

## **Introduction: Trauma's Continuum—September 11th Reconsidered<sup>1</sup>**

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In the decade following the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, scholarly accounts of September 11th have in many ways become exercises in consensus. Early scholarship tended to follow Jean Baudrillard and Slavoj Žižek in arguing that the spectacle of the burning towers was 'pre-scripted' by collective fantasies of destruction and Hollywood disaster films. There is widespread agreement that news broadcasts transformed the shocking spectacle from an "infinite" because indefinite wound, as Jacques Derrida initially suggested (85-86), into a standardized, tendentious visual narrative symbolized by a numerical icon or, as Marc Redfield puts it, "name-date" ("Virtual Trauma" 55). These cultural-studies inspired arguments differ significantly from mainstream accounts, which register outrage and shock and sometimes demand vengeance. However, there is one point on which scholars and pundits, whatever their political orientation, agree, namely that the attacks were traumatic: for those who experienced them directly, for those who lost family and friends, and for the millions who watched 9/11 on television. This is the premise of numerous books and articles published over the last ten years such as Judith Greenberg's *Trauma at Home: After 9/11* (2003), Hans Jürgen Wirth's *9/11 as Collective Trauma* (2004), and E. Ann Kaplan's *Trauma Culture* (2005), to list only a few of the indicative titles.

If trauma is defined as a serious injury or shock, then it is clear that the attacks were traumatic. However, it is equally clear that the term 'trauma' involves certain critical assumptions about what constitutes injury and who suffers shock. The standard definition of trauma is derived from a personal, therapeutic context, and its applicability to social groups and collectives is debatable. Can, for example, a nation be traumatized in the same way an individual is? Considering such questions requires us to look at the specific ways in which the concept has been used, a history going back to at least the first half of the twentieth century characterized by cycles of increasing and decreasing popularity. One peak in popularity occurred in the decade prior to the attacks. In the early 1990s, Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, and Dominick LaCapra began exploring what they argued was the neglected significance of memory in historical and literary discourse. Their interventions and the ensuing debates to a large degree set the conceptual course for discussing the September attacks. The essays in this special issue of *Amerikastudien/ American Studies* are dedicated to interrogating various aspects of what could be called 'trauma's continuum' in relation to 9/11. Continuum is here meant to describe the

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recurrence and repetition implicit in the concept of trauma itself, but also the recurrence of the trauma concept—a concept which may, as Richard Gray has suggested of novels exhibiting traumatic symptoms, “assimilate the unfamiliar into familiar structures” (134). Contributions share the premise that while traumatic events are disruptive, trauma itself has a critical and literary tradition: one marked by a continuity of key concepts, affinity with particular forms and practices, and fidelity to specific stylistic conventions. Exploring such continuities is in no way meant to deny the wounding impact of 9/11. Rather, this issue of *Amerikastudien / American Studies* seeks to explore how this event—like any event—is embedded in particular discursive frameworks that make it meaningful.

### I. Tracing Trauma

Attempts to trace trauma’s genealogy reveal its intimacy with modernity as a historical formation. Trauma is connected to rationalization, technization, and acceleration—ostensibly forces of progress that often leave destruction in their wake. In *Post-Traumatic Culture: Injury and Interpretation in the Nineties* (1998), Kirby Farrell argues that the *fin-de-siècle* moment, in both the 1890s and the 1990s, is defined by economic developments that seemed to transform the natural order while threatening traditional social ties: “the intensive rationalization of economic life [...] created an appearance of inexorable, ‘natural’ order while depersonalizing work and diluting loyalty and responsibility” (29). Such a general account of trauma hardly distinguishes the term from Marxist accounts of alienation. However, the psychological concept of trauma emerges from constellations whose relation to modernity is irreducible to economics: scenes of accident as well as technicized, routinized violence (cf. Mülder-Bach 7-8). The experiences of World War I veterans in particular shape Sigmund Freud’s classical account of the phenomenon. First, in “Trauer und Melancholie” (1915/1917), revised and expanded in *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* (1919/1920), Freud speculates that the self has a “protective shield” (*Reizschutz*) separating it from the outside world (237). Shocks such as those suffered by soldiers in the trenches can penetrate that shield, making it difficult for victims to move beyond the moment of wounding (238, 242). Instead, victims compulsively return to traumatic events or, rather, the events return to them in involuntary forms of memory such as the flashback.

Freud linked trauma to other key psychoanalytic concepts such as the drives, libido, and the role of childhood experiences in shaping the unconscious. More recent theorists have tended to shy away from these traditional Freudian categories, concentrating instead on an issue which Freud raised but to which he did not limit himself, namely the question of temporal dislocation. LaCapra is typical of this trend in current discussions of the concept. Central to his account of trauma is the belated manifestation of psychic wounding or *Nachträglichkeit*. Invoking primarily those psychoanalytic concepts linked to the persistence of the past in the present (melancholy, transference, acting out), LaCapra emphasizes the inability of the traumatized individual to forget or overcome traumatic events: “In acting out, tenses implode, and it is as if one were back there in the past reliving

the traumatic scene" (*Writing History* 21). One aspect of 'trauma's continuum' is in this sense definitional, involving the resurgence of memory and the psychological persistence of past events.

Another aspect of the 'continuum,' however, concerns the discourse as a whole: the periodic recurrence of trauma as a central critical concept mentioned in the introduction. Considering the pattern of interest in the term, it seems that trauma theory follows the timeline ascribed by it to the traumatic experience, returning to the critical scene with marked *Nachträglichkeit* several decades after its inception (Leys 15). Why this renewed interest in an old theory? Farrell, as we have already mentioned, points to what he takes to be significant socio-economic parallels between 1890 and 1990. It could also be argued that the increasing violence of twentieth-century warfare, with its growing impact on civilians and soldiers alike, has produced a population of victims, perpetrators, and survivors whose symptoms match those described by the term. Mark Seltzer, moving from psychological to cultural diagnosis, has argued that the widespread fascination with injury in the United States—what he calls "wound culture"—has become the primary mode of social, cultural, and erotic interaction in an era marked by the mechanization of the body and disintegrating communal bonds (31-34). We can 'feel' other people's pain, or at least develop a voyeuristic interest in their suffering, even in the absence of more significant commonalities. These explanations are plausible; however, the most significant trