian Federation for Humanities and Social Sciences*. University of British Columbia, Vancouver, BC. 3 June 2008.

more accessible and appealing to a larger audience, the individual members of which possess literacy skills that vary significantly from person to person. It is due to this genre's much-touted accessibility that the graphic novel has rapidly become educators' current "go-to" resource for kindling student interest in, and engagement with, relatively challenging and difficult texts and subject matter that comprise school curricula.⁵³

Beyond improving literacy and encouraging the "aliterate" (that is, those unwilling to read, yet able to do so) to immerse themselves in texts that pique their interests, educators also see in the genre of the graphic novel the potential to instill in students a keener sense of media awareness and a broader understanding of developing modes of communication that have been made possible by new media technologies. In "Expanding Literacies through Graphic Novels," Gretchen Schwarz observes that "[i]ncreasingly, scholars and teachers realize that in a media-dominated society, one traditional literacy—reading and writing of print—is no longer sufficient. Today's young people also have to read films, TV shows, magazines, and Web sites. Both practical information and the stories of our culture come from many media, especially those made possible by current technology" (59). As a result of this shift in the institutional understanding of what literacy entails, Schwarz argues that "[b]oth traditional, alphabetic literacy and literacies such as information, visual, and media literacy can be well served by classroom engagement with the graphic novel" (59).

⁵³Shari Sabeti even explores how youth characterize their experiences reading graphic novels as opposed to other print texts (like novels) that are conventionally assigned as part of school curricula. (Sabeti, Shari. "Arts of time and space': The perspectives of a teenage audience on reading novels and graphic novels.")

The growing popularity of graphic novels has certainly not escaped the attention of literary scholars, either. Indeed, as Hillary Chute notes, “[s]cholarship on comics [...] is gaining traction in the humanities” (Chute 452). In response to this growing academic and scholarly interest in the long-form comics medium, the winter 2006 special issue of *Modern Fiction Studies* found Hillary Chute and Marianne DeKoven proposing the use of the term “graphic narrative” over “graphic novel.” This suggested amendment to the nomenclature of the genre aims at a more accurate reference to the increasingly diverse body of “narrative work in the medium of comics” (Chute and DeKoven 767), especially since this genre “has become part of an expanding literary field, absorbing and redirecting the ideological, formal, and creative energies of contemporary fiction” (768). In a subsequent 2008 article in *PMLA* on the same topic, Hillary Chute expounds on the necessity of abandoning the more commonly used term of “graphic novel” in favour of “graphic narrative.” She explains that the former term is rather inaccurate and limiting in scope, and does not quite get at the nuances and complexities that allow for much of the diversity of expression and in subject matter, which the medium empowers its proponents to explore:

Yet *graphic novel* is often a misnomer. Many fascinating works grouped under this umbrella—including Spiegelman’s World War II-focused *Maus*, which helped rocket the term into public consciousness—aren’t novels at all: they are rich works of nonfiction; hence my emphasis here on the broader term *narrative*. (Indeed, the form confronts the default assumption that drawing as a system is inherently more fictional than prose and gives a new cast to what we consider fiction and nonfiction.) In *graphic narrative*, the substantial length implied by *novel* remains intact, but the term shifts to accommodate modes other than fiction. A graphic narrative is a book-length work in the medium of comics. (Chute 453, her emphasis)

The proposal to adopt the term “graphic narrative” over “graphic novel,” however, has far greater implications beyond accurately assessing the typical length of works in this genre or avoiding the definitive characterization of this genre as either fiction or nonfiction. For Chute, the medium of comics also requires scholars “to reexamine the categories of fiction, narrative, and historicity” (452), particularly as they are encountered and taken up by readers of graphic narratives. This is so because the medium of comics—and the genre of graphic narratives in particular—have built into their formal structural conventions elements that are hospitable to a multiplicity of readings and interpretations:

comics is multigeneric, composed, often ingeniously, from widely different genres and subgenres; and, most importantly, comics is constituted in verbal and visual narratives that do not merely synthesize. In comics, the images are not illustrative of the text, but comprise a separate narrative thread that moves forward in time in a different way than the prose text, which also moves the reader forward in time. The medium of comics is cross-discursive because it is composed of verbal and visual narratives that do not simply blend together, creating a unified whole, but rather remain distinct. (Chute and DeKoven 769)

Chute and DeKoven certainly make a compelling case not only for using the term “graphic narratives” in future academic inquiries into this genre, but also for regarding the genre as “a representational mode capable of addressing complex political and historical issues with an explicit, formal degree of self-awareness” (769).

My own exploration of this field of study follows in their wake and thus takes up their proposal of adopting the more capacious term of “graphic narrative” in place of the more restrictive term of “graphic novel”—especially when referring to lengthier comics that address (historical) non-fiction events. Furthermore, the current shift in naming this

genre “graphic narrative” rather than “graphic novel” is significant to my arguments in this chapter because this genre debate informs my consideration of the graphic narrative’s capacity to engage in (counter) memorial responses to historical traumas. More specifically, I interrogate what the graphic narrative offers by way of critical pedagogy and public remembrance, particularly in the context of the attacks and their commemoration as a traumatic “watershed” moment in world history and geopolitics. Through a close reading and analysis of Art Spiegelman’s *In the Shadow of No Towers*, this chapter considers the medium of the graphic narrative as a site of remembrance that foregrounds the pedagogical potential of contemporary visual culture, the post-“9/11” ubiquity of which, in turn, is underscored by the attacks’ continued and perhaps over-determined appeal as spectacle and tele-visual event.

In terms of the political critique it mobilizes, Spiegelman’s semi-autobiographical graphic narrative employs the structural conventions of the genre—for example, the use of panels, dialogue bubbles, and the collage-like assemblage of images and texts—to problematize the efficient state and media policing of what constitutes the “official,” “authoritative” historical narrative of the attacks and hence, what is validated as “acceptable” and thereby “legitimate” ways of publicly commemorating the event. Regarding this aspect of the text, Spiegelman’s graphic narrative significantly contributes to the democratization of the event’s public remembrance, since *No Towers* multiplies the perspectives that attempt to make sense of the attacks and the event’s many aftermaths. Writing about *In the Shadow of No Towers*, Kristiaan Versluys comments that “[r]ather than a consistent tale, the ten giant cartoon pages—displaying a wide variety of styles—

present themselves as modernist collage,” in that “the garish colors, the darkly rimmed panels, the dynamic, irregular layout of every page, the superimposition of panels suggesting a random pile-up of material—all have the effect of giving urgency to the tale and pervading it with a sense of disbelief and panic” (Versluys 989). Spiegelman’s graphic narrative on the attacks thereby gestures towards achieving a similar kind of politicized work that Charles Garoian and Yvonne Gaudelius attribute to collage, montage, assemblage, installation, and performance art. According to Garoian and Gaudelius:

these modes of address have broader implications for challenging the dominant codes of contemporary cultural life given their volatile in-between spaces, which are constituted by the disparate, dissociative remnants of mass mediated culture. Considering that the postmodern condition is pervasively mediated by visual culture, our awareness of its dominating assumptions, and our ability to expose, examine, and critique its spectacle, make the critical pedagogy of collage, montage, assemblage, installation, and performance art all the more imperative. (39)

Moreover, to borrow the words of Carol Becker, Spiegelman’s text, with its outright criticisms of American foreign policy and its interrogation of the heightened culture of fear in Western media after the attacks, also “assume[s] the role of ‘immanent critique,’ in a dialectical sense, which is to say that instead of offering superficial solutions, [it] expose[s] society’s inherent contradictions; and instead of pursuing absolute truths, [it] offer[s] complexity, ambivalence, and, at times, aggressive confrontations with the status quo” (qtd. in Garoian and Gaudelius 38). Certainly, published as it was in 2004 (only three years after the attacks), this kind of complex and ambivalent critique that Spiegelman’s text undertakes runs radically counter to the majority of mainstream

responses to the attacks at the time; responses which sought mainly to affirm or secure one's status as trusted "patriot" in the "War on Terror" rather than ensure a more measured and cautious approach to the further legitimization of state power during instances of crisis or national emergencies.

In what follows, I discuss the pedagogical and counter-memorial potential of the graphic narrative genre as suggested by Spiegelman's text. I then shift my focus to critiquing and appraising the futures of the graphic narrative in general as a visual site of remembrance as well as a mode of remembrance pedagogy. My overall aim in this chapter is not so much to definitively promote or condemn the graphic narrative as a vehicle of commemoration rooted in spectacle culture, but rather to tease out the political, pedagogical, philosophical, and memorial implications that this relatively recent mode of remembrance compels us to address.

Trauma, "I-Witnessing," and the Crisis of Democracy in Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*

I can still *vividly* remember the horrors of Ground Zero on September 11... 2002! I was an *eyewitness* to the bombardment of kitsch on sale that day... And I almost became a participant!

--Art Spiegelman (*In the Shadow of No Towers* 10)

Maybe I really *want* the world to end, to vindicate the fears I felt back on 9/11! Maybe it's just *my* little world that ended... But then I glance at the news and there's absolutely no doubt... The Sky is Falling!!!

--Art Spiegelman (9)

Of the numerous books about New York City's World Trade Center (WTC) Towers, two stand out for their visual impact as well as their similar attempts to recall the iconic height of the towers through the use of over-sized, elongated broadsheet pages. Peter Skinner's *World Trade Center: The Giants that Defied the Sky* is a coffee table book about the Towers' inception and subsequent destruction. Saturated with archival photographs of the Towers before, during, and after "9/11," this book comes with a pullout poster of the buildings' erstwhile golden façade at sunset and a survey of proposed architectural plans for what, immediately after the attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center, had become known as the sacrosanct void of Ground Zero. If a bookstore were to consider architecture's "larger-than-life" proportions as adequate stand-ins for life itself, Skinner's book—with its informative, historical account of the birth and death of the WTC Towers—would surely be found in the "biography" section.

By comparison, Art Spiegelman's post-"9/11" re-visitation of "comix" resulted in the publication of *In the Shadow of No Towers*. This other book classifies as imposing because the front cover's gloomy black-on-black rendering of the Towers enshrouds the cardboard-thick pages within it. Equally gloomy, the silhouetted cartoon figures suspended in perpetual free-fall on the back cover call to mind the trapped individuals who—intentionally or otherwise—plunged to their deaths as the fires in the World Trade Center continued to burn around them. *In the Shadow of No Towers* is artist Art Spiegelman's autobiographical account of his experience "outrunning the toxic cloud that had moments before been the north tower of the World Trade Center" (6). The text is a graphic narrative the broadsheet pages of which aptly pay tribute to "oversized

skyscrapers and outsized events” (1)—events which the attacks on the Pentagon and the World Trade Center have come to epitomize in the new millennium.

Visual media representations of the attacks have often resulted in the indefinite fomenting and massaging of anxieties and moral panics over terrorism and homeland security. Indeed, even though, as Jacques Derrida has argued, “there is nothing purely ‘modern’ in [...] a terrorism that operates by propagating within the public space images or rumors aimed at terrifying the so-called civilian population” (Derrida, “Autoimmunity” 109), he does concede that in relation to the September 11, 2001 attacks, “[m]ore than the destruction of the Twin Towers or the attack on the Pentagon, more than the killing of thousands of people, the real ‘terror’ consisted of and, in fact, began by exposing and exploiting, having exposed and exploited, the image of this terror by the target itself” (108). Spiegelman himself admits to experiencing this “real ‘terror’” in Plate 2 of *No Towers*, when he says that he has felt “equally terrorized by al-Qaeda and by his own government.” In Plate 4, beside a drawing of George W. Bush and Dick Cheney riding atop a gigantic bald eagle (even as the caricature of Dick Cheney is shown simultaneously slitting the eagle’s throat with a box-cutter), Spiegelman extends his criticism of the American government’s propagandistic exploitation of the attacks when he comments that “brigands suffering from war fever have since hijacked those tragic events.”

In addition to their manipulability for the sake of propagandistic aims, visual representations of the attacks can also run the risk of disavowing the traumatic nature of

the event, and in so doing, also deflect critical engagements with what has transpired. In the context of the attacks' visual impact, Marianne Hirsch argues that "[m]edia representations function like euphemisms to obstruct seeing, saying, and understanding" (1214). Hirsch also notes that the popular description of "the collapsing towers on television look[ing] just 'like' the disaster movies to which we are habituated" (1214)⁵⁴ is symptomatic of the desire to "shield us from the 'excessive expressivity' of the visual to the point where [...] we can live with ourselves as we look without seeing, see without doing, understand without saying or writing" (1214). In response to this euphemistic aspect of the event's visual representation, Spiegelman's text "exposes the protective mechanisms that are deployed by the ways in which vision typically operates in our culture" (1213). According to Hirsch, "[i]n the frames of Spiegelman's pages, words and images that in their media representation and repetition threaten to lose their wounding power reappear in newly alienated, and thus freshly powerful, form" (1215). *In the Shadow of No Towers* is thus an attempt on Spiegelman's part to reinvigorate the power of visual media representations to unsettle and agitate public discourses about and remembrances of the attacks.

Spiegelman's work is divided into two sections. The first half of *No Towers* consists of the ten full-colour plates he painstakingly produced in order to recall his personal memories of "9/11" and give voice to the creeping despair he felt in the immediate and long-term aftermaths of the attacks. "The Comic Supplement" takes up

⁵⁴ Christina Rickli provides a more detailed discussion of the connections between the September 11, 2001 attacks and Hollywood movies (Rickli, Christina. "An Event 'Like a Movie'? Hollywood and 9/11.")

the latter half of the text. In this section, Spiegelman provides a diverse sampling of “old newspaper comics” that he says granted him “solace” (10) after the attacks. This segment of *No Towers* resurrects the Sunday supplements in newspapers from the early 1900s, such as the *New York World* and the *New York Journal*. Classic comic strip stars—among them, The Yellow Kid, Happy Hooligan, and the characters from Krazy Kat—turn up in Spiegelman’s work not simply as “ghosts ‘disinterred’ by the 9-11 blast” (McElroy par. 3); rather, they are figures whose appearance in Spiegelman’s text proves “eerily resonant” (Leopold par. 18) when placed within the more immediate context of September 11 because, as Matt Fraction points out, these “comics pages of antiquity” echo “some aspect of the iconography of the WTC attacks” (Fraction par. 3). Indeed, the samples from classic comic strips Spiegelman includes in *No Towers* employ the New York City skyline as the backdrop or target of chaotic rampages and large-scale destruction. Moreover, buildings of colossal proportions topple spectacularly, and representations of American identity and independence are either problematized or blatantly undermined in the samples that do not have New York as their geographical setting. The inclusion of these comic strip supplements historicize not only the spectacle of destruction Spiegelman witnessed that day, but also the seemingly insatiable public demand to continue looking at this spectacle of destruction in the years following the attacks. The supplements help Spiegelman “make sense of the ultimate inexplicable” (par. 2): rather than function simply as sentimental ornaments recalling a bygone era of newspaper comic strips, these supplements form part of a larger framework that places them in dialogue with Spiegelman’s *own* comic panels. There are no pullout posters

here: unlike *The Giants That Defied the Sky*—which mechanically rehearses the Towers’ brief life span as celebrated icons of the Manhattan skyline—the nostalgia triggered in Spiegelman’s work encompasses not only the artist’s ambivalent affection for the Towers, but also his love for New York City’s rich (and unapologetically political) comic strip history, as well as his strong identification with the caricatures of destruction that played out in the Sunday supplements of old. As a long-time resident of Lower Manhattan, the devastation of the World Trade Center disrupts Spiegelman’s daily routine and his artistic relationship with New York. This is an experience that sends him into what he characterizes as “a sky-is-falling tizzy” over the living nightmare of the collapsing towers, from which only his “return to making comix full-time” (Spiegelman 1) can rescue him. Given this context, *In the Shadow of No Towers* effectively demonstrates how Spiegelman finds himself “reeling on that faultline where World History and Personal History collide” (1).

What becomes of this harrowing collision, when it is relived and represented within the pages of a graphic narrative—a relatively “younger” or “newer” mode of memorialization, when compared to more conventional staples of commemorative work such as monuments and museums? What critical insights can we glean from Spiegelman’s labour of “sorting through his grief” after the attacks, and literally “putting it into boxes” (2)? How does the graphic narrative negotiate personal accounts of collective trauma, while at the same time also serving as a medium for public mourning and remembrance pedagogy? For Spiegelman, the dialectic between words and pictures—as employed in the graphic narrative—succeeds in approximating “a ‘mental

language' that is closer to actual human thought than either words or pictures alone" (qtd. in Young, *Memory's* 18). If we are to accept this premise, how does the graphic narrative's capacity or function as a vehicle for public mourning and remembrance pedagogy change? Conversely, how are conventional assumptions about the labours of public mourning and testifying to trauma unsettled by the medium of the graphic narrative?

Eliciting such inquiries of and about graphic narratives is by no means unfamiliar territory for Spiegelman. After all, *Maus I: My Father Bleeds History* and *Maus II: And Here My Troubles Began* (1986; 1991)—Spiegelman's Pulitzer prize-winning, two-volume account of his father's experiences as a Holocaust survivor and his own struggle to negotiate his role as both artist and witness to his father's testimonies—were both controversial and widely acclaimed for their use of animal imagery to represent the different racialized groups directly involved or prominently implicated in the Holocaust, such as the Jews, the Germans, the Poles, and the Americans. The *Maus* texts were influential, if not groundbreaking, in their bold exploration of the comic genre's capacity to address contentious historical events that pose serious narrative and representational dilemmas for survivors, storytellers, graphic and cartoon artists alike. In fact, it is in his analysis of *Maus* that Holocaust memorial scholar James E. Young points out that the graphic novel genre "suggests itself as a pointedly antiredemptory medium that simultaneously makes and unmakes meaning as it unfolds" (22). Young goes on to note that meaning in *Maus* "is not negated altogether, but whatever meaning is created in the father's telling is immediately challenged in the son's reception and visualization of it"

(23). Thus, regarding *In the Shadow of No Towers* as an “antiredemptory” memorial medium that repudiates the fixity of meanings and instead welcomes—indeed, thrives on—the absence of dogmatic certainty implies, like Simon’s understanding of the attacks as an interminable social experience, that the narrative of the event “expand[s] the boundaries of what is supposed to be the subject of cultural memory and historical appraisal” (354). Admittedly, this particular framing of “9/11” as an interminable social experience—a phenomenon still unfolding, with neither reprieve nor end—risks fanning the flames of collective despair, because for the event of “9/11” to unfold, expand, or “go on” indefinitely, its seemingly indelible images of death and destruction must necessarily haunt us, indeed consume us, so to speak, through its intimate associations with terror, grief, and loss.

In the Shadow of No Towers not only makes this pedagogical intervention of “talking back to terror,” but also—through what Young has designated the “antiredemptory” medium of the graphic novel genre—reinvigorates the political register of public remembrance at a crucial time when, quoting Judith Butler, “resolute action [is made] to take the place of grief” (Butler 29). While *Maus* explores and problematizes Spiegelman’s role in receiving, witnessing, and (un)making meaning out of his father’s trauma, his most recent graphic narrative takes an even more personal turn by focusing on the artist’s very own experience of, and struggles with, trauma. Reflecting in this work on his own distressing memories of the attacks, Spiegelman is not only the audience to this testimony of trauma and the artist who visualizes such horrific scenes of death and destruction; he is also the witness and the one who enacts or provides the testimonial.

But to reduce the labour of this graphic narrative to one man's artistic engagement with personal "trauma therapy" is to dismiss the fertile political and pedagogical possibilities that *In the Shadow of No Towers* opens up for our post-"9/11" world. This particular graphic narrative provokes not only a radical rethinking of politics, but an equally radical reengagement with politics in the wake of a traumatic experience—in this case, the disorientation and the fear he experienced on the streets of New York on September 11, 2001. Spiegelman's personal perspective of the event, in fact, diverges dramatically from the media spectacle that the attacks have become, but this is not to say that Spiegelman's work operates in a vacuum, or that his graphic novel refuses to engage the myriad ways the attacks have been mobilized and manipulated to serve state interests both at home and abroad. Quite the contrary, since *No Towers* foregrounds the traumatic nature of Spiegelman's personal experience of the attacks without divorcing this experience from the media spectacle into which the attacks transmogrified well before the day was through. *No Towers* also compulsively lingers with the sense of personal loss and paranoia with which Spiegelman agonistically wrestles in the short- and long-term aftermaths of the attacks. His "I-witness" account is unapologetically invested in testifying to the artist's emotional fragility and psychical vulnerability, and such an openness to exploring and reflecting upon the psycho-social injury that the attacks exacted upon him undermines the pervasive, jingoistic rhetoric of American unity, superiority, and triumphalism that has come to characterize much of the event's commemorative culture, with its wide-sweeping promises that in the "War on Terror," "good" will prevail over "evil" and that the "victims" and "heroes" will be avenged; no

matter the costs incurred, it seems, in civil liberties and inalienable human rights. Furthermore, Spiegelman's "I-witness" account challenges the anxious desire for absolutes—moral, political, epistemological, and otherwise—especially when the attacks and the "War on Terror" are the issues exciting public discourses eager to draw the line between "who is for us" and "against us." *No Towers* seeks to redress this evacuation of counter-narratives and alternative voices from public discourses about the attacks by tapping into Spiegelman's personal trauma in the interests of unsettling the currently prevalent notion of "democracy" with which the artist feels at odds: that is, the kind of depoliticized democracy that, for him, staves off "vigorous criticism" until it can be contained as "part of our business as usual" (Spiegelman, *No Towers* 2).

Spiegelman's employment of the genre of the graphic narrative enables him to rethink and reconfigure the notion of democracy as well as of democratic citizenship in the wake of his trauma. The "obsessive," and perhaps even "melancholic," labour involved in creating a graphic narrative parallels the harrowing "working through" of grief itself, but also the attempt, through the psychoanalytic concept of "repetition compulsion," to "master" or understand—though never completely—a particularly traumatic experience. In his essay "Mourning and Melancholia," Sigmund Freud describes the repetition compulsion inherent in melancholia as constituting "countless separate struggles" between the ego and the lost object of grief; ambivalent struggles which "cannot be assigned to any system but the *Unconscious*, the region of the memory-traces of *things*" (Freud 256-7, his emphasis). For Freud, through the reality principle "mourning impels the ego to give up the object by declaring the object to be dead," while

in the case of melancholia, “each single struggle of ambivalence loosen[s] the fixation of the libido to the object,” and in this way “[t]he ego may enjoy [...] the satisfaction of knowing itself as the better of the two, as superior to the object” (257). Mastery over one’s loss through the decathecting of the libido from the lost object is thereby the ultimate objective of mourning. For Freud, what distinguishes melancholia from mourning is that melancholia is the markedly protracted and, hence, “pathological” version of the affect of mourning. Through a re-reading of Freud, however, current theories of mourning and melancholia re-evaluate melancholia as potentially productive rather than pathological, in its very refusal to allow the subject to “get over” trauma. For example, Eng and Kazanjian contend that the “continuous engagement with loss and its remains” that is inherent in melancholia “generates sites for memory and history, for the rewriting of the past as well as the reimagining of the future” (4). This is so because “melancholia raises the question of what makes a world of new objects, places, and ideals possible” (4), and allows for “[a]vowals of and attachments to loss” to “produce a world of remains as a world of new representations and alternative meanings” (5).⁵⁵ Thus, the repetitive intrusions of traumatic memory—as represented by the recurrent, spectral image of the North Tower’s glowing bones in Spiegelman’s work—undermine linear and economical notions of temporality, recovery, and history. Consequently, the very

⁵⁵ For a re-reading of Freud’s theory of melancholia in the context of American racial politics, see Anne Anlin Cheng’s “The Melancholy of Race.” Also, in the context of the September 11, 2001 attacks, Judith Butler’s *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* challenges the notion that melancholia is unproductive by arguing that “to make grief itself into a resource for politics, is not to be resigned to inaction, but it may be understood as the slow process by which we develop a point of identification with suffering itself” (30).

possibility of mastering historical knowledge is thrown into question and challenged.

Writing about Freud's theory of trauma, Cathy Caruth points out that "the term *trauma* is understood as a wound inflicted not upon the body but upon the mind. [...] [T]he wound of the mind—the breach in the mind's experience of time, self, and the world" is "experienced too soon, too unexpectedly, to be fully known and is therefore not available to consciousness until it imposes itself again, repeatedly, in the nightmares and repetitive actions of the survivor" (Caruth 2, her emphasis). Upon noting that, for Freud, traumatic experience "is an experience that is not fully assimilated as it occurs" (3), Caruth goes on to argue in her own work that texts arising from traumatic experiences pose the important question of "what it means to transmit and to theorize around a crisis that is marked, not by a simple knowledge, but by the ways" the crisis itself "simultaneously defies and demands our witness" (3).

In the Shadow of No Towers is an example of such a text. Through the graphic narrative format, Spiegelman's re-engagements with his psychically injurious "9/11" experience are agonizing and conflicted attempts not only to master the event, but also to recuperate the mind's very capacity to generate and assign meaning to the event in the first place. Indeed, in the words of Kristiaan Versluys, "[t]he sense that the terrorist attacks caused a semiotic rupture (that everything is topsy-turvy and semantically dislocated) is deeply embedded in the images themselves and screams, as it were, from every page" (989) of *No Towers*. But even though "traumatic experience is inaccessible to language [...], [...] there are means that witnesses can mobilize so as to avoid the terror of memory, while yet reviving it for themselves and their audience" (988). The

visual recurrence of the north tower's glowing "bones" in Spiegelman's work represents one such mobilization and also "serves as the leitmotif of the series. As such, it can easily be identified as an essential part of the protagonist's post-traumatic stress disorder" (993). As the leitmotif of *No Towers*, the frequent appearances throughout the text of the north tower's steel frames just before their disintegration convey the image's thematic significance: it symbolizes the ubiquitous influence or unshakeable hold that Spiegelman's traumatic post-"9/11" experience continues to have over him.

As well, the mournful aspects of *No Towers* give the graphic narrative's compulsion to repeatedly revisit the artist's experience of the attacks a greater significance. Just as Spiegelman allows his art form to manipulate his memories of the event, so too does his chosen art form move him to relive his memories in the most contradictory of ways. While other memorials to the attacks—with their emblazoned logos, engraved sentiments, and steadfast promises to remember—congeal around over-determined and encoded narratives of patriotism, sacrifice, and heroism to immortalize the dead, *No Towers* demonstrates the graphic narrative genre's potential to refuse fixed narratives and thereby engage actively with one's grief and loss; this, even though the graphic narrative cannot come into existence without the frames and panels of containment which characterize the genre.

In his work on public memorials, James Young expresses his concern that the propensity for "mass memory production and consumption" risks emphasizing "the memorialization of the past" over "its contemplation and study" (Young, *Texture* 5).

According to Young, we must not allow “the past to rigidify in its monumental forms” (15); rather, we ought to “vivify memory through the memory-work itself—whereby events, their recollection, and the role monuments”—and, I might add here, other forms of public remembrance like the graphic novel—“play in our lives [must] remain animate, never completed” (15). The emphasis Young places upon the ongoing contemplation of the past conveys his concern that the collective cultural practice of public remembrance threatens to become amnesiac in its very anxiety to memorialize and pledge perpetual remembrance in all the material and commodified means possible. Young sees the ethical dilemma of making the business of public memory-work synonymous with the work of engaging and reflecting upon public memory. For while the former is more heavily preoccupied with the building and preservation of memorial museums and monuments, the latter is enmeshed in unpacking the conflicted and often contradictory narratives that make public memory—and discourses about what constitute public memory and memory “as public”—possible. For my analysis, the question becomes: how does Spiegelman’s work negotiate the memorialization of the attacks, at the same time that it engages in a sustained contemplation without “monumentalizing” what took place in the United States on September 11, 2001? The narrative conventions of the graphic narrative, which *No Towers* adopts, in fact disrupt the very concept of establishing a particular narrative; and in this way Spiegelman succeeds in sorting out what he differentiates as “the fragments of what [he had] experienced from the media images that threatened to engulf what [he] actually saw” (Spiegelman 2). As the next section of this chapter will explore, the “architecture” of *No Towers*—that is, the layout of Spiegelman’s panels and frames as

well as its recurring images and themes—undoes the very fixity of narratives, memory, and the recollection of trauma itself. But more importantly, it resists the temptation to seek dogmatic knowledge about the attacks and hence abandon one's ethical responsibility to engage with the event as an ongoing social experience that demands rigorous contemplation and study.

Secondly, Spiegelman's constant reengagements with his memories of the attacks are what gradually lead him to his critical insight into how the event was and continues to be employed by the state as a means of justifying heightened intervention and control in the public sphere. *No Towers* is quite allergic to media accounts of "heroes" and "victims" and Manichaeian accounts of "good" and "evil," since Spiegelman's constant reengagements with his memories of the attacks are what gradually lead him to the awareness of how the event was and continues to be employed by the state as a means of justifying heightened intervention and control in the public sphere. The recurring trope of wakefulness that haunts the frazzled Art Spiegelman caricature in the last few plates of *No Towers* effectively communicates the artist's emphasis on his inability to sleep and his inability to let others sleep—both of which signal that he no longer suffers from what Jacques Derrida, writing in the aftermath of the attacks, has called "a dogmatic slumber from which only a new philosophical reflection can awaken us" (Derrida, "Autoimmunity" 100). It is at this point in *No Towers* that Spiegelman opens up his private experience of the attacks to allow for other emerging dialogues among his readership of individuals, who may or may not share his belief as well as his embodied and affective sensation that the sky is (still) falling.

The Architecture of *No Towers*

An artifact, a slab, a monument—this is no mere book. Unpaginated, ungainly and heavy, it seems to demand its own space. A coffee table can't contain a statement so thick and unsettling, a cry that would shout chaos... Unlike a work that's all text, you can "get through" this quickly. Absorbing it takes more time. It's Spiegelman's attempt to keep the memory of the World Trade Center from frying his brain. Patiently created, with great emotional trepidation, this signals Spiegelman's fresh commitment to a world he's just beginning to trust again.

--Carlo Wolff (pars. 2-5)

In the Shadow of No Towers defies clear-cut classification. Is it merely a slab of comic strips—contemporary and "antiquated" alike? Or is it a miniature monument that demands its own space somewhere, other than the surface of a coffee table? Wolff is also correct in pointing out that one may very well "go through" *No Towers* quickly, but "going through it quickly" does not guarantee that one has absorbed Spiegelman's work. Unlike Peter Skinner's coffee table book, with its intention to revere the World Trade Center made clear by a stunning picture of the Towers on the cover, and whose bright photographs of the glory and destruction of the WTC Towers invite readers to peruse the high resolution images before reading the text, Spiegelman's graphic novel does not afford its readers such nostalgic luxury. It could even be said in this regard that Skinner's text is more an act of mourning, while Spiegelman's text is more an act of fecund melancholia. In *No Towers*, both text and image operate in tandem to attract the attention of readers. But even though one may initially peruse *In the Shadow of No Towers*, one must repeatedly go back to the interplay between the text and images—which, according to Spiegelman, is a formidable approximation of human thought—in order to understand or make sense of what is happening in each of the ten plates.

Of course, the burden of scrutinizing every panel does not lie solely on the reader. The artist, in fact, bears the initial yoke of meticulously constructing, unraveling, and revisiting the narrative he or she wishes to convey to readers. Charles McGrath provides a description of the different kinds of labour the graphic novelist undertakes before arriving at a final product—if a final product ever comes about:

In certain ways, graphic novels are an almost primitive medium and require a huge amount of manual labor: drawing, inking, coloring and lettering, most of it done by hand (though a few artists have begun to experiment with computer drawing). It's as if a traditional novelist took his [*sic*] printout and then had to copy it over, word by word... For some graphic novelists, just four or five panels is a good day's work, and even a modest-size book can take years to complete. (McGrath 30)

In the case of Spiegelman, who bemoans the fact that “comix can be so damn labor intensive that one has to assume that one will live forever to make them” (Spiegelman 1), the labor of creating an autobiographical graphic narrative about the attacks is doubly burdened by his own personal struggle with the trauma and grief he experienced that day. But is it? Or is it the case that the medium of the graphic narrative—with the kind of interminable, melancholic labor it forces upon the artist—provides productive means by which mourning work and encounters with trauma can be addressed and reconfigured? If the complex and ongoing dialectic between words and vibrant pictures makes it doubtful that readers can fully absorb Spiegelman's work, is it also equally doubtful that the artist has fully absorbed his own work? If he has not, and thus can be characterized as struggling in the act of “working through” his grief, ought his engagements with his “9/11” experience be dismissed as incomplete and hence, yet-to-be successful? As I

have suggested earlier, Spiegelman's melancholic engagements with the attacks need not be characterized as hopeless, dis-eased undertakings. Eng and Kazanjian, after all, insist that "[i]t is precisely the ego's melancholic attachments to loss that might be said to produce not only psychic life and subjectivity but also the domain of remains" (4); so much so that melancholia "facilitat[es] the work of mourning by creating numerous disparate bodies, places, and ideals composing the symbolic world" (4). Certainly the creative (representational) burdens of an artist at work on a graphic narrative are not unlike the burdens one faces when encountering or testifying to the traumatic witnessing of death and horrific events. In *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative, and History*, Cathy Caruth argues that "trauma is not locatable in the simple violent or original event in an individual's past, but rather in the way that its very unassimilated nature," or in other words, "the way it was precisely not known in the first instance—returns to haunt the survivor later on" (Caruth 4). Although Spiegelman employs the convention of repetition and the use of boxes to contain and separate different frames of text and images, these conventions in fact work to disrupt, rather than master or bring order to, the narrative sequence of the ten plates that make up his "broadsheets" about the event. Thus, all ten of his renderings come across as simultaneously obsessive and frenetic, as transient and interminable attempts to give voice to his thoughts, feelings, and impressions in the aftermath of the attacks. When analyzed in the context of *No Towers*, the haunting of the survivor—which Caruth considers crucial to the unassimilated nature of trauma—finds its expression in Spiegelman's constantly anxious and fragile recastings of his impressions and understandings of what the event has come to represent for him.

What does it mean to address grief, and to memorialize a traumatic event through the medium of the graphic narrative, as opposed to other forms such as monuments, poetry, and documentaries? How is the work of mourning transformed, and in what ways, when a graphic narrative artist employs the genre to address personal grief? Shoshana Felman suggests that the act of testifying or publicly bearing witness to traumatic events “seems to be comprised of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance” (Felman and Laub 5). Spiegelman’s graphic narrative embodies this theory of trauma in its attempt to recall and grapple with the grief and terror the author experienced following the attacks. The very layout of *In the Shadow of No Towers*—a collage-like layering of panels and images—coupled with its adamant refusal to provide a specific sequential order in which to read the panels, suggest an understanding of the interminable condition of encountering and trying to address trauma. Just as a reader can reread the different plates of Spiegelman’s work and formulate new interpretations with each reading, so too does the artist’s constant reliving of trauma shore up different ways of drawing the fragmented memories from such an experience, which are never to be fully apprehended by the traumatized person. One, therefore, never completely comes to terms and masters one’s traumatic experience.

This particular insight into the constantly “incomplete” experience of trauma forms the structural or architectural basis of *No Towers*. Rather than prescribing “ready-made” assumptions and specific narratives about the attacks and its aftermaths, Spiegelman’s diverse style of addressing—within and in between each plate—the

immediate and subsequent trauma he experienced, effectively demonstrates the extent to which traumatic experiences necessitate a breakdown not only of linguistic mastery, but also of concepts of continuity. It is worth quoting Felman and Laub's comments on this phenomenon in the context of the poet Paul Celan's use of silence and the "rhythmic breakdown":

By introducing silence as a rhythmic *breakdown* and as a displacing *counterpoint* to sound not just in *between* his stanzas and his verses, but even *in the very midst* of the phonetic flow and the poetic diction of his *words*... Celan strives to defetishize his language and to dislocate his own aesthetic mastery, by breaking down any self-possessed control of sense and by disrupting any unity, integrity or continuity of conscious meaning. Through their very breakdown, the sounds testify, henceforth, precisely to a knowledge they do not possess, by unleashing, and by drifting into, their own buried depths of silence. (Felman and Laub 37, emphasis theirs)

In the technical lingo of comics production, the term "frames" refers to the panels or boxes in which comics artists draw the images and write the texts that make up their graphic narrative, while the term "gutter" refers to the empty spaces that lie between the frames and provide the narrative with the sense of time passing. Thus, each panel can be regarded as a distinct thought only by virtue of the gutter that punctuates the assemblage of frames that comprise each plate. In addition to using silence through the adoption of the frame-gutter structure, Spiegelman also incorporates an image of "the glowing bones" of the North Tower before its disintegration in all the plates he draws; this, in order to unsettle the very notion of mastering one's recollections of traumatic events. This pivotal image visually registers his protracted absence of mastery over the attacks, as well as his repetitive remembrance of them. In this way, this image calls to mind the "rhythmic

breakdown” of which Felman and Laub speak: its constant recurrence in the text gives it a rhythmic quality, yet its very presence throughout the text represents the very elusiveness of the event’s meaning for Spiegelman. That the sight of the North Tower’s searing metal frames—its ephemeral “glowing bones”—was, in Spiegelman’s words, the “pivotal image” from his “9/11 morning” (Spiegelman 2), and that this same image is the only image in all ten plates to reappear in some fashion, demonstrate the extent to which even the most palpable memory of one’s traumatic experience proves indefinable. In other words, even though Spiegelman vividly remembers seeing the glowing metal frames of the North Tower shortly before the building’s total collapse, he cannot fully apprehend or assign meaning to this image, much less incorporate it into his understanding of the attacks. This is so because his traumatized state is what undermines his ability to achieve masterful or comprehensive knowledge of the attacks. Thus, his repeated incorporations of this image into all ten plates of his graphic narrative are not only attempts to make sense of the event that has traumatized him, but also symptoms of his continued traumatization. As Marianne Hirsch observes, “[a]t the moment of trauma, time stands still, images are frozen, like the glowing tower that is repeated over and over in the pages of Spiegelman’s work. To see is to be wounded, seared, burned” (Hirsch 1213). In *No Towers*, the glowing orange and red-hot skeletal remains of the World Trade Center is perhaps the most ambiguous image throughout Spiegelman’s work: for example, in Plate 1, Spiegelman refers to the images as “awesome”; in Plate 2 its gradual collapse is depicted in horizontally arranged panels denoting a sequence of closely related events; in Plates 3 and 4 the image is arranged in different ways as a border to the panels

in the foreground; in Plate 5 the colors of the glowing metal frames are made to correspond with the colors of the Terror Alert Scale implemented at the behest of the Bush administration in the interests of public safety and “Homeland Security.”

Spiegelman says that of all the scenes of panic and destruction he beheld on September 11, 2001, this image has been “burned into the inside of [his] eyelids” (2). Why then can he only paint it—in his words—“with humiliating results,” and why did he instead decide that a computer-rendered digital image was more accurate than his hand-drawn attempts to reproduce this indelible memory of the North Tower’s rapidly disintegrating steel frames (2)? It is because this image of the attacks functions as an indexical and allegorical representation of Spiegelman’s traumatic experience, the sheer vividness and meaning of which—try as he might to incorporate, master, and contain it in all ten of his renderings of the tower—will always already elude him. While coffee table books like *The Giants That Defied The Sky* seek to commemorate what are considered acts of heroism that warrant anxious remembrance and recuperation in the form of mechanically rehearsed narratives of sacrifice,⁵⁶ the graphic narrative—in particular,

⁵⁶ In *102 Minutes: The Untold Story of the Fight to Survive Inside the Twin Towers*, Jim Dwyer and Kevin Flynn challenge Mayors Michael Bloomberg and Rudy Giuliani’s bombastic claims regarding the “bravery or sacrifices of the firefighters” (252) in the World Trade Center on “9/11.” Dwyer and Flynn’s book does not gainsay the New York fire department’s dedication to saving civilians from the fires in the World Trade Center; however, the authors do challenge the mayors’ claims that *all* the firefighters who entered the towers to rescue trapped civilians knowingly and (heroically) went to their own deaths. By including information gleaned from interviews with firefighters and city officials after the attacks, Dwyer and Flynn demonstrate that the high casualty rate among firefighters on “9/11” was not so much a result of conscious acts of heroism, but rather a result of poor communication with supervisors and the police department—all of which contributed to delaying the evacuation of firefighters at the time of the towers’ imminent

Spiegelman's graphic narrative—eschews rote memorialization. For within its pages glow the traces of Spiegelman's sense of loss that day, as well as his constantly thwarted attempts to work “successfully” through its trauma-inducing memories.

In the Shadow of No Towers does not seek to make short work of grief and loss; rather, the text is animated throughout by a condition of mourning that does not entail the presupposed expectation of inevitable psychological and emotional recovery and narrative mastery, but instead dwells upon the impossibility of fulfilling or realizing these expectations. This particular reading of Spiegelman's work calls to mind Judith Butler's recasting of the dynamic possibilities that grief can offer, especially in relation to historical traumas like the September 11, 2001 attacks. In *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence*, Butler contends that the swift banishment of grief for the sake of immediate (retaliatory) action results only in the reification of (prolonged) mourning as an occurrence or experience to be dreaded rather than explored and theorized in all its complexities—emotional, psychological, political, and otherwise:

Is there something to be gained from grieving, from tarrying with grief, from remaining exposed to its unbearability and not endeavoring to seek a resolution for grief through violence? Is there something to be gained in the political domain by maintaining grief as part of the framework within which we think our

collapse. This account of what took place at the World Trade Center Towers on “9/11” also challenges Peter Skinner's celebration of the towers as architectural wonders. Dwyer and Flynn also adamantly emphasize the Towers' safety flaws (a lack of a fire tower, poor fireproofing, few stairways that are dispersed in various areas of each floor and lead directly from the top to the bottom floor)—flaws which were instrumental in trapping those individuals above and a few stories below the hijacked airplanes' points of impact. In effect, Dwyer and Flynn's account conveys the ways in which the Towers themselves contributed to the mass killing of their stranded occupants—a narrative that is certainly silenced in Skinner's *World Trade Center: The Giants that Defied the Sky*.

international ties? If we stay with the sense of loss, are we left feeling only passive and powerless, as some might fear? Or are we, rather, returned to a sense of human vulnerability, to our collective responsibility for the physical lives of one another? (29-30)

Through its very “failure” or unwillingness to attach a foreclosed meaning to the sight of the North Tower’s glowing steel frames, regardless of the number of times the artist himself refers or draws attention to this image, Spiegelman’s graphic narrative stays with the artist’s profound “sense of loss.” By “tarrying with grief,” as Butler would say, *No Towers*—as a graphic novel that agonistically and inefficiently mourns “9/11”—unravels the “privatized” and simultaneously “depoliticized” (22) veneer of mourning, for it invites its readers to grapple with Spiegelman’s experiences from that day and to incorporate his renderings of the attacks into the fabric of their own recollections. In this way, individual grief translates to a tapestry of collective concerns and responsibilities, and mourning becomes a foundational basis upon which “the public” and “the political” are established and contested.⁵⁷ Thus, rather than “resolute action” swiftly taking the place of grief—be it in the form of aggressive militarism mobilized as a supposedly “appropriate” response in memory of the victims, or of public memorials intentionally

⁵⁷ Of course, as I have discussed in greater detail earlier in this project (see both the Introduction and Chapter 1), Butler’s theory of mutual human vulnerability warrants critiquing. This is so because she appeals to the primarily “Western” experience of loss from the event of “9/11” as the foundation upon which to base her theory of universal vulnerability—a move which threatens to occlude (if not eradicate or deny entirely) the incommensurably different ways that “non-Western” individuals have experienced and continue to live with other forms of vulnerabilities (especially those to which they have been subjected by “Western” powers). Despite this problematic aspect of Butler’s propositions regarding mutual vulnerability, however, her insistence upon dwelling with, rather than banishing, grief is nonetheless helpful here in terms of analyzing the impact that Spiegelman’s graphic narrative has in politicizing private loss and grief.

constructed to foment distrust in and suspicion of so-called “foreigners” and “non-Americans” and proclaim unflinching belief in state institutions and interests—the time has come for (the thinking of and about) grief to take the place of resolute action. As a memorial to the attacks and as a mode of public pedagogy, Spiegelman’s graphic narrative does not relay the anxiously prescribed “facts” about the event, as so many impromptu and “officially” state-sanctioned memorials seem alarmingly too ready to do; nor does it seek to justify the measures undertaken by the state for the sake of “national security” in the wake of the attacks. Rather, *No Towers* mourns the attacks— that is, those who died as well as the incidents of destruction that make up the event of “9/11” itself—without fearing or pretending to banish the facets of grief that remain always already inconsolable and radically resistant to subsequent banalization. Far from being apolitical and privatized, Art Spiegelman’s *In the Shadow of No Towers* fashions a work of productive melancholy that—in its sustained engagement with trauma and loss—is both public and very much mired in “politics” and the political.

Crises Out of Chaos

How vulnerable New York—and by extension, all of Western Civ.—actually is. I took my city, and those homely, arrogant towers, for granted. It’s actually all as transient and ephemeral as, say, old newspapers. Afterwards, our government reduced a tragic event with so many ramifications down to a mere war-recruitment poster.

--Art Spiegelman, (“A Comic Book Response to 9/11 and Its Aftermath” par. 8)

Spiegelman's refusal to attach a fixed meaning to the image of the North Tower's glowing bones demonstrates his text's wariness towards establishing clear-cut (memorial) narratives of "good" and "evil," as well as of "terrorists" and "victims." Instead, he addresses the different forms that "terror" and "terrorism" have assumed in the aftermath of the attacks and, in doing so, also implicates high-ranking members of the United States government as perpetrators. It is worth unpacking and parsing Spiegelman's shifting references to two "hijackings": first, the airborne suicide hijackings on the day of the attacks, and second, Spiegelman's characterization of the Bush administration as having promptly—and exploitatively—capitalized on the grief, panic, and fear the events of September 11, 2001 elicited in the American public. The tenth plate of *No Towers* palpably demonstrates Spiegelman's poignant critique of the Bush administration and the Republican Party, which held its Presidential Convention in New York City in September 2004. In this final plate of *No Towers*, Spiegelman comments that there is "[n]othing like commemorating an event to help you forget it" (Plate 10). To emphasize this point, a caricatured Spiegelman also bemoans the commodification of "9/11" just a year after the attacks (Plate 10). Furthermore, he recalls the rabid patriotism and consequent censorship that permeated the United States and its mainstream media outlets in the aftermath of the attacks, the consequences of which contributed to what he views as "two years of squandered chances to bring the community of nations together" (Plate 10). But Spiegelman offers his most cutting social and political critique when he declares that in September 2004, New York City will see "[c]owboy boots drop on Ground Zero as New York is transformed into a stage set for the Republican Presidential Convention, and

Tragedy is transformed into Travesty” (Plate10). Tragedy is transformed into Travesty: through these very words Spiegelman expresses the absurdity of staunchly subscribing to an inflexible narrative of American victimization at the hands of foreign “terrorists.” For who has victimized whom? But more importantly, in the aftermath of the attacks, who continues to victimize whom by circulating—in Derrida’s words—“images or rumours aimed at terrifying the so-called civilian population” (“Autoimmunity” 109)? Certainly the American government has itself appropriated and flaunted its nation’s projected “victim status” as a country besieged by terrorists who loathe freedom; this, to garner unquestioning electoral support for (or nationwide acceptance of, or submission to) the often aggressive, and equally often unilateral decisions the U.S. makes with regards to those countries it authoritatively deems as “rogue nation-states.”

Even though Spiegelman did not anticipate what he considers the Bush administration’s divisive “hijacking” of the attacks—in much the same way as he did not anticipate the September 11, 2001 hijackings—he nevertheless does not ignore its implications. He waits with a heightened sense of paranoia and anxiety for “that other shoe to drop” (Spiegelman, *No Towers* Plate 1) and as a result refuses or is unable to sleep soundly. In Plates 6, 7, and 8, while alternately assuming the classic comic strip personas of Little Nemo and Jiggs, Spiegelman is rudely awakened either by a bad dream or a suspiciously loud noise that he fears was made by a “terrorist” (Plate 8). In Plate 9 a frazzled Spiegelman—complete with bloodshot eyes—sits up in a bed full of sleeping men and stares at the reader in utter fright: “How can they be so complacent? How can they sleep??!” he asks. “Don’t they know the world is ending???” (Plate 9). In a

subsequent panel Spiegelman wakes his bedfellows with the exclamation that “The Sky is Falling!!!”—to which his startled neighbours respond by shaking in fright. As they continue to quake in fear and paranoia, Spiegelman himself falls asleep, but before he does so he mumbles, “Sometimes complaining is the only solace left!” (Plate 9).

I want to focus briefly on this trope of wakefulness and insomnia to discuss the ways in which Spiegelman’s graphic narrative addresses what Zygmunt Bauman refers to as the phenomenon of “*Unsicherheit*”:

The most sinister and painful of contemporary troubles can be best collected under the rubric of *Unsicherheit*—the German term which blends together experiences which need these three English terms—uncertainty, insecurity and unsafety—to be conveyed [...] [T]he nature of these troubles is itself a most powerful impediment to collective remedies; people feeling insecure, people wary of what the future might hold in store and fearing for their safety, are not truly free to take the risks which collective action demands. They lack the courage to dare and the time to imagine alternative ways of living together; and they are too preoccupied with tasks they cannot share to think of, let alone to devote their energy to, such tasks as can be undertaken in common. (5)

In its debilitating distrust of what the future may (or may not) hold in our post-“9/11” world, the paranoia Spiegelman feels at the onset of *No Towers* of course falls under the rubric of *Unsicherheit*. But what I find brimming with dynamic political as well as pedagogical possibilities in Plate 9 is Spiegelman’s “ability” to fall asleep once he “contaminates” the rest of his bedfellows with this sense of dread. Could it be that Spiegelman’s paranoia from the first few plates of *No Towers* has, by virtue of his dogged reflection on the attacks and their aftermaths, evolved into a more sophisticated form of wariness—that is, one that falls in line with educated vigilance, rather than paranoia? Does his ability to fall asleep in Plate 9—this, only after he rouses his

neighbours—indicate that he has accomplished what he has set out to do since the attacks: engage in some form of consciousness-raising? I ask this question in light of Henry Giroux’s discussion of the “politics of worldliness” as it pertains to Edward Said’s notion of wakefulness. Giroux, commenting on Said’s reflections about his personal inability to sleep, writes:

this sense of being awake, displaced, caught in a combination of diverse circumstances [...] suggests a particular notion of worldliness—a critical and engaged interaction with the world we live in mediated by a responsibility for challenging structures of domination and for alleviating human suffering. As an ethical and political stance, worldliness rejects modes of education removed from political or social concerns, divorced from history and matters of injury and injustice. (*Terror of Neoliberalism* 150)

Certainly, Giroux’s understanding of critical and cultural wakefulness also falls in line with Jacques Derrida’s provocation—which I have quoted above—that insists on the importance of being roused from a “‘dogmatic slumber’ from which only a new philosophical reflection can awaken us” (Derrida, “Autoimmunity” 100). Giroux’s equation of the metaphor of wakefulness with the public intellectual’s responsibility to remain perpetually vigilant also imbues Spiegelman’s insomnia in *No Towers* with greater political import: the caricatured Spiegelman is able to sleep, for the time being, perhaps because he has successfully voiced his complaint about the lack of critical and engaged interaction with the world (Spiegelman, *No Towers* Plate 9) and, in doing so, has also roused others into taking part in the vigil of cultural wakefulness. Voicing this “complaint,” Spiegelman succeeds in turning chaos into crises.

Since he has succeeded in stirring others to cultural wakefulness, why does Spiegelman the artist still allow the caricatured version of himself to fall asleep once again? If Derrida, Said, and Giroux call for critical citizenship in the form of cultural wakefulness and perpetual ethical and philosophical vigilance,⁵⁸ the caricatured Spiegelman's ability to sleep in *No Towers* poses an interesting quandary, especially because it threatens to compromise or even contradict what I am claiming here as the graphic novel's work of rousing people from the "dogmatic slumber" of depoliticized democracy—of which the heightened authoritarianism of the Bush administration in the aftermath of the attacks is a recent example. Spiegelman's falling asleep indicates the

⁵⁸ Of course, Derrida, Said, and Giroux do not call for critical citizenship in identical ways. Although the scope of this chapter cannot thoroughly address the different ways in which these thinkers seek to mobilize critical citizenship, at the risk of coarsening their arguments and concerns, I will very quickly point to the more salient points of their work here, for the sake of clarity. For Derrida, the concept of deconstruction is always already bound up with the responsibilities of critical citizenship, because the "infinite task of deconstruction" is "to draw on [one's] heritage and its memory for the conceptual tools that allow one to challenge the limits that this heritage has imposed up to now" (Derrida, *For What Tomorrow...: A Dialogue* 19). Said, on the other hand, addresses the importance of humanism to democratic criticism. In *Humanism and Democratic Criticism*, he argues that "[h]umanism is the exertion of one's faculties in language in order to understand, reinterpret, and grapple with the products of language in history, other languages and other histories [...] humanism is not a way of consolidating and affirming what 'we' have always known and felt, but rather a means of questioning, upsetting, and reformulating so much of what is presented to us as commodified, packaged, uncontroversial, and uncritically codified certainties" (Said 28). Giroux's focus on the important role public educators play in the development of critical citizenship demonstrates not only the need for a politics of hope, but also for a kind of politics that dedicates itself to the *ongoing* project that is critical citizenship: "As committed educators, we cannot eliminate politics, but we can work against a politics of certainty, a pedagogy of censorship, and an institutional formation that closes down rather than opens up democratic relations. This requires that we work diligently to construct a politics without guarantees, one that perpetually questions itself as well as all those forms of knowledge, values, and practices that appear beyond the process of interrogation, debate, and deliberation" (Giroux, *The Terror of Neoliberalism: Authoritarianism and the Eclipse of Democracy* 140-41).

productive and vibrant establishment of a community that supports and “looks out for” every individual, and thus seeks collaborative action and, in Bauman’s words, “collective remedies” for issues that are of public concern. In a sense, this particular reading of this scene in the graphic narrative suggests that the artist has passed on the wakeful moment or wakeful mode to those around him, in a kind of relay effect, which in turn enables him to go to sleep once more—a sleep necessary in order to wake again or be constantly waking. The sleep to which the caricatured version of Spiegelman succumbs may also imply a reversion to “dogmatic slumber” or a decline in cultural wakefulness, brought about by the inability or impossibility of maintaining vibrant critical citizenship within a community. But let us recall and keep in mind that despite the vast diversity of their respective works, Derrida, Said, and Giroux—in their own ways—consider wakefulness and vigilance an ongoing project of critical citizenship; and that critical citizenship itself cannot (indeed, must not) be attained only once and then considered successfully implemented upon the point of initial achievement. In the words of Derrida:

one must know that this vigilance, this language of vigilance, which is the language of consciousness or of conscience, is not enough. Nor is educating the decision-makers[...] Awakening is necessary; it is necessary to work, to work to say, to see, to remember thematically, consciously, but while knowing that another analytic labor is under way[...] The citizen, in the present form of citizenship, in his current situation, must doubtless be vigilant: this is what we do, for example, when we take a position, engage in a discourse, act in order to convince, in order to exert pressure, in order to bear witness, when we go out into the streets, vote, or sign a text. This exercise of vigilance is indispensable, but we mustn’t think that it’s enough to become conscious, to say or see things clearly, that this is what it takes for this work to get done. (Derrida and Stiegler 136)

Critical citizenship is thus not a terminable project: as a constant—and constantly laborious—work in progress, critical citizenship requires not only perpetual self-

reflection, but also perpetual reassessments and refashionings of one's place within and among the intricate power dynamics that render us as "political" subjects, whatever the term "political" may come to mean in specific cultural milieus and contexts. Thus, rather than waking up for good or once and for all, one is constantly falling asleep and waking up, and constantly being roused, rejuvenated into an awareness of the need for a more rigorous and vigorous cultivation of what it means to participate in and actively uphold a democracy. Avoiding the dogmatic slumber that is symptomatic of what he considers a neglected and thereby depoliticized democracy, Spiegelman is critical of "dogmatic insomnia": that is, the kind of authoritarianism that rabidly denies any form of debate and dialogue and adamantly refuses to challenge (much less *question*) itself.

While Spiegelman's text demonstrates the extent to which the graphic narrative genre possesses the capacity to promote wider (political) literacy as well as the potential to foster critical engagements with and remembrances of traumatic events, I also note here, however, that the graphic narrative's appeal as a newer and more widely accessible kind of memorial form that is inherently shaped and influenced by contemporary screen culture remains just as vulnerable to programmatic renderings that undermine the very pedagogically innovative qualities for which the medium is currently celebrated. More on point, as a mode of "9/11" remembrance pedagogy, what James Young has assessed as the genre's "antiredemptory" (Young, *Memory's Edge* 22) potential when it comes to grappling with traumatic events is not itself immune to becoming subjected and vulnerable to ideological and depoliticizing co-optations. In fact, it is the goal of rendering the event and its attendant meanings and legacies easily accessible and

understandable to all through the graphic narrative genre that risks becoming the very alibi for the regimented thinking and remembrance of the attacks, in spite—or perhaps in avoidance—of the event’s inherent and often agonistic complexities.

For example, in 2006, and at the heels of Spiegelman’s far from triumphalist graphic narrative, Sid Jacobson and Ernie Colón created *The 9/11 Report*, a self-proclaimed “faithful” graphic narrative adaptation of *The Final Report of the National Commission on Terrorist Attacks Upon the United States*—a text which is better known as *The 9/11 Commission Report* (2004). The rationale for rendering *The 9/11 Commission Report* into graphic narrative format is to make, according to Jacobson and Colón, “one of the most important and tragic events in [American] history” “accessible to all” (Jacobson and Colón ix). The implied and quite erroneously generalizing (and patronizing) assumption undergirding this endeavour is that the majority of the public is either unwilling to, or incapable of, understanding the attacks or addressing their implications, unless the complex narrative of the attacks is simplified through the reduction of written text and the proliferation of images. Thus, as the graphic narrative becomes more widely accepted by educators as an institutionally approved mode of promoting, facilitating, and perhaps even “democratizing” literacy, something of the genre’s counter-hegemonic potential as a site of remembrance, its otherness as hybrid text, can itself be diminished by the very appeal to easier accessibility.

In this specific context, the concept of facilitating public access and making easier the apprehension of “difficult” or challenging issues such as the event of “9/11” becomes

less pedagogically commendable and more ideologically troublesome. For while Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* disrupts and undermines any kind of confident posturing that dogmatically declares absolute "knowledge" about the attacks, Jacobson and Colón's graphic narrative reproduces and—by dramatically cutting down on the expository verbiage—renders "easier to understand" or "less difficult" the *9/11 Commission Report* that has been widely touted as the "official document" that chronicles in detail "what really happened" (even from hour to hour) on September 11, 2001. Jacobson and Colón's graphic narrative adaptation employs timelines, life-like caricatures, and linear diagrams to ensure readers' understanding of only one narrative of the attacks: the official, state-sanctioned one, found within the pages of *The 9/11 Commission Report*. Glaringly absent from this specific graphic narrative adaptation are alternative views of the event or the creators' personal opinions about the aftermaths of the attacks, much less their own narratives of their respective (post-) "9/11" experiences. Bluntly put, this graphic narrative about the attacks is merely an illustrated version of the *Commission Report*; unlike *No Towers*, it does not provoke its readers to dialectically cast their private experiences and impressions of the event and its many legacies against the official story being presented to them in text and image form. To employ the words of Spiegelman himself, there is no "faultline" here on which a "collision" takes place between "World History" and "Personal History." Such a programmatic engagement with the attacks runs the risk of ignoring David Simpson's observation that "9/11" is rooted in and dependent upon historical forces for its coherence and intelligibility (13). Moreover, this programmatic understanding of "9/11" also leaves the event vulnerable to what

Simpson considers ideological cooptation (62). In essence, the readers of this text—though they are encouraged to involve themselves and participate in public dialogue about the attacks through the easier accessibility of the *Commission* documents—are limited to being passive consumers of an official story explaining the attacks as well as of official solutions offered up to rectify the shortcomings of national security that the occurrence of the attacks painfully unearthed.

Notwithstanding its well-meaning pedagogical intention of enabling and empowering more individuals to read and become more informed about the contextual history and sequential unfolding of the attacks, Jacobson and Colón’s reluctance to stray from the official narrative of the event as (re)constructed by the *9/11 Commission Report* and their singular goal of making “9/11” accessible to all in fact shuts down rather than foments sustained critical engagements with the attacks. Consequently, the populace is meaningfully silenced through the preemption of personal affect and non-state narratives of the attacks from what is considered “public dialogue.” Such a gesture threatens to undermine and in fact even dismantle the counter-narrative and anti-redemptory memorial possibilities of the graphic narrative genre, which Spiegelman’s *In the Shadow of No Towers* has enabled its readers to glimpse.

But despite the fact that I regard Jacobson and Colón’s text as more programmatic in its memorial treatment of the attacks in comparison to Spiegelman’s graphic narrative, it does warrant saying that my intention throughout the chapter has not been to lionize *In the Shadow of No Towers* as a flawless response to the event of “9/11” and, hence,

infallible and immune to critique. One way of possibly teasing out some of the troubling aspects of Spiegelman's narrative is by closely examining the wider implications of his fixation upon the attacks as a primarily "American" event. As I have discussed earlier, *No Towers* formidably demonstrates the promise and potential of the graphic narrative genre as an anti-redemptory medium that provides means of critically unpacking the vicissitudes of grief and trauma. But what could give us as readers pause in the context of this particular work, however, is the way in which the artist's compulsion to repeatedly relive his personal "9/11" experience—and, by extension, the "9/11" experience of his fellow Americans—threatens to re-center Western injury; this, despite Spiegelman's continued insistence upon the event's geopolitical significance on a global scale.

I have, of course, already spoken in detail about the re-centering of Western injury in the preceding chapter, particularly as this tendency at times informs the peace activism of the September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows organization. My discussion of Peaceful Tomorrows' claims of sameness with the Afghan and Iraqi civilians (that the group members met during their visits overseas) critiqued the organization members' equation of their traumatic (post-) "9/11" experiences as being the same as those of their racialized Others despite the vast economic, infrastructural, and sociopolitical differences that undermined such idealized claims. Regarding Spiegelman's graphic narrative on the other hand, I want to tentatively posit for consideration here the ways in which his text's insistence upon the uniqueness of "9/11" and the event's capacity to profoundly impact global politics may also risk evoking a similar threat posed by the colonial strains of the peace activism undertaken by the

Peaceful Tomorrows group. This is so because, ironically enough, the seemingly diametrically opposed claims regarding the event's traumatic nature as either unique because of its singularity (as in the case of Spiegelman's text), or universal because of its commonality with other forms of historical trauma (as in the case of Peaceful Tomorrows' peace activism) both imply that democracy or meaningful democratic change cannot happen in other parts of the world *unless* it is instigated at the behest of or initially led by Western subjects. The common assumption problematically undergirding both sentiments is, of course, that the West and its subjects are the natural purveyors of democracy and, by extension, human rights and world peace. This particular critique of Spiegelman's text is one way in which his call for the refashioning of democracy in the United States could be seen as complying with or validating colonial ideologies that continue to reproduce the West's hegemonic relationship to its global Others.

The Work of Art *In the Shadow of No Towers*

In the Shadow of No Towers [...] chronicles the slow, sickening descent of one man's mood—and, by extension, our collective mood [...] despite its maddening lack of discipline and its frustrating willingness to leave a thought half-finished and unexplored, you can't deny how Spiegelman captures the fractured mindset of a frightened age.

--Tim Grierson (par. 4)

To conclude, despite Spiegelman's fears—neurotic or not—that the world is on the brink of another disaster, *In the Shadow of No Towers* is saturated with palpable desires for further disorder and crises—but certainly not those identical or even akin to the attacks that took place on September 11, 2001. Rather, *No Towers* taps into and

employs Spiegelman's personal trauma to disrupt and unsettle the prevalent notion of "democracy" with which the artist, ever since the events of September 11, has felt excruciatingly at odds. That is, Spiegelman employs his graphic narrative as a means of agitating the kind of depoliticized democracy in the United States that staves off "vigorous criticism [...] until it could be contained as part of our business as usual" (Spiegelman, *No Towers* 2). In the words of Kristiaan Versluys, "it is in sketching how mourning leaves the strictly private realm and acquires a public dimension that *In the Shadow of No Towers* turns political" (995). Spiegelman's careful arrangement of his graphic narrative as at once a faithful and at the same time faithless tribute to what he saw and experienced on September 11, 2001 complements the equally careful deliberation he undertakes in order to unravel the current "climate" of depoliticized "discourse in America" (2). In short, Spiegelman's employment of the genre of the graphic narrative also allows *In the Shadow of No Towers* to take on a sustained critique of current national and political issues.

But what Spiegelman himself calls his "slow-motion diary" (2) also gestures towards the project of invigorating the artists'—and by extension, other cultural producers'—roles as educators as well as influential agents of critique and change. Thus, as politically engaged citizens, the work of artists—of which Spiegelman is only one among millions—will shed what Susan Buck-Morss, in her book, *Thinking Past Terror*, laments as the perception of artists' "social irrelevance" (Buck-Morss 13). This graphic narrative suggests that artists are perhaps the best prepared for teaching and productively demonstrating "how," in Spiegelman's poignant words, "ephemeral even skyscrapers

and democratic institutions are” (Spiegelman, *No Towers* 2). Spiegelman’s presence throughout his graphic narrative symbolically challenges the notion that the artist—as cultural producer—requires rescuing from the shadows of political obscurity. Versluys rightly points out that for Spiegelman in particular and for artists in general:

[T]elling the story does not only serve a cathartic purpose. The survivor also has the duty to make his or her voice heard, if only to honor the victims and to make sure that their death was not in vain. This may explain why 9/11 and its aftermath spoke so strongly to Spiegelman that he felt, as an artist, he was obliged not only to testify as a witness but also to protest when he saw how the events were misinterpreted and abused for political ends. (987)

As a graphic narrative, the public appeal of *In the Shadow of No Towers*—a work which explores the uneven and unpredictable textures of what it means to witness and testify not only to personal trauma, but also to historical events—addresses a larger readership that hopefully will, in turn, reflect upon and critically take up both the politics and the pedagogies of the work of mourning.

CHAPTER THREE

“Do you know what a tower is?” The Crisis of “9/11” Remembrance Pedagogy in Samira Makhmalbaf’s *God, Construction and Destruction*⁵⁹

The 2002 international film project *11''09'01 – September 11* consists of eleven short films from eleven different countries. Each film has a running time of eleven minutes, nine seconds, one frame and is characterized as a contribution to or part of the global response to the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. Special emphasis is placed on the geographic origin of each film because *11''09'01 – September 11* underscores the fact that the attacks, though primarily portrayed in the mainstream media as an “American tragedy,” in fact resonated throughout many parts of the world as an event that has repercussions that far exceed national boundaries. The film project begins with a contribution from Iranian director Samira Makhmalbaf, entitled *God, Construction and Destruction*, and it is this film that preoccupies my analysis in this third and final chapter of my project. The previous two chapters have largely focused on the ways in which mainstream public remembrance of the attacks can (re-)educate individuals about, for example, grieving and yet refraining from the pursuit of militarized vengeance, and welcoming rather than disavowing uncertainty in the face of trauma as a necessary condition for political and personal transformation. This chapter likewise seeks to trouble the association between state propaganda and public remembrances of the attacks.

⁵⁹ An earlier, condensed version of this chapter has been published in *The Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies* 10.2 (2012), 8-35. Also, portions of this chapter were presented at the “Art in Times of Conflict” Bi-Annual Pre-Conference of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies (CACS), Wilfrid Laurier University, Waterloo, ON. 26 May 2012.

Moreover, through a close reading of Makhmalbaf's film I also examine here the ways in which education—that is, the act or practice of teaching and the phenomenon of learning—itself encounters many conceptual, practical, and philosophical challenges as it takes up the task of committing the event to memory and, hence, communicating its legacies for the future.

Makhmalbaf's film takes place in Iran, where a group of Afghan civilians is shown in the opening sequence drawing water from a drying well. These Afghans are part of the largest refugee population in the world, which dramatically increased in size as a result of the Soviet war in Afghanistan from December 1979 to February 1989. The Soviet war compelled Afghan refugees to flee to neighbouring Iran and Pakistan, where they sought safety and reprieve from the bloody conflicts at home. In the aftermath of the Cold War, and as the political and economic stability of Afghanistan became increasingly threatened by insurgency and religious extremism, what had been previously regarded as a temporary diaspora of Afghan refugees became more commonplace and permanent. At the time of writing, “the current Afghan conflict” has “continued to produce the most refugees” in the world, “a position that it has held for 32 years. Worldwide, one refugee in four is Afghan” (“Global Refugee Numbers” par. 6). Furthermore, “Pakistan remained the world's top host nation in 2012, with 1.6 million refugees mostly from Afghanistan, followed by Iran, with 868, 200, and Germany, with 589,700” (par. 19). According to Ashrafi and Moghissi, twelve years ago, “[i]n 2000, official Iranian government figures put the total number of *documented* Afghans in Iran at 1,482,200. If the many non-documented migrants are added, an estimate of 2-2.5 million Afghan refugees in Iran

seems realistic” (par. 26, emphasis theirs). Ashrafi and Moghissi also note that “[a]n overwhelming number of refugees reside in provinces bordering Afghanistan, and are concentrated in the margins of major urban centres. Only about 3 per cent of Iran’s Afghans inhabit refugee camps,” with “the rest [the remaining 97%] being free to live anywhere in the country” (par. 28).

Despite its status as a host nation to those fleeing Afghanistan, Iran has consistently denied full citizenship status to Afghan refugees and their children—many of whom were born in their host country and have yet to set foot on Afghan soil: “Afghan children are automatically considered to have the nationality of their fathers, even though they may not have a valid document to establish their Afghan nationality. Within such an environment, most Afghan refugees in Iran [are] still regarded as aliens or foreigners” (par. 29). This view of Afghans as aliens or foreigners persists because, in Iran, Afghan refugees are granted very little by way of physical or social mobility: “their freedom of movement is restricted; they are not able to obtain travel documents that would allow them to leave and enter the country; and they usually cannot get work permits” (par. 29). Iran’s economic problems in the aftermath of its war with Iraq in 1980 also compounded the increasing public hostility towards Afghan refugees, to such a point that “[t]here was a widespread feeling that Afghans were being nicely provided for by a government that was unable to do the same for its Iranian citizens” (par. 34).

After the Soviet Union withdrew from Afghanistan in February 1989, a three-year civil war broke out in Afghanistan and resulted in the defeat of Mohammad Najibullah’s

Communist government by mujahideen forces in April 1992. The fall of the Najibullah government encouraged close to 1.5 million, mostly male, refugees to repatriate voluntarily and participate in the Afghan resistance (par. 24) by “join[ing] their own ethnic fighting groups” (par. 24). The civil war, however, made it even more difficult for Afghanistan to rebuild its infrastructure. This is so because the conflicts “intensified the lack of security and perpetuated the harsh conditions of life” (par. 24), thereby rendering repatriation a risky endeavour. As a result, “[a] new refugee flow was induced, thus initiating in Iran a ‘revolving door’ phenomenon of departure and return by Afghans” (par. 24). The situation of Afghan refugees wishing or actively seeking to repatriate did not improve in the latter half of the `90s, since “persecution and continued ethnic strife under the Taliban regime, together with a severe drought in much of Afghanistan, saw several hundred thousand more Afghans cross the border into Iran. This pattern of population movement persisted more or less up to (and even after) the overthrow of the Taliban in late 2001” (par. 25).

To help address host countries’ intensifying desire to reduce the population of Afghan refugees living within their borders, in 2002 the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) established a voluntary repatriation program that remains in place to this day. By providing cash grants meant to offset travel expenses and other costs, the program seeks to encourage and facilitate the return to Afghanistan of refugees and their children born in exile. Nader Farhad observes that as of August 2012, “[m]ore than 50,000 Afghan refugees have returned from exile in Pakistan and Iran so far this year, up more than 10 per cent on the first eight months of last year” (par. 1). Farhad

also remarks that “[m]ore than 5.7 million people have returned to Afghanistan since the fall of the Taliban government in 2001, including some 4.6 million with UNHCR help. The return movement continues but more than 3 million people remain in exile, mostly in Pakistan and Iran” (par. 4).

Ashrafi and Moghissi point out, however, that the unwillingness of refugees in exile to repatriate stems from “the level of security in Afghanistan” as well as “[o]ther obstacles includ[ing] harsh winter weather and the lack of international assistance” (par. 54). Furthermore, they also raise the issue that for Afghan women who have lived in Iran for many years, the thought of repatriation would be far from appealing, since in Iran at the very least, “the younger generation of Afghan women has had the chance to go to school and benefit from national schemes such as literacy training, and reproductive health and family planning programmes” (par. 41). Thus repatriation would prove much more difficult for women in particular, especially given the lack of opportunities awaiting them in their “homeland.” But even though they benefited from nationally funded educational programs in their host country, it also bears pointing out that “Afghan women in Iran have had to struggle with the difficulties arising from patriarchal values, male-centred suppositions and culturally prescribed gender roles, all of which are endorsed by leaders of the Afghan community and the host government” (par. 47). Still, rather than repatriate to Afghanistan, many Afghan women continue to prefer staying in Iran, where they already have some semblance of predictability in terms of their public and social status. Because “many women have been given a new awareness by education, paid work, and exposure to woman-centred ideas, activities and publications” (par. 48), the

transition to a life in Afghanistan would certainly prove rather daunting. Resettlement is a challenge for all returning Afghan individuals because the establishment of crucial infrastructures within the country remains a protracted work in progress. But resettlement is also a greater challenge for Afghan women in particular because of the heightened religious and patriarchal fundamentalism that has gripped the country since the political resurgence of the Northern Alliance, whom the United States government—in its well-publicized claims to purportedly liberate women in Afghanistan from oppressive patriarchal rule—sought as allies in their war against the Taliban.⁶⁰

My intention here is not to further propagate the Orientalist image of Afghanistan as a culturally “backwards” country; nor is it to lend credence to the imperialistic notion endorsed by both the U.S. government and some strands of Western feminism that the current war in Afghanistan is “a humanitarian war which is about saving women” (Arat-Koç 53) from the barbarism of their own culture and society.⁶¹ Indeed, Sedef Arat-Koç rightly points out that “[r]eferences to culture and religion as the cause of women’s

⁶⁰ The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA) went as far as writing an “Appeal to the UN and World Community,” which stated that “the NA[Northern Alliance] has learned how to pose sometimes before the West as ‘democratic’ and even supporter of women’s rights, but in fact they have not at all changed [...] RAWA has already documented heinous crimes of the NA” (93).

⁶¹ Saba Mahmood further criticizes this Western goal of spreading democracy and feminism to Afghanistan. She argues that it is important “to lay bare a terrain of shared assumptions internal to liberal discourses of feminism and democracy—particularly their normative secularism—that make the Euro-American war on Muslims across the world appear palatable, if not advisable, to people across the political spectrum. While the U.S. administration’s ambitious plan to establish absolute military and economic domination in the Middle East might abate in its zeal, as long as the assumptions that link the projects of empire, liberal feminism, and democracy continue to reign, an imperial impulse will continue to corrupt our judgment in regard to Islam and the Middle East” (82).

oppression are immensely useful and convenient to an imperialist project” because such references do the work of “justifying an otherwise destructive war as a ‘humanitarian’ one to a Western audience” (59). Furthermore, that the United States agreed to align itself with a political group that Afghan people themselves insist is more insidious than the Taliban in terms of human rights abuses,⁶² underscores the hypocrisy of the claim that the “War on Terror” is primarily being fought in the name of liberating oppressed Afghans. Arat-Koç observes that this “[h]ypocrisy also exists in the media, through the ignorance and amnesia it has actively contributed to creating and maintaining [...] the very recent history of Western intervention in Afghanistan and the West’s role in creating fundamentalist regimes in the region” (54). My objective in pointing out the difficulty of resettling in Afghanistan and the reluctance of many (primarily female) Afghan refugees to do so is to emphasize the extent to which their struggles and precarious status as displaced peoples were, in the first place, caused and continue to be further exacerbated by the very states that are now claiming to undertake “violent forms of ‘benevolent’ intervention” (59) in their names. It is, therefore, of utmost importance to “question how US foreign policy has, in a cold war environment, directly contributed to [the] weakening of other political alternatives – including ones far more favourable for women – and a strengthening of political Islam in Afghanistan” (59).

⁶² For accounts of Afghan people opposing American endorsement of the Northern Alliance, see, for example, the public statements released by The Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan (RAWA)—in particular, the organization’s “Appeal to the UN and World Community.” Also, Janelle Brown’s interview with “Fatima,” a member of RAWA, proves insightful in this regard. See Brown’s article “‘Fatima’ Speaks: Resisting the Taliban.”

Makhmalbaf's film focuses on the Afghans who remain in exile within the borders of Iran, and it is the post-"9/11" experience of the camp-dwelling Afghan refugees that the director explores in *God, Construction and Destruction*. Her film's first scenes depict the refugees participating in the construction of a brick shelter. Off-camera, two men providing instructions to the rest of the camp reveal that the shelter must be built to protect everyone from possible U.S. military bombings. The urgency with which the camp undertakes the shelter's construction implies that news has only recently spread that America is preparing to bomb Afghanistan in retaliation for the September 11, 2001 attacks. Uncertain of the reach, extent, and timing of this impending retaliation, the refugees nervously prepare for the worst.

The bustling opening sequence of men, women, and children intently making bricks in the most rudimentary of ways is interrupted by the arrival of the local teacher, who rounds up the camp's children by sternly telling them to leave their brick-making tasks. Along the way, as she offers books in exchange for class attendance, the teacher points out to the adults she passes that the children should be going to school instead of helping build the shelter. "America wants to attack Afghanistan. We are Afghans all right, but we are refugees in Iran," she says as she enters the camp's makeshift schoolhouse. "Three million Afghan refugees are living in Iran. Whatever happens to them will happen to you too. You can't stop atomic bombs with bricks. Send the children to class." Once the children are finally assembled for class, the teacher tenaciously delivers a lesson on the geopolitical importance of "9/11" and demonstrates the 'proper' way to honour the victims by observing a moment of silence. By the end of the short

film, Makhmalbaf makes it clear to viewers that the teacher's pedagogical approach in relation to "9/11" is a failure, but not only because the school-aged children in the refugee camp are unruly and highly distractible. Rather, the teacher's lesson fails because her preferred method of teaching about and encouraging the remembrance of the attacks proves exceedingly at odds—and hence, incompatible—with the living conditions, central concerns, and personal as well as cultural histories of her students.

Before anything else, the teacher's presence in the film's symbolic world must be briefly discussed here, especially given the fact that her unexplained and unannounced arrival is a rather odd scene to appear in a film about an Afghan refugee camp in Iran that is in the midst of an urgent security crisis. As can be gleaned from the film, the teacher is not a member of the refugee camp, although she herself is an Afghan refugee. Her situation is quite different from those of her students, since she is among the 97% of the Afghan refugee population who lives outside of refugee camps and thereby is not only more immersed in the host country's culture, but also more likely to participate in the educational programmes and benefit from the other services offered by Iran. The teacher in Makhmalbaf's film calls to mind—or may in fact even represent—the

groups of educated Afghan women [who] have set up community-based or home-based schools for undocumented/unregistered Afghan children who cannot attend local schools. These makeshift schools, run with minimum facilities, books and stationary [*sic*] in refugee homes or small rented rooms, are of the utmost importance to the Afghan community. The initiative has been strongly opposed by the government, which has advised international organisations not to provide the schools with buildings or financial support. Some of the schools have been closed. Hence, the schools are supported by the Afghan community itself, through donations or basic tuition fees for students who can afford to pay. Afghan women

play a remarkable role in teaching at the schools and administering them. (par. 50)

That the teacher visits the camp, urges parents to send their children to school, uses the books she carries in her bag as ‘incentive prizes’ for her students, and seeks the help of the children to set up her makeshift classroom for the day, all support the idea that Makhmalbaf uses the teacher in her film to represent one of the major social roles that young and educated Afghan women have taken up within their refugee communities in Iran. What remains unclear throughout the film, however, is the source of the Afghan teacher’s curious belief that the victims of the attacks on the United States must be memorialized by her students through the observation of a moment of silence—a commemorative practice that is more peculiar to North American and Commonwealth countries. In other words, the question of whether she is figured as an individual who has bought into American hegemony is left ambiguous and unanswered by Makhmalbaf’s film.

The teacher’s inability to maintain her students’ attention and educate them about the event’s geopolitical significance raises several important questions. What compels the teacher in the film to imagine that pressing on with her lesson is somehow less futile than making a bomb shelter out of bricks? How, the film seems to ask viewers, could the privileging of education prevent the more destructive consequences of international acts of aggression? Taken from the vantage of difficult knowledge, how might the teacher’s pedagogy embody, even as it represses, the very crises of the subject matter it seeks to represent? The teacher’s conduct reveals her firm belief in education’s valuable role in a

post-“9/11” world, but she is not as successful as she would like to be in communicating this view to the students in her classroom. What kinds of education and what modes of remembrance, then, could have the potential to impact students, or perhaps even to assuage violent international conflicts? What aspect of the teacher’s approach to teaching and remembering “9/11” results in her lesson’s “failure”? Lastly, and focusing on the film’s construction as a work of art bound to specific historical contexts, why does Makhmalbaf’s film about Afghans living in an Iranian refugee camp problematize education’s aim of remembering and teaching the event in the first place?

This chapter deliberates upon the role that Makhmalbaf’s film plays in the creation and sustained cultivation of “9/11” remembrance pedagogy. I use the term “remembrance pedagogy” here to refer to the kind of historical consciousness that, according to Simon, Rosenberg, and Eppert, enacts “a mindful attentiveness to, learning from, and participation in the memory of the traces of traumatic history” (3). The objective of “9/11” remembrance pedagogy far exceeds the mere retelling of the suffering of others as a result of the attacks on September 11, 2001. Instead, modes of remembrance pedagogy that focus on the attacks should be concerned with “not only what gets remembered, by whom, how, and when, but, as well, the problem of the very limits of representing and engaging” the event. This is so because “in [its] extremity,” the event “shock[s] and resist[s] assimilation into already articulated discourses” (7). With this understanding of remembrance pedagogy in mind, I closely examine Makhmalbaf’s film as a mode of remembrance pedagogy that attends to the challenges faced by education in the wake of the attacks, and also in the context of an increasingly

globalized and heteronomous world. In doing so, I intend to reconceptualize the teacher's seeming pedagogical failure in the film as a kind of success; one that, in the context of "9/11" remembrance pedagogy, not only resists any claims to the masterful apprehension of the September 11, 2001 attacks, but also effectively points to the problematic ethical quandaries inherent in the desire for and compulsion towards dogmatic knowing.

The film imbues art in times of global crises with a pedagogical force that surpasses its capacity to bolster practices of "strategic remembrance," a term that Roger Simon, Sharon Rosenberg, and Claudia Eppert use to denote collective "efforts to mobilize attachments and knowledge that serve specific social and political interests within particular spatiotemporal frameworks" (3). Remembrance as a strategic practice "is aligned with the anticipation of a reconciled future in which one hopes that justice and harmonious social relations might be secured" (4). At first glance, the concept of "strategic remembrance" suggests a collectively therapeutic and optimistically future-oriented approach to working through grief. However, in its goal of assigning particular meanings to loss and committing them to memory for the sake of ensuring a less violent or catastrophic future, this remembrance practice risks programmatically rendering violent global crises into cautionary tales that do not sufficiently engage with or respond to the specificities and conflicts that attend each of these traumatic events. While in some ways needed for its consolatory function in the aftermath of devastation, remembrance as a strategic practice also reinforces dominant cultural norms, values, ideals, and beliefs that may have been unsettled or challenged in the wake of such events. I contend that Makhmalbaf's film both represents and performatively works *against* the concept of

remembrance as a strategic practice in its depiction of the teacher's persistent and, arguably, "failed" lesson. Put another way, the film draws attention to the implied shortcomings of the teacher's efforts at strategic remembrance in order to demonstrate the overall limitations of that form of remembrance. But as well, Makhmalbaf's film also models ways in which artistic engagements with the attacks can and do possess the capacity to provide more than a medium for citizens to remember their sense of national unity and its myriad exclusions. Makhmalbaf's contribution to the *11"09'01* compilation employs the film genre to make more ethically accountable the practice of remembrance pedagogy, especially in the wake of the attacks. I specifically argue that Makhmalbaf's portrayal of a "failed" lesson about the attacks demonstrates how strategic remembrance practices risk equating "9/11" remembrance pedagogy with more hegemonic and nationalist forms of remembrance. These hegemonic forms of remembrance, in turn, threaten the transformative aspects of fostering critical engagements with traumatic events—what educational theorist Deborah Britzman considers to be the potential of encounters with "difficult knowledge."⁶³

Britzman's concept of "difficult knowledge" "signif[ies] the relations between representations of social trauma in curriculum and the individual's encounters with them in pedagogy" (Britzman and Pitt 354). While an educational theory of difficult knowledge might evoke a desire to understand and bear witness to historical trauma, it also recognizes the resistances that accompany and constitute educators' and students'

⁶³ For a more detailed understanding of how Britzman develops this concept at length, see, for example, her essay "If the Story Cannot End: Deferred Action, Ambivalence, and Difficult Knowledge."

confrontations with experiences commonly perceived or characterized as “unspeakable.” As I began to highlight in my introduction and as I have explored with reference to the September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows organization and Art Spiegelman’s *In the Shadow of No Towers*, difficult knowledge thus poses a crisis for, as well as a crisis of, education. It is a crisis *for* education, since immersing oneself in the details of such harrowing events is necessary when addressing their myriad legacies. Difficult knowledge is also a crisis *of* education because teaching about and learning from traumatic experiences are themselves affected by the distressing events that education strives to represent through pedagogy and curriculum. Sharon Rosenberg further claims “that what it means to study trauma is also always a matter of what it means to face losses, for the scholar, who, in the process, must feel the guarantees of what she thought she knew slip away, at least provisionally, [...] to be open to what that facing does to the certainty of scholarship” (Rosenberg 250). It is in this way that trauma challenges the notion of the know-able and brings us to the limits of our conventional ways of understanding and making meaning.

Such is the case with the teacher in Makhmalbaf’s *God, Construction and Destruction*. Indeed, the film portrays the disconnect between the teacher’s pedagogical strategies and her students’ ability to relate to what she is trying to teach. This portrayal suggests that despite her well-meaning intentions to comprehensively (and hence, faithfully) memorialize, interpret, and conceptualize the attacks as a watershed geopolitical event, widely adopted modes of remembering the attacks—such as those portrayed in the film—risk becoming out of touch with the complexity of the event’s

significance in the specific contexts in which they are enacted. Three issues preoccupy Makhmalbaf's film: distinguishing between "learning from" versus "learning about" traumatic events; historicizing and contextualizing significant events of mass trauma; and lastly, assessing the role of art and artists in the formation of remembrance pedagogies. The film's attentive engagement with these specific concerns conveys their influential impact upon the futures of remembrance pedagogy as a mode of attentive historical consciousness. Therefore, engaging in close readings of these three issues is an important undertaking, especially if doing so helps foster more ethical means of addressing the kinds of difficult knowledge we encounter in the myriad aftermaths of the event.

At stake in Makhmalbaf's film is the question of what educators ought to teach regarding the subject matter of "9/11" in order for it to facilitate "an opening into learning." This "opening into learning" means, for Simon, Rosenberg, and Eppert, "an opening of the present in which the identities and identifications, the frames of certitude that ground our understandings of existence, and the responsibilities to history are displaced and rethought" (7). I put forward the argument here that Makhmalbaf's *God, Construction and Destruction* instantiates the kind of opening into learning that Simon, Rosenberg, and Eppert call for.

"Learning From" versus "Learning About" the Traumatic Event of "9/11"

The sequence of the local teacher rounding up her students to go to school is followed in Makhmalbaf's film by a longer segment that shows the teacher delivering her

lesson in front of an unruly classroom. The teacher, who remains nameless throughout the film, promptly begins her lesson by asking her students if they know what event of great importance transpired very recently. Despite the curiosity implied in the question, she cuts short any responses that do not hint at the answer she is specifically seeking. For instance, in reply to one student's suggestion that the event has to do with either the man who died after falling in the camp's well or a student's aunt being buried to her chin and stoned to death in Afghanistan, the teacher shakes her head and insists that the answer she is looking for has, in her own words, more "global" importance.⁶⁴ The teacher's leading questions gradually reveal to the film's audience her two-fold pedagogical objective for this lesson, namely: the generation of class discussion regarding key details about the attacks of September 11, 2001, and the observance of a moment of silence as a means of properly honouring those who died at Ground Zero in New York City.

Nothing, however, goes as planned in this lesson. At best, the children are unruly because they cannot stop chatting about issues of immediate concern in the camp. At worst, they are clueless about the event, since the puzzled expressions on their faces communicate the fact that the teacher seemed to presume too much about her students' capacity to grasp and relate to her lesson's central topic. For instance, she assumes that the children would know the geographical location and political significance of New York City, and understand the meaning of such notions as "airplane hijacking" and "terrorism." When she finally tries to gauge her students' general comprehension of the

⁶⁴ For the purpose of clarity, it must be noted that all the lines cited from Makhmalbaf's film are directly quoted from the English subtitles/translations that appear/are included in the film.

event and its significance, the teacher realizes that the children—who, like her, are refugees made destitute by the social, political, and economic upheavals of the Cold War and global capitalism—have no concept of what “office towers” and “mobile devices” are. Despite these glaring gaps in the students’ knowledge⁶⁵ and hence, despite their inability to appreciate the lesson’s geopolitical import, the teacher resolutely presses on with her planned class discussion and subsequently imposes a moment of silence intended to educate the children about the “proper” way to remember and pay respects to the victims of the attacks. It may come as no surprise that the students are inadvertently defiant of this moment of silence, choosing instead to continue chatting casually amongst themselves about God’s ability to destroy and create human beings.

Just who exactly in the film is deemed “uneducated” or “ignorant” about “9/11” and this event’s at times over-determined (yet no less conflicted) legacies—the students, the teacher, the film’s presumed audience, or “all of the above”? Throughout the film, Makhmalbaf refrains from providing a definitive answer to this question, yet she intriguingly employs the figure of the teacher to delineate and unsettle binary notions of “ignorance” vs. “knowledge” in relation to the attacks; this, without diminishing either the teacher’s well-intentioned objectives or her integrity in the face of pedagogical failure. In comparison to the easily distracted response of the students, the teacher is cast

⁶⁵ Makhmalbaf’s portrayal of these gaps in the Afghan students’ knowledge of the West could also be seen as a means of communicating or reflecting the fact that the students’ knowledge of the West is no more or less lacking than the West’s knowledge of them. For instance, the Afghan refugee statistics in Iran and Pakistan I discussed at the opening of the chapter refutes the widely-held assumption that the West harbours most of the world’s refugees.

as an austere figure and the source of authoritative knowledge. The teacher's desire to disseminate 'key' facts about the attacks calls to mind Britzman's discussion of Sigmund Freud and what he argues are the two dynamics of learning, that of "learning about" and "learning from." Britzman explains that "learning about an event... focuses upon the acquisition of qualities, attributes and facts, so that it presupposes a distance (or, one might even say, a detachment) between the learner and what is to be learned" (117). The teacher's act of adhering to her lesson plan despite the apparent failure of her lesson may well demonstrate this anxious urge on the part of the educator to provide all the required or "mandatory" material she is convinced her students must learn about the attacks. This rigid routine may in fact underline her own struggles to represent the difficulty of such knowledge.

What explains the teacher's compulsion to continue with her lesson, despite her awareness that the students are not able to fully comprehend the implications of her words? The response to this question has much to do with how "learning about" historical trauma is bound up with the practice of strategic remembrance. Simon, Rosenberg, and Eppert point out that a key feature of strategic remembrance is its insistence upon foreclosed lessons that promulgate the importance of specific historical traumas, the recollections of which function as cautionary tales against future destruction and suffering. Moreover, strategic remembrance is bolstered by "a hope that anxiously attends to a horrific past in expectation of the promise that, by investing attention in narratives that sustain moral lessons, there will be a better tomorrow... [One that is] fully cognizant of the warning that forgetting could lead to a return to the horrors of history"

(4). But although the objective of strategic remembrance is well-meaning, Simon, Rosenberg and Eppert astutely note that “the continuation of local and global violence suggests that such a pedagogy rarely serves as an effective safeguard” (4) against future historical traumas. Yet this mode of historical remembrance persists in its over-determination of the future through repetition: “[a]s if caught in some form of repetition compulsion, such remembrance practices can only respond with further directives to tell again, and to tell with increased urgency, thereby invoking an absolutist moral demand that one must listen” (4).⁶⁶

It is for this very reason that as a proponent of strategic remembrance, the teacher in Makhmalbaf’s film appears to steadfastly insist upon the relevance of her lesson. This, even and especially when her students prove resistant or indifferent to the urgency of what she hopes to impart as knowledge regarding the historical and social relevance of the attacks. Furthermore, her persistent policing of what and how the children ought to “learn” about the event, as well as what they are to “remember” for posterity, rejects any engagements with counter-narratives of the attacks that do not prove harmonious with what has purportedly been deemed “official knowledge.” At a key point in Makhmalbaf’s film, when the students repeatedly guess what event of “global importance” happened

⁶⁶ Of course, the opposite approach of refusing “to tell” because telling does not prevent or fully guarantee against repetition is not a viable option, since it is always already an isolating and hopeless response to historical traumas. But the central point behind the arguments put forward here by Simon, Rosenberg, and Eppert in regards to the “shortcomings” of strategic remembrance is that one must move beyond strategic remembrance practices in order for it to be possible to learn *from* trauma, instead of simply learning *about* it (through the modes of telling that strategic remembrance practices often require). I will return to and expand upon this distinction shortly.

recently, the teacher rhetorically asks the question: “Who knows anything?” Given that the teacher continues to reject the students’ contributions to the class discussion of the attacks as neither “global” nor “important” enough, this seemingly casual or innocuous rhetorical question of “Who knows anything?” carries with it an unsettling implication. Implied in the teacher’s question is an assumption that the students’ knowledge is not equally of worth when compared to the “facts” about the event that the teacher possesses. In this way, what the teacher views as “globally important” inadvertently runs the risk of elevating specific—and oftentimes nationalist or Ameri-centric—narratives of the attacks. In fact, the teacher’s insistence on dwelling only upon the narrative of innocent American victimization at the hands of “terrorists” threatens to reproduce the notion that the decades-long plight of the Afghan refugees (among whom the teacher and her students are counted) do not matter nor deserve as much attention, especially in comparison to the plight of the American citizenry in the wake of the attacks.

Judith Butler’s discussion of the “hierarchy of grief” (32) in *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* provides an apt description of this scenario. She observes that, “there are radically different ways in which human physical vulnerability is distributed across the globe. Certain lives will be highly protected, and the abrogation of their claims to sanctity will be sufficient to mobilize the forces of war. Other lives will not find such fast and furious support and will not even qualify as ‘grievable’” (32). The teacher enacts a strategic remembrance limited only to rehearsing key occurrences that comprise the event proper. Her lesson unintentionally amounts to what has been called in psychoanalytic theories of education a “passion for ignorance,” which Britzman says

“sever[s] the quest for an understanding that exceeds the order of things” (57).

Inadvertently or not, this “passion for ignorance” that manifests itself through the teacher’s lesson also becomes complicit in the hegemonic privileging of the dominant culture’s interests and well-being, to the detriment of marginalized peoples whose lives, the teacher’s own curiously included, are often subjugated to the whims of those in power. This is why more is required of educators and students than simply teaching and learning about historical trauma, because as Britzman says, “[t]he work of learning is not so much an accumulation of knowledge but a means for the human to use knowledge, to craft and alter itself” (4). Stated a bit differently, learning only happens when the student or learner undergoes a transformation as a result of the kinds of knowledge that have been transmitted to her. The mere transmission of knowledge alone, however, is not a sufficient condition for learning.

In stark comparison to the concept of “learning *about*,” for Britzman and Freud “learning *from* an event or experience is of a different order, that of insight” (117, my emphasis). Britzman goes on to say that “[l]earning from demands both a patience with the incommensurability of understanding and an interest in tolerating the ways meaning becomes, for the learner, fractured, broken, and lost, exceeding the affirmations of rationality, consciousness, and consolation” (118). The pedagogical approach of “learning from” thereby proves more accommodating to the anxieties, resistances, and uncertainties that often accompany encounters with historical trauma. Moreover, “learning from” perpetually defers the impulse to fully apprehend or claim mastery over traumatic experiences. Instead of favouring efficiency and a totalizing mode of knowing

when grappling with a traumatic event like “9/11,” “learning from” dwells with the protracted process of engaging with trauma. Consequently, as a mode of historical consciousness, the dynamic of “learning from” runs radically counter to the objectives of strategic remembrance, since it rejects the very notion of assigning “definitive” (and hence, “normative”) meanings and interpretations to experiences of unspeakable suffering and loss. Put another way, “learning from” characterizes encounters with historical trauma as yielding neither absolute guarantees nor definitive truths for the future. Resisting the seductive pull of the passion for ignorance, “learning from” instead extends hospitality to the “ongoing problem of... attend[ing] to... remembrance of the past without foreclosing the possibility that this attempt to remember will rupture the adequacy of the very terms on which a memory is being held” (Simon, Rosenberg, and Eppert 6). In this way, the dynamic of “learning from” is a melancholic struggle to perpetually remember, and in that perpetual remembrance make meaning out of trauma.

In their work on loss and the mourning of what remains in the aftermath of loss, David L. Eng and David Kazanjian rightly argue for the importance of “considering the ways in which loss and its remains are insistently creative and deeply political” (Eng and Kazanjian 23). In the context of *God, Construction and Destruction*, this means that while Makhmalbaf’s film portrays the teacher’s pedagogical failure to enact strategic remembrance of the events of September 11, 2001, the film itself cannot be read simply as a vehicle of strategic remembrance. Quite the contrary, since it is through the figure of the teacher that the film critically casts into doubt the assurances of a better future that strategic remembrance promises. How, after all, could simply teaching and learning about

the details of the attacks “stop atomic bombs” better than a brick shelter ever could, if those to whom such details are imparted are granted little choice but to passively accumulate and retain such informational knowledge? The film screens the shortcomings of strategic remembrance through the dramatization of the students’ resistance to the knowledge offered by their teacher. In this way, the film’s audience is confronted by “the vicissitudes of learning from difficult knowledge” (Britzman 118), which “acknowledg[es] [that] learning [is] a psychic event” and that—rather than an enemy of or obstacle to learning—“resistance is a precondition for learning from knowledge and the grounds of knowledge itself” (118). By showing its viewers that new paradigms of remembrance must be thought in the aftermath of the attacks, the film presents itself as ever-mindful of education’s “own ethical implication”—namely, that it “must interfere” and “make something more of [itself]” (10).

Historicizing and Contextualizing Events of Mass Trauma

While observing a moment of silence in honour of the victims of the attacks on New York and Washington, the students chatter impulsively, thereby thwarting the teacher’s desire for the class to engage in the solemn remembrance of those who were killed. The teacher, disappointed in the students’ inattentiveness, comments on their “innocence,” castigates them for their lack of self-discipline, ushers them outside, and makes them line up at the foot of the brick kiln’s chimney. Once the students assemble under the glare of the sun, the teacher points at the imposing smoke stack. She instructs the children to look up at the smoke billowing from the chimney and quietly think about

those who died as a result of the attacks in New York City. After a moment's hesitation, Esmat, one of the more voluble young boys in the class, asks the teacher what he should do if he feels like talking during this moment of silence. The teacher brusquely tells him to bite his lip and just look at the chimney—a gesture that would supposedly convey to his teacher, peers, and fellow refugees that he is thinking about the victims of “9/11.” Esmat reluctantly does what he is told, but not before an expression of confusion and frustration crosses his face as he gives his teacher one last, lingering look before he obeys her instructions. Esmat's response demonstrates the failure of the teacher's nonetheless well-intentioned lesson, in that her lesson inadvertently polices and silences his voice at the same time that it forecloses his encounter with the incommensurability of the difficult knowledge that the event of “9/11” offers. The teacher's anxious insistence that her students learn about not only the attacks, but also the proper or expected ways of publicly signaling or demonstrating the remembrance of the victims hinders their ability to learn *from* the attacks through engagements with empathy and compassion.

As filmic narrative and sociopolitical commentary, Makhmalbaf's film *God, Construction and Destruction* is fraught with ambiguity. Haim Bresheeth describes the film's complexity in the following manner:

In contrast to many of the other episodes [from the film *11'09'01*], the section directed by Samira Makhmalbaf is totally lacking in violent visual referents and is a ruminative, even philosophical episode about the different value systems which apply in the West and Afghanistan where the classroom of children she confronts with her camera are oblivious to the momentous events in the US – events which are about to change their lives forever. Even when told about them, the children cannot quite grasp their importance. While on one hand we encounter the vast distance between the Afghan children and the Western world, the film also directs

our gaze to how very little the West knows and understands Afghanistan at the very point when it is about to destroy it, as a preamble to the destruction of Iraq. (29)

Bresheeth's commentary on the film astutely draws attention to Makhmalbaf's treatment of the connections between obliviousness, willful ignorance, education, and the need to re-evaluate conventionally accepted and widely practiced modes of remembrance pedagogy in the wake of the attacks.

A case in point from the film that demonstrates these complex connections would be the scene in which, at the behest of their teacher, the children strain to look at the chimney outside their classroom in order to glean an (albeit imprecise) understanding of what the concept of a "tower" entails, and subsequently what the World Trade Center towers in New York might have looked like before they were destroyed. This scene depicts the teacher's brisk and barely accommodating transmission of facts about the attacks, *despite* and *regardless* of her keen awareness of her students' ill-equipped comprehension and glaringly lacking contextualization of metropolitan life and culture. Additionally, this scene poignantly conveys the extent to which pedagogical practices and methods shape, inform, and even determine how specific subpopulations living in areas far removed from the attacks' epicenter are at times coerced to understand, interact with, and relate to the central concerns and preoccupations of the dominant global majority, all while setting aside their own, more immediate concerns and preoccupations.

From this standpoint, Bresheeth's comment on the film's dramatization of the "vast distance between the Afghan children and the Western world" would be seen as an unsettling contrast to the illusory sentiment of "We're all Americans now" that permeated

public discourse in the Western world in the aftermath of the attacks. In the context of this romanticized notion of harmonious unity in the face of crisis, the teacher's impatient desire to impart her factual and normative knowledge about the attacks to her students would be regarded as a much-needed and welcome antidote for the shameful educational "lack" on the part of the Afghan children. In this reading of the film, evidence of the Afghan children's educational "lack" includes their inability to empathize with the grief and suffering of American citizens and engage in sustained dialogue with their teacher about key details pertaining to the event. This interpretation of the film problematizes and, at its most extreme, demonizes the state of being oblivious to public discourses about the attacks that, in turn, form the basis of what constitutes "knowledge" of and about the event and its legacies. Frustrating, awkward, and fruitless though her undertaking of the students' education about the attacks may be, from this standpoint the teacher's stern attempts at "teaching" the "innocent" Afghan refugees the impact of the attacks on their personal and public safety would be applauded as a benevolent and valiant effort. The teacher's objective would, in essence, be characterized as an admirable attempt to enlighten young minds about the reality of their precarious existence as diasporic people, who have little control over the current and future living conditions they must endure.

However, as Bresheeth's analysis suggests, Makhmalbaf's film offers a subtle—though no less poignant—criticism of precisely this kind of ignorance that is more destructive and disturbing than the Afghan children's oblivious reaction to the attacks. Makhmalbaf attributes to those in "the West" the tendency to de-contextualize

spectacular crises like the attacks, in a manner that renders such events without history and hence, unrelated to larger systemic concerns (like widespread poverty, inadequate housing, lack of essential medical supplies, and poor access to clean drinking water) that currently debilitate other parts of the world. When interviewed about the rationale behind the making of her film, Makhmalbaf stated:

[a] lot of people talk about the Sep[tember] 11 incident but few people attribute these happenings to the distance that exists between the developed and underdeveloped world. The poor are drowning in their poverty and the fortunate ones are in the depths of their great fortunes. No one thinks that this distance, the distance between this warm climate and that cold climate might create a heavy storm. (Makhmalbaf par. 7)

Hence, the film is the director's attempt at making this conceptual and historical connection between the September 11 attacks and the global living conditions that shaped, informed and essentially gave rise to the spectacular violence—"the heavy storm"—that came to be named in shorthand as "9/11." Makhmalbaf is critical of the Western world not because its inhabitants are unwittingly oblivious or unintentionally ignorant, but rather because its inhabitants are, according to her, too self-assured about what constitutes and dictates the boundaries of public discourse, as well as too certain about what needs or ought to be "known" and "taught" about the attacks. This mentality troubles Makhmalbaf because it persists even and especially when the complexity of the event points to the fact that the event itself, with its lingering traumatic aftermaths and incalculable legacies, calls for a rigorous and self-reflective reassessment of "whether we are prepared to address 9/11 in accord with the familiar terms and categories... or whether they are even adequate to the task" (Rockmore and Margolis 3).

If, after the traumatic experience of the attacks, we are no longer assured of the validity of our conceptual frameworks for understanding and apprehending the world around us and managing our diverse relationships with one another, then we cannot be so quick to police what is and is not deemed “legitimate” forms of knowledge, modes of education, and manners of relationality and sociality pertaining to the attacks. Rockmore and Margolis go on to acknowledge that beyond the philosophical uncertainties we face in our post-“9/11” world:

[t]he impasse extends to other domains. All of our ready conceptual assurances are confounded by 9/11. The assumption that we have captured the world in our theories has been stalemated by the world itself... We cannot diagnose the events of 9/11 by any simple application of the usual tools. They defy our sense of legible order, and we cannot say when our categories will adjust again. (3)

Interestingly enough, the claim put forward by Rockmore and Margolis in their discussion of the event’s impact on Western philosophy is telling and admittedly problematic here, in that it implies that the attacks disrupted what before were uncontested, universalized “conceptual assurances” and philosophical “theories” about the world.

There are schools of thought that take serious issue with this Western-centric claim. More specifically, from the standpoint of postcolonial theory (which has long challenged and sought to dismantle the idea that Western forms of knowledge are universal and objective), this claim would be criticized for repressing difference and multiplicities and forcefully subscribing to the homogeneity of “Western Knowledge” in the name of exercising mastery over resistant ambiguities encountered in daily lived experience. In the context of the “post-‘9/11’ era,” Anna Ball writes that

“postcolonialism offers a critical framework—or more accurately, a variety of frameworks—that might account for the paradigms of identity formation, power, and representation formed in the interplay of the marginal and central, local and global post-9/11” (Ball 297). In particular, she cites “postcolonial theory’s familiarity with tropes such as the construction of the Self and Other, Orient and Occident” as potentially “provid[ing] critical frameworks through which the specificities of power and knowledge formation post-9/11 might be drawn out” (299). Furthermore, for Ball, because it is:

“[i]nterdisciplinary by nature, postcolonialism can be considered a mode of critical practice that lends itself to multiple and intersecting sites of enquiry, pitched at the level of the political and personal, academic and interventionist. As such, it is in some ways a discourse that epitomizes an approach towards the analysis of identity and power, rather than a clearly defined field. This level of fluidity casts postcolonialism as a discipline of the interstices[.] (297-298)

Postcolonial theory, then, is hospitable to difficult knowledge—in fact, has been so well before the attacks’ occurrence—since, constitutively, it partakes in “[t]he unmasking of power structures” (Viruru 15) and also challenges the “ideas of linear progress and development, objectivity, universality and totalisation” (14)—all of which are foundational ideas in Western education. Postcolonialism can accommodate the difficult knowledge that the attacks offer, since the “post-9/11 cultural climate” (Ball 300) “requires a turning-outwards for postcolonial studies within the Western academy in every sense, [...] and this includes the address of transcultural critical traditions and texts that pose a challenge to the leftist, deconstructivist tendencies of the discipline” (300).

Rockmore and Margolis say that “[w]e cannot diagnose the events of 9/11 by any simple application of the usual tools” and yet, this is the very thing that Makhmalbaf’s teacher is shown undertaking in the film. Her traditional or conventional approach of

educating her students about the attacks culminates in the closing scene, in which she instructs each child to stand and quietly observe a moment of silence while staring at a rough, industrial approximation of now-collapsed office towers, beneath which died thousands of individuals whose culture and relatively more comfortable lifestyles prove strange and alien to these diasporic and impoverished students eking out subsistence living as refugees in Iran.

The teacher attempts, in her discussion of the attacks, to deliver a pre-established and well-rehearsed lesson plan that revolves around American victimization at the hands of foreign “rogue” individuals. As well, her class lesson echoes the fear of the United States’ military wrath, as expressed at the beginning of the film by the men at the well who do not appear on-camera, but whose voices clearly convey the urgency of building a bomb shelter for the camp as protection in the face of American military might. In doing so, she consequently legitimizes and normalizes the idea that impoverished and war-torn countries such as Afghanistan have little sovereign agency and minimal means of substantial resistance against the hegemonic influence of world superpowers like the United States. What the teacher in Makhmalbaf’s film does is conduct herself in front of her class *as if* the attacks are manageable in their teachability. Despite the urgency of her tone in intimating to her students that the event has the capacity to have significant impacts on a global scale, her lesson begins, unfolds, and ends just like most other lessons: she introduces the topic, outlines the boundaries of the discourse under study through the facilitation of a class discussion, and reinforces the main points of her lesson

through a hands-on, practical task (the observation of a moment of silence at the foot of the chimney) that requires the active involvement of each student.

The teacher's pedagogy forecloses the difficult knowledge that the event presents to both her students and herself as educator. She willfully ignores the challenges and obstacles that teaching about the event palpably presents, such as the need to contextualize and historicize the attacks in relation to the students' living conditions in Iran. As well, the teacher takes little heed of the children's seemingly random conversations, which are preoccupied with stories of death and suffering—stories which could be an important site of alternative knowledge-making. But in fact, it is through these obstacles and distractions that supposedly derail the teaching of the lesson that difficult knowledge symptomatically manifests itself. For Britzman, these interfering "forces" that "seem to come back at education as interruptions, as unruly students, as irrelevant questions, and as controversial knowledge in need of containment" are indicative of "the difficult knowledge held in curriculum, where we ask students to engage with difficult knowledge about life and death without acknowledging the war within and without thinking about how pedagogical idealizations might coarsen the psyche's capacity to respond" (133). Thus, in the teacher's desire to complete her *task* of teaching about the attacks, she dismisses her students' behaviour as inappropriate or excessive. The teacher's approach to her lesson does not cultivate a hospitable attitude towards encounters with forms of difficult knowledge, which threaten her students' normalized or routinized ways of understanding themselves and the world around them. Conversely, given the themes of the children's own stories and conversations (that is,

themes of mortality, debility, and displacement), her lesson also proves inhospitable to the difficult knowledge that constitutes their everyday ways of perceiving and understanding their daily existence. Makhmalbaf's teacher thus succeeds in achieving only a kind of tableau of teaching because her lesson delivery does not sufficiently account for a consideration of education "as a frontier concept: something between the teacher and the student, something yet to become" (4). Clearly, Britzman's concept of difficult knowledge asks us to think about how a teacher's pedagogy—including this teacher's pedagogy—is affected by and defends against the knowledge that he or she represents. Far from opposing Britzman's concept, the film's pedagogy in fact illustrates the ways pedagogy is a symptom of historical trauma.

In an interview, Makhmalbaf offers justification for the teacher's questionable pedagogical approach to the event. The teacher's comportment in front of her class, though outwardly stern, in fact betrays both her apprehension regarding the potential aftermaths of the attacks as well as her resignation to the plight and fate of her fellow Afghan refugees. How and why is this so? As Makhmalbaf explains:

I wanted to express the threats that an eastern girl faces because of an incident that takes place in the West. I wanted to say that an eastern girl might not have seen New York and those towers and might not even have a clue about life in that geographical location. Yet she is forced to be anxious about the globalization process and such an incident might even change the course of her life. Actually the storm that has been created by the West through globalization might destroy the easterners. I wanted to show how the destruction of two towers in a western city could cause the destruction of many cities in non-western countries. I wanted to show how people who have had no role in the destruction of those two towers and even did not know that they exist could become homeless and bereft of everything as a result of this incident. (par. 9)

Makhmalbaf's statement exemplifies difficult knowledge because it shows how the conflicts of world crises get enacted at the level of pedagogy, often in defensive ways. While it is easily tempting to blame the teacher, the difficult knowledge conveyed in Makhmalbaf's statement asks us to consider how the individual is an effect of larger political conflicts, and to what extent her pedagogy is a foreclosure in the name of psychological defense. For Makhmalbaf, the event unsettles and creates anxiety in the teacher because she is cognizant of the troubling geopolitical situation in which she and her fellow Afghan refugees in Iran find themselves. "[S]he is *forced* to be anxious about the globalization process" (my emphasis), Makhmalbaf says about the teacher in her film. From this brief comment the director indicates that it is not so much that the teacher seems to be consoled by the idea that passing along factual information will "stop atomic bombs" from demolishing their homes better than mud-bricks ever could. Rather, it is the teacher's own anxiety regarding her future and the future of her community that compels her to undertake an attempt—problematic as it is—to make sense of the event, and to make out of the event an object of knowledge; this, to dispel *her own* feelings of uncertainty regarding the potential aftermaths of the attacks. In the words of Britzman:

We are back to the question of how students respond to the teacher's affect that is pedagogy and of how the teacher responds to the students' affect that is learning. It is this sort of transferential relation, one that suggests the ambivalence of learning from and learning about, that education must engage. For what the children "pick up" and think with their own heads about are the grown ups' affective response to the difficulties of war and their precarious attempt to make from aggression and social breakdown a moral lesson. Children notice and learn from the nervousness, anxiety, restlessness, and ambivalence of parents and adults, the symptoms of our own pedagogy. Essentially children are engaging not with the adult's rational explanations, but with their failures, in the very places where the adult strategies break down. (126)

The teacher's "failure" to effectively engage her students' understanding of the attacks should not be regarded as the collapse of education in general, or more particularly the utter futility of education to foster the kind of teaching and learning that far exceeds rote memorization and mere information transmission. Rather, the pedagogical "failure" depicted in the film is what actually opens up the possibilities and opportunities for viewers to reevaluate the continued relevance and viability of the educational practices they have taken for granted as the standards and norms of teaching and learning.

As I have stated previously, Makhmalbaf's film dramatizes an instance of potential failure in the realm of teaching and learning. It is through the film's embodiment of education in the figure of the seemingly detached, and matter-of-fact teacher who does not *quite* succeed in substantially engaging her students (or, for that matter, engages them, but not in the way she had intended or anticipated), that the film haunts the praxis of remembrance pedagogy with some of its disavowed shortcomings. These shortcomings are, namely, the tendency to put more emphasis on "learning about" the attacks as opposed to "learning from" the event and responding to its myriad legacies, and the frequent evacuation of localized and personalized contexts from discussions and engagements having to do with collective historical traumas. As Felicity Colman observes in her analysis of *God, Construction and Destruction*, "[i]n trying to convey the uncertainty of the continuation of their life at that moment after the event, the teacher struggles with the limitations of her pedagogic practice and her students' knowledge and biographical consciousness" (par. 9). The film presents a sobering portrait of how the blanket imposition of established and widely accepted knowledge transmission practices

undermines the transformative aspects of remembrance pedagogy. It also suggests that we read pedagogy as a symptom of the anxious times in which it operates, and fails.

But the film does not parade this shortcoming with the intention of denouncing formal education in the refugee camps (whether funded by host countries or made possible through the collaboration and support of the refugee communities themselves), though at first glance this might seem to be the case. Rather, Makhmalbaf tarries with education's potentiality for failure because the film performatively rehearses what I have already cited as Britzman's insistence that education "must interfere" (11) in the reproduction and transmission of the difficult knowledge that comes with loss and other traumatic events. According to Britzman, educators must recognize that although it is necessary to catalogue and make sense of one's living circumstances through the transmission and exchange of experiences and facts, such an act can and never should be deemed *enough* to serve as a kind of global or universal cure-all that protects one from vulnerability at the hands of others. While the teacher in Makhmalbaf's film insists that one cannot stop bombs with bricks, educators engaged in remembrance pedagogy must also acknowledge—as the film very subtly does—that simply teaching about the attacks and reproducing traditionally accepted modes of commemoration such as the observance of a moment of silence cannot stop bombs either.

Also, what, in the film, seems like a routine attempt at topical curriculum delivery is in fact a pedagogical quandary. This is so because the Afghan children awaiting instruction are not cognizant of the fact that the hijacking of airplanes and the collapse of the World Trade Center towers in America on September 11, 2001 are the reasons why

they were tasked with hastily making mud-bricks in the first place and anxiously corralled by their teacher to attend class that day. With the exception of hinting that the event may become the catalyst for a World War III, the teacher willfully avoids discussing the potential legacies of the attacks and its consequent implications for this particular community of Afghan refugees living in Iran and daily enduring the specific hardships that attend life as a displaced people. The teacher chooses instead to focus upon the location- and context-specific narratives of tragedy and loss that emerged as a result of the attacks. Without gainsaying the horrific nature of the victims' deaths or the earnest symbolism of participating in a collective moment of silence, it must be acknowledged that such accounts of death and commemorations of loss would not make as much of an impact on those who have lived an altogether different kind of life. Hence, "transplanting" or "grafting" the rituals and practices of collective remembrance of one way of life onto another may, in fact, prove detrimental to fostering sustained engagements with historical trauma and the difficult knowledge such an experience heralds.

The teacher's lesson risks the delegitimization of the equally traumatizing histories and experiences of her students. The students' own personal narratives of grief, loss, suffering, and death can and must be linked to the capitalist and geopolitical preconditions and crises that culminated in the attacks, since these personal narratives have unique histories that link up and intersect with the conditions that made such an event as "9/11" possible. Dismissing their significance risks forcefully contributing to the dehistoricizing of the attacks themselves and of how the event connects with long-

existing forms of oppression, subjugation, and suffering. Makhmalbaf's film seeks to remind educators and students that remembrance pedagogy must remain cognizant of these connections.

A formidable objection might be raised that such historicizing and contextualizing inevitably bring to the fore the unjust and often subjugative, hegemonic, and exploitative relationships that the West has with its subaltern others. What follows from this objection is the implication that these specific historical connections may be framed as justifications for the attacks (i.e., “the oppressive Western capitalists deserved this!”), rather than as more clichéd representations of the dead as victims. In other words, an approach that rigorously takes up the long contextual history of the attacks holds the potential to validate instead of condemn as ethically wrong the hijackers' execution of the attacks in particular, and the extermination of life through violent terrorist tactics in general. Sadly, this interpretation or characterization of the attacks as “payback” can neither be avoided nor extinguished—especially in light of the plunder, exploitation, humiliation, and bitterness that formerly or ongoingly colonized peoples have endured for centuries under the yoke of Western hegemony.

But acknowledging this fact and refusing to deny or minimize the degree and extent of another's suffering, however, do not equate to condoning such a rationalization or encouraging resigned acceptance of the factors that created the conditions for the attacks to take place. Indeed, to do so would be inexcusable and irresponsible, even intolerable for critical pedagogies that welcome not only the productive though painful

transformative potential of difficult knowledge, but also the democratizing force of empathy, mutual respect, and fellow-feeling. Perhaps Jacques Derrida expresses best the need for critical remembrance pedagogies to be unconditionally open to what difficult knowledge may bring. Speaking in Frankfurt upon receiving the Theodor Adorno Prize in 2001, Derrida says the following on the topic of “9/11” in his acceptance speech, entitled, “Fichus: Frankfurt Address”:

My absolute compassion for all the victims of September 11 will not prevent me from saying: I do not believe in the political innocence of anyone in this crime. *And if my compassion for all the innocent victims is limitless, it is because it does not stop with those who died on September 11 in the United States.* That is my interpretation of what should be meant by what we have been calling... in the White House’s words, “infinite justice”: *not to exonerate ourselves from our own wrongdoings and the mistakes of our own politics, even at the point of paying the most terrible price, out of all proportion.* (Paper 179, my emphases)

Responsibility, accountability, culpability, and fallibility: these powerful concepts are what make the knowledge of and implication in historical traumas so difficult and arduous to the point of near unbearability. Just as importantly, these concepts are what empower critical remembrance pedagogy to develop a sense of what is just and equitable not only for a select few, but for all. As unbearable as they are to acknowledge, accept, and carry out, however, it is necessary to strive to undertake the tasks of obtaining and enacting “infinite justice.” The labour of pursuing such daunting tasks, though interminable, is nevertheless necessary in order to learn from the past, transform the present, and sustain hope for the future.

The Significance of Art in Education and Public Remembrance

The film concludes with a long-shot view of the entire class looking at the kiln's chimney, purportedly deep in solemn thought regarding the event of "9/11." This protracted parting shot of the entire class squinting up at the smoke-spewing chimney—the only symbolic reference to the attacks' visual iconography in the film, which interestingly enough also connotes (if not more so) Holocaust imagery—leaves the viewer wondering whether the students ever do manage to meet the objectives of the day's lesson to the satisfaction of their teacher. Furthermore, by the end of Makhmalbaf's film, one cannot help but think back to the teacher's earlier privileging of education over and above brick shelters as the best deterrent for the kind of suffering that comes as a result of international acts of aggression. If not bricks, then what is it about education that can stop death and destruction by drones,⁶⁷ guided missiles, landmines,

⁶⁷ To help further demonstrate the kinds of destruction and safety threats posed by unmanned drones in the area of Afghanistan and Pakistan, Ben Brumfield and Mark Morgenstein begin their article with an anecdote about Pakistani farmers getting 'accidentally' killed by a CIA drone as they tend to their crops. The authors then go on to say that according to the U.N. special rapporteur on counterterrorism and human rights, "[s]uch attacks by U.S. drones are," in fact, "common" (Brumfield and Morgenstein, "Drones killing innocent Pakistanis, U.N. official says" pars. 1-3). The authors report that since "[s]ome Pashtun men dress the same as Taliban members from the same region, [...] the drone operators mistake them for terror targets," and that because "[i]t is also customary for Pashtun men to carry a weapon," they are rendered "virtually indistinguishable from militants to an outsider" (par. 11). Brumfield and Morgenstein state as well that "[r]eports by independent groups corroborate [the U.N. special rapporteur's] account, concluding that drones mistakenly target and kill a significant number of civilians" (par. 17) and "the strikes have killed far more people than the United States has acknowledged, and traumatized many more innocent people" (par. 20). In terms of specific statistical data, Brumfield and Morgenstein cite the New America Foundation's estimate that "in Pakistan, drones have killed between 1,953 and 3,279 people since 2004 – and that between 18% and 23% of them were not militants.

and atomic bombs? In light of this filmic portrayal of the ways in which teaching and learning come with no absolute guarantees of success or failure, does the teacher's delivery of factual knowledge about the attacks—through what can only be described as, at best, the tactic of consciousness or awareness raising or, at worst, mere information transmission—represent also the deep and penetrating ways that both curriculum and pedagogy are affected by difficult knowledge, and the anxiety of this relation?

In the context of public remembrance of the event, visual art in its various forms has been generally associated with three things: photographs of the ruins of New York City, visually appealing narrative texts that reference the attacks, and “brick and mortar” memorial structures. Myriad photographs of the ruins of New York City in the aftermath of the attacks— for example, James Nachtwey's iconic photographs of Lower Manhattan, a compilation of which appeared in an issue of *South Atlantic Quarterly* (Nachtwey 337-348)—are what mostly constitute the event's documentary archive of images. Also, visually appealing narrative texts that reference the attacks have taken up the task of either challenging or reinforcing state-sanctioned accounts of the event, such as Art Spiegelman's graphic narrative *In the Shadow of No Towers* and the graphic narrative adaptation of *The 9/11 Commission Report* by Sid Jacobson and Ernie Colón, both of which I discussed in the previous chapter. Lastly, “brick and mortar” memorial structures, such as architect Michael Arad's “Reflecting Absence” design for the National

The nonmilitant casualty rate was down to about 10% in 2012” (par. 18). As further evidence, the authors also cite a study conducted by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism, which “estimates that since 2004, Pakistan has had 365 drone strikes that have killed between 2,536 and 3,577 people—including 411 to 884 civilians” (par. 19).

September 11 memorial site in Manhattan, often evoke a vast range of public reactions to the ways in which traumatic histories are visually and architecturally represented on the landscape. For instance, the selection and construction of the “9/11” memorial at “Ground Zero” were rife with debates⁶⁸ over such issues as the “sentimentality” versus “solemnity” of public memorials, as well as the extent to which a national memorial can express patriotism while at the same time evoking more diverse and open-ended interpretations from both local and international visitors.

So much *unlike* these artistic responses to the attacks, Makhmalbaf’s film dwells primarily upon the challenges and legacies that the traumatic history of the event presents to education. In particular, the film is preoccupied with the question of how to think about failure and success in education, when the subject of what is to be taught and learned remains bound to interminable loss and instances of inconsolability. In essence, Makhmalbaf’s film becomes a poignant embodiment of what the philosopher Jacques Derrida observes of mourning, memory, and interiorization: that the incomplete or “aborted interiorization [of the lost loved one or object] is at the same time a respect for the other as other, a sort of tender rejection, a movement of renunciation which leaves the

⁶⁸ For instance, *Monument and Memory: The Columbia Seminar on Art in Society, September 27, 2002* is an edited transcript of a public program put together by the Department of Art History and Archaeology at Columbia University on September 27, 2002. Featuring Daniel Libeskind as keynote speaker and Leon Wieseltier and Sherwin Nuland as respondents, the seminar program “was planned” while “there was no evidence that the various actors vying to control the World Trade Center site understood or were capable of meeting the profound challenge of commemorating 9/11 with the gravity it is due” (6). The objective of the seminar, therefore, was “to offer alternative ways of thinking about the memorial, divorced from real estate calculations, and to reconceptualize how the trauma at Ground Zero might inform redevelopment of the site” (6).

other alone, outside, over there, in his death, outside of us” (Derrida, *Mémoires* 35).

Derrida adds that this failed interiorization is a productive phenomenon that demonstrates the ways in which, in a counter-intuitive manner, “*success fails*” and “*failure succeeds*” (35, emphasis his).

In the context of the film, the teacher’s failure to succeed in *unproblematically* teaching about the event to her students is, oddly, a kind of ‘success’ for educators in general and those engaging in remembrance pedagogy in particular. This is the case because the film’s vivid portrayal of the failure of readily available tools and methods for teaching about the event and its legacies is what activates the thinking about and the implementation of alternative ways of teaching—that is, teaching otherwise—about “9/11.” On the other hand, had the teacher completely succeeded in delivering her lesson on the event—that is, had her students understood and accepted with little to no difficulty what she was teaching them about the attacks, then what would be absorbed, lost, and perhaps even nullified? More than likely it would be the very incommensurability of the Afghan children’s life experiences and value systems.

The film’s rehearsal of educational failure productively reminds educators that remembrance pedagogy is, in its very constitution, a constant and constantly fallible work in progress. Further, the very portrayal of pedagogical failure depicted in Makhmalbaf’s film is itself an instance of remembrance pedagogy that ironically succeeds in responsibly addressing the legacy of the attacks. This “success in failure” is brought about largely by the film’s self-identification as an artistic work. Unlike educators, whose initial tendencies, according to Britzman, would be to disavow rather than “love a knowledge

that knows no mastery” (61), artists “gesture to their own constructedness and frailties, troubling the space between representation and the real, the wish and the need” (60). As well, “[t]hey are interested in the mistakes, the accidents, the detours, and the unintelligibilities of identities” (60).

Makhmalbaf’s film certainly embodies the capacity of art to draw attention to the frailties and resistances to difficult knowledge on the part of both the students and the educator. Her film refuses to allow the event of “9/11” to become a benign and easily transmissible object of knowledge and instruction. As a result of the proliferation of institutional practices that refuse, in the words of Britzman, “to engage the difficulties the arts offer” (61), it is imperative now more than ever for remembrance pedagogy to “tolerate the arts even as the arts must necessarily exceed the intolerances of education” (61). Makhmalbaf’s film heeds Britzman’s call, insofar as the film frames a Western audience’s encounter with the alterity of the Afghan children in a way that draws attention to an ethical demand to neither dissolve nor cement that alterity. Enacting the mode of artistic interest about which Britzman speaks, Makhmalbaf’s film gestures towards a remembrance pedagogy that is informed by what Sara Ahmed considers a “politics that is premised on closer encounters, on encounters with those who are other than ‘the other’ or ‘the stranger’” (Ahmed 180). Through Makhmalbaf’s employment of the medium of film, the audience is thus encouraged to encounter difference or strangeness as embodied by the children and teacher. But this encounter does not in any way grant to the audience a totalizing identification with the predicament of either the teacher or the students, nor does it dismiss the daily lived experiences of the Afghan

refugees as something completely alien to the point of evoking incomprehension or indifference. Rather, the film acknowledges through its dramatization of a failed lesson about the attacks that more “work [...] needs to be done to get closer to others in a way that does not appropriate their labour as ‘my labour,’ or their talk as ‘my talk,’ that makes possible a different form of collective politics,” and that “[t]he ‘we’ of such a collective politics is what must be worked for, rather than being the foundation of our collective work” (180). As the audience watches this film, it is “surprised by those who are already assimilated as strangers in a globalised economy of difference” (180-181); this, because the film compels its audience to realize that “thinking about how [they] might work with, and speak to, others, or how [they] may inhabit the world *with* others, involves imagining a different form of political community, one that moves beyond the opposition between common and uncommon, between friends and strangers, or between sameness and difference” (180, her emphasis).

In closing, the teacher’s lesson in Makhmalbaf’s film fails to buttonhole the students in the event’s normative remembrance discourses. Functioning as a kind of counter-memory to the over-determined, strategic memorialization she deliberately undertakes at the start of the film, the teacher’s inability to succeed in her lesson’s objectives holds at bay the colonization and negation of difference, both of which are part and parcel of a hegemonic and programmatic system of teaching and learning. In *God, Construction and Destruction*, what Bresheeth sees as “[t]he centrality of education” (29) in Makhmalbaf’s directorial *oeuvre* implies more than the need to fulfill the mandate of circulating and thereby reproducing established knowledge and forms of knowing about

the attacks. Viewers are faced with the responsibility of learning *from* the teacher's failed lesson, instead of merely learning *about* it. The film, in fact, points to the interminable but necessary work of reevaluating not only the practices, but also the very objectives, future-oriented hopes, and (often occluded) anxieties of remembrance pedagogy in a post-"9/11" world. In essence, Makhmalbaf's film *is* an encounter with the difficult knowledge that students and educators have inherited in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks.

CONCLUSION:

The Remembrance of “9/11” as Pedagogical Inheritance

The fact that we inherit is not an attribute or an accident; it is our essence, and this essence, we inherit.

--Jacques Derrida (*Echographies of Television* 132)

In his 2012 address commemorating the eleventh anniversary of the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, President Barack Obama remarks that the event’s anniversary is “a time to reflect on just how far [Americans have] come as a nation these past eleven years” (Obama, “Coming Together” par. 3). Assessing what has transpired in America since the attacks, Obama triumphantly celebrates and reaffirms the perseverance of his nation by proclaiming that in the face of grievous death and loss, the United States “took the fight to al Qaeda, decimated their leadership, and put them on a path to defeat. And thanks to the courage and skill of our intelligence personnel and armed forces,” Obama reassures his (inter)national audience, “Osama bin Laden will never threaten America again” (par. 6). Even the May 2011 military ambush, slaying, and highly secretive burial of Bin Laden—which to this day remain mired in questions having to do with their legality⁶⁹—have been heralded as the closest tangible approximation to

⁶⁹ See, for example, Kai Ambos and Josef Alkatout’s article “Has ‘Justice Been Done’? The Legality of Bin Laden’s Killing under International Law.” The authors argue that Bin Laden’s killing violated International Humanitarian Law (IHL) because at the time of his death, Bin Laden was merely Al Qaeda’s spiritual leader. They contend as well that the top secret mission undertaken by the U.S. Special Forces in Abbottabad undermined the sovereign rights of Pakistan, which was also a United Nations member

“closure” that Americans could ever have in relation to the attacks. This sentiment was, in fact, so widespread that media coverage of Bin Laden’s death also inspired separate articles about American reactions to the news that Bin Laden had been found and was subsequently killed by U.S. special operations forces. For example, *The Huffington Post* noted that “[a]round the country, reactions from those whose lives had been particularly touched by the attacks varied. There was joy, of course. And satisfaction. And joy and satisfaction tempered by thoughts of loved ones who’d died on Sept. 11 or by concern for Americans still fighting overseas” (“Americans React” par. 6). As well, National Public Radio (NPR) observed that “[m]ore than anything else, the first reaction seemed to be shock, then celebration and then temperance [...] As more news was reported, people expanded their opinions” (Dade par. 3). The mixture of celebratory, relieved, and retrospective reactions to the death of Bin Laden reported through the media implied that the protracted physical, emotional, and psychological ordeals which resulted from the September 11, 2001 attacks were quickly drawing to a close and would soon be relegated to something past, rather than still ongoing. Indeed, in the context of mainstream media coverage of Bin Laden’s apprehension and subsequent death, closure was the common way of framing the reactions and responses of “ordinary Americans”; this, at the risk of conflating broadcast reports with actual impressions and despite the sheer impossibility of speaking of a singular “American” impression.

country. In the same journal issue, David A. Wallace challenges the arguments put forward by Ambos and Alkatout. Wallace argues that the United States was legitimately engaged in armed conflict with Al Qaeda and that Bin Laden was still considered Al Qaeda’s military/tactical leader, which meant that Bin Laden’s killing neither violated International Humanitarian Law nor threatened Pakistan’s sovereignty rights.

Even the circulation and popularity of images having to do with the mission to find and eliminate Bin Laden reflected this sentiment. As if to circle back and provide a kind of figurative companion “book-end” to the iconic image of George W. Bush’s Florida classroom photo (which I discuss in the introduction to this project), the highly secretive ambush and subsequent killing of Osama Bin Laden—the long-declared “mastermind” behind the September 11, 2001 attacks—also produced its own infamous photograph. Illustrating President Obama’s observation of “just how far” America has come “as a nation,” this time the infamous photo that has helped visually reify a turning point in American history—and, more specifically, cement the purported narrative climax to the event called “9/11”—is the image of President Obama and his national security team watching live video feed from an unmanned drone. In what has been dubbed “The Situation Room” photograph (taken by White House photographer Pete Souza), President Obama is seen sternly leaning forward in his chair, while Vice President Biden is seated to his right. Despite the image’s title, the photograph was actually taken in a smaller room adjacent to the White House situation room. The most memorable and highly remarked upon feature of this now-iconic photograph capturing official reactions to “Operation Neptune Spear” (as the mission to apprehend and kill Bin Laden was code-named) is the ambiguous image of former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, seated across from Biden, with her hand over her mouth as she stares intently—like everyone else photographed in the room—at the live video feed off-camera. Clinton’s body language certainly invites the assumption that the suspenseful and critical nature of the mission elicited such a seemingly affective reaction on her part, especially since she

subsequently admitted in hindsight that “[t]hose were 38 of the most intense minutes” (“Clinton” par. 4). However, she also quickly pointed out that this photograph of her supposedly reacting in alarm or anxiety over the mission “may have no great meaning whatsoever” because the photographer likely captured her in the process of “preventing one of [her] early spring allergic coughs” (par. 5).

Despite Clinton’s explicit downplaying of her unintentional contribution to the photograph’s profundity, “The Situation Room” image has nevertheless invited media analysts such as CNN’s John Blake to revere the photo as “a classic” (Blake par. 1). But for Blake, however, the photograph is “historic in a more subtle way” because “[i]t’s a snapshot of how much this nation’s attitudes about race, women and Presidential swagger are changing” (par. 5). While Blake’s article does provide a very interesting analysis of the ways in which “The Situation Room” photo symbolically reflects changing American cultural attitudes about Presidential masculinity and the concept of women and African American individuals occupying positions of power and authority within the U.S. government, it too easily treats the photo and the mission’s historical significance in relation to the legacies of the September 11, 2001 attacks as foregone conclusions. In the context of the attacks, the photo is of simplistic importance to Blake only because it chronicles “the epicenter of U.S. military power hunting down its most hated foe” (par. 4). Blake’s article, in its romanticization of the “The Situation Room” image as the ultimate photographic evidence of the triumph of progressive social and cultural attitudes in America, seems to (willfully?) have nothing more to say about the image’s connections to the myriad aftermaths of the attacks, such as the C.I.A. and U.S. military’s continued

use of drones in Afghanistan and Pakistan in the “War on Terror.” While the successful mission to find “‘9/11’ mastermind” Bin Laden was crucially helped by the use of an unmanned drone (as made evident in the circumstances surrounding the “Situation Room” photograph of Obama and his national security team), the controversy regarding the use of drones extends far beyond its connection to “Operation Neptune’s Spear.” Constitutional debates were also sparked when it was revealed that the Obama administration approved the use of drone technology to target and kill Anwar Awlaki, an American citizen reported to have been the chief of external operations for the Al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula (AQAP).⁷⁰ As Blake’s celebratory treatment of the “Situation Room” image illustrates, questions regarding the implications of Bin Laden’s death for Al Qaeda and the “War on Terror,” as well as debates concerning the legality and necessity of using unmanned drones to track alleged terrorist suspects and protect U.S. forces abroad, were largely glossed over in dominant mainstream media sources, which seemed to be far more interested in providing a triumphalist dénouement to the official narrative of “9/11.” This eagerness to “move on” upon supposedly eradicating the perceived external threat to the nation and thereby acquire some discernible “closure” to the trauma of the attacks is symptomatic of a reductive understanding of the event as solely a crisis threatening national safety and stability: Bin Laden is dead, the U.S. finally

⁷⁰ For a greater sense of the issues revolving around America’s use of drones in the “War on Terror,” see President Obama’s recent speech on his administration’s policy on the use of drones (“Obama’s Speech on Drone Policy”) and William Saletan’s insightful commentary on the Obama administration’s actions one week after Obama’s speech on drone policy (Saletan, “Drone On”).

‘got’ him as promised, justice has been (purportedly) served, and the September 11, 2001 attacks on America can now be put to rest.⁷¹

The President of the United States himself was eager to regard the death of Bin Laden as the end of a chapter in American history, the lasting effects of which, according to Obama, are evident in how much America has stalwartly resisted fundamental changes to its national character and succeeded in maintaining the *status quo*. Prior to his “U.S. Drone Policy” speech in May 2013, Obama had not publicly acknowledged that beyond the death of Bin Laden the September 11, 2001 attacks continue to have ongoing and less glorious repercussions for the United States on both the domestic and international fronts. In his 2012 speech on the eleventh anniversary of the attacks, Obama instead avoids engaging in a sustained reflection on what it means to live in the aftermath of such a geopolitically charged event: “Eleven years later,” he says, “that’s the legacy of 9/11 – the ability to say with confidence that no adversary and no act of terrorism can change who we are” (par. 11). Is it truly the case that the event that has

⁷¹ Another issue that, at the time of writing, continues to challenge the concept of Bin Laden’s death providing “closure” to the event of “9/11” is the fact that despite his Presidential campaign promises, Obama and his administration have yet to enact the closure of Guantánamo Bay prison. Indeed, the term “indefinite detention” in relation to many of the prisoners is still very much in use despite the end of Bush’s term in office. Despite his much celebrated campaign slogan of “Change We Can Believe In,” President Barack Obama has himself voiced support for the policy of “preventive” or “prolonged” detentions; a policy particularly focused upon the continued imprisonment of potential or suspected (not actual or proven) “terrorists,” even and especially those who have yet to be formally charged or indicted based on the scarcity of evidence pointing to their guilt. According to the *New York Times*, those at the mercy of this policy are “terrorism suspects who cannot be tried” (qtd. in Rall par. 9) due to lack of evidence. Such a claim on the part of the U.S. Administration surely violates the basic rights of those indefinitely imprisoned as suspects, for due process requires that prisoners be officially indicted or charged in order to remain incarcerated.

been referred to in shorthand as “9/11” can finally be considered “over,” now that Osama bin Laden has been apprehended and killed? In the preceding pages, I have sought to challenge the truth of this claim as well as the premises upon which such a claim can be made. President Obama’s myopic assertion that the most laudable and enduring legacy of the attacks lies in the unfazed and immutable character of the American people is symptomatic of the rejection, or holding at bay, of the difficult knowledge that the September 11, 2001 attacks bring about. The anxiously policed narrative of the victimization, politically polarized struggle, victory, redemption, and vindication of one nation ought not to be considered the sole inheritance that “9/11” bequeaths to us. Furthermore, that the grief, loss, and trauma which resulted from the attacks purportedly did *nothing* to change the way a nation’s people characterizes, comports, and conducts itself should not be celebrated as an admirable legacy. Obama’s description of what he regards as “the legacy of 9/11” is, in fact, a *disavowal* of learning from the difficult knowledge that this specific event potentially holds.

The aim of this project has been to interrogate these very assumptions that are founded on the premise that the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States can and must only be understood and remembered as spectacular crises of homeland security and terrorism; that is, crises that devastatingly breached the borders of the world’s current superpower and tested the fortitude of its government and citizens. The respective works of Roger Simon and David Simpson in particular demonstrate that although the temporally situated occurrences that constitute “9/11” as an event have indeed come to pass, the event itself has a history that continues (and will continue) to lead a spectral life,

one in which the recollections and iterations of the attacks themselves continue to shape the very event they undertake to commemorate. Furthermore, Bin Laden's death at the hands of the country he sought to terrorize has done little to lessen the strife between the United States and Arab nations, and this serves to illustrate further the fact that vengeful and often militarized responses to the September 11, 2001 attacks do not bring genuine closure, if there ever is such a thing as "closure" that can be achieved at all. Certainly, the event that has too efficiently been called "9/11" leaves in its wake many other legal, socio-political, technical, and ethical legacies that exceed and challenge the validity of Obama's grandiosely patriotic sentiment regarding the attacks. Furthermore, sustained consideration and care must also be devoted to the environmental legacy as well as health and disability consequences that the highly destructive attacks in the United States and the subsequent "War on Terror" have left behind in their wake.⁷² Certainly, of these legacies most troubling still is the amount of human suffering and loss that resulted from the attacks and the military mobilizations that followed. For even now, twelve years since "9/11," those who have been made bereft and homeless by volatile military occupations and rampant civil unrest (mostly in the Middle East and Afghanistan) continue to struggle as dispersed peoples seeking asylum or refugee status in neighbouring countries.

⁷² In terms of the environmental, health, and disability consequences related to the collapse of the World Trade Center towers, see, for example, Robin Shulman's article "Health fears from victims of Ground Zero's deadly dust" and Susan Teskey's 2006 documentary *9/11: Toxic Legacy*. Also, for an informative discussion of the potential environmental repercussions of the Iraq War, see Arne Jernelov's study "The Environmental Effects of the Iraq War" and Steven Komarow's article "Military's fuel costs spur look at gas-guzzlers."

In light of these disquieting legacies that refuse to be swept away either by the much-publicized eradication of the “mastermind” behind the attacks, or the triumphant speeches of the United States’ 44th President, what, then, are the lessons to be learned from the commemorations of “9/11” that this project focuses upon? Each form of remembrance this project has closely explored calls in some way for the necessity of a re-education of sorts, especially in the face of the widespread, divergent experiences of trauma and grief brought about by the attacks and their aftermaths. The memorials I have discussed at length here seek to change some aspect of the conventional ways in which the collective mourning and public remembrance of the attacks have been undertaken. The memorial responses I have addressed in this project also answer in the affirmative David Simpson’s query of “whether it is possible to take commemorative procedures out of the hands of the government and its media apologists and to fashion alternative ways to remember the dead and to invoke their deaths in the pursuit of nondestructive ends” (Simpson 89). All three memorials welcome the admission of vulnerability and fallibility during instances of loss and trauma, as well as acknowledge that responding to the attacks in a “business as usual” approach—that is, without heeding the ways in which the event itself has unsettled some of the very foundational assumptions concerning the “proper” or “right” ways of remembering—amounts to missed opportunities to improve our relationships with and interdependence upon one another in social, political, and pedagogical contexts. Even the perceived limitations of and conflicts within these memorial texts provide us with lessons and caveats to consider for the futures of public remembrance and education. In fact, the perceived “shortcomings” of these memorials

are themselves reminders that any work of mourning or act of remembrance is a work in progress that is in constant need of reevaluation, always influenced and informed by such factors as who is remembering whom or what, for whom, in whose name, and towards what purpose or end.

For instance, the September 11th Families for Peaceful Tomorrows organization purposefully turns away from the rallying cries for revenge that were mobilized and naturalized in their name by the American government and media shortly after the attacks claimed the lives of their loved ones. Rather than lend their support to and thereby validate the kind of retributive justice being popularly sought in the memory of the victims, members of this peace organization undertake instead the task of sharing their experiences of grief and loss; this, for the sake of bringing attention to the mutual vulnerability of humanity across the globe and calling for non-violent means of addressing and resolving political conflicts. Casting aside the vindictive or retributive aspects inherent in state sovereignty and the law, the Peaceful Tomorrows group instead aligns itself with other communities and subpopulations that have been similarly affected by violent and often horrific political acts inflicted upon civilian populations by state and non-state actors alike. The performative gesture of renouncing vengeance and proclaiming solidarity with civilian victims across the globe not only challenges the notion that grief is the passive and thereby unproductive opposite of righteously incensed action, but it also supplants the idea that loss immobilizes the bereft and prevents them from doing anything (politically) meaningful or worthwhile because of their bereaved

state. It is thus that the group enacts a work of mourning that is itself an act of peace in a time of war, terrorism, and rampant military mobilization.

However, although well-meaning in its calls for peace and good-intentioned in its desire to prevent the future suffering of others across the world as a result of further political violence and aggressive military campaigns, the organization's widely acknowledged insistence upon a relationship of solidarity and sameness with its (often) racialized others across the world warrants further rigorous engagement. It is crucial to interrogate and challenge the group's (re)framing of their collective grief from the "9/11" attacks as a "teachable moment" (qtd. in *September 11th Families* 143) that demonstrates members' "commonality with all people affected by violence *regardless of borders*" (144, my emphasis) because such a characterization of loss implicitly assumes a universalizing treatment of others' suffering, despite vast differences in living conditions between, for instance, those in "the West" and those from countries that have suffered gravely as a result of "Western" military invasions and occupations. The consequence of this universalizing approach to the losses inflicted by inherently unique historical traumas is the marginalization of the painful experiences and difficult struggles of other (primarily non-"Western") individuals whose encounters with historical trauma have often implicated "Western" states. Such an ethical quandary faced by the Peaceful Tomorrows group serves as a caution to future memorial responses primarily geared towards global humanitarian endeavours; this, especially in light of how modes of "9/11" remembrance pedagogy that emphasize the primacy of the losses from the September 11, 2001 attacks over and above past, lesser known, and often racialized instances of political violence

risk reinforcing what Butler has called a “hierarchy of grief,” which insists upon the value assigned to specific lives and traumatic experiences as opposed to others.

Art Spiegelman’s graphic narrative *In the Shadow of No Towers*, meanwhile, tends to privilege embodied experience and materialist presence in its account of, and response to the September 11, 2001 attacks. But despite the fact that Spiegelman’s insistence upon his eye-witness status in Lower Manhattan during the collapse of the World Trade Center towers demonstrates his work’s quite conventional, presentist understanding of reality and experience, his graphic narrative does offer up powerful critiques of the concepts of “official knowledge” about the attacks and “masterful knowledge” of historical traumas. Indeed, his work functions as a kind of counter-memorial, in its persistent contention that the establishment and authority of “official knowledge” about the event ought not always be seen merely as a stabilizing touchstone for the citizenry, but instead as a (potentially) hegemonic force that further isolates and atomizes a society that is in dire need of informed dialogue and collective mobilization. Despite the counter-memorial potential of Spiegelman’s work, however, it is also important to recognize the ways in which his insistence upon the recuperation of democracy in America—indeed, the recuperation of the idealized “America” he suggests is needed to lead the world in a time of terror—risks re-centering Western injury and suffering in the wake of the attacks.

Lastly, Samira Makhmalbaf’s short film *God, Construction, and Destruction* reminds us of the productive and potentially regenerative force of failure—especially at a

time when the rhetoric of proclaiming victory and vanquishing the enemy threatens to eclipse such a valuable lesson. Through its focus on the shortcomings and uncertainties of the teacher, Makhmalbaf's film demonstrates that assumed or established knowledge—far from ensuring or productively contributing to the success of pedagogical aims—can and at times *does*, in fact, obscure sustained and genuine learning and education. That is, learning and education that insists not upon “the simple entry of the excluded into an established ontology,” but rather “an insurrection at the level of ontology, a critical opening up of the questions, What is real? Whose lives are real? How might reality be remade?” (Butler 33).

These modes of remembrance, in their unique set of complexities, articulate or model some aspect of what it might mean to inherit—and hence, take up and respond to—the legacy of the attacks. They counter the fear and terrorism that permeated the event with the call for the multiplication of narratives about the event, the pluralization of public spheres and pedagogical approaches, as well as the emphasis on developing practices that value and preserve spaces and opportunities for debate, dissent, the exchange of ideas, and the respect for human rights. Furthermore, each of these memorials forays into the possible futures and challenges faced by the memorialization of crises and the work that cultural productions, artefacts, and institutions (can) do. For these memorials, this is especially relevant with regards to the project of strengthening democracy and building multidisciplinary efforts to combat terrorism and foster more ethical public remembrance in an increasingly globalized world.

Why bother characterizing and treating the remembrance of the attacks as a crisis of and for education? In a sense, there is no choice in the matter, since those who live on inherit the historical, geopolitical event of September 11, 2001 in particular and the past in general as such—as crises of and for education. As Jacques Derrida observes:

[h]eritage or inheritance is what I can't appropriate, it is that which accrues to me and for which I am responsible, which has fallen to me as my lot, but over which I have no absolute right. *I inherit something that I must also transmit*: shocking or not, there is no right of property over inheritance. That's the paradox. I am always the tenant of an inheritance. Its trustee, its witness, or its relay... I can't appropriate any heritage without remainder. (Derrida and Stiegler 112, my emphasis)

Derrida's theorization of the necessity by which one actively encounters and engages with the past binds the notion of inheritance and remembrance to that of education, for as can be gleaned from Deborah Britzman's work on difficult knowledge, education ideally interferes, intervenes, and transforms the one who teaches, the one who learns, as well as that which is taught and learned. Education is never content with simply amassing or accumulating knowledge for dormant safekeeping. Indeed, to transmit, to witness, and to relay one's inheritance require that one must articulate meaning(s) from the past for the sake of communicating or conveying these lessons—however difficult or unbearable they may be—to the future and to an Other who has yet to learn.

It is in this way that the remembrance of the event of September 11, 2001 is a crisis of and for education, since its remembrance compels the transmission and relaying to the future of what is inherited from the past. Additionally, the modes and forms chosen to transmit and relay this inheritance from the past warrant vigilance and careful

deliberation, since the theorization and assignation of meanings to the attacks shape the very ways in which the event's myriad legacies will be received by others in the future. To "commit to memory," or be "committed to memory" then, does not simply entail the rote memorization of historical dates and tallies of the dead, nor does it merely imply the archiving of past collective grief into institutionalized repositories of public remembrance, such as national monuments or "sanctioned" and "approved" course syllabi that tout the "greatness" or "excellence" of a sovereign state's national history. Rather, to "commit to memory" or be "committed to memory" is a promise and a pledge to await the future and welcome the myriad afterlives of the past; even and especially when such specters unsettle the very presentism, certainty, and sense of infallibility that render hegemonic modes of memorializing the event of September 11, 2001 complacent in their responsibility to remember and learn.

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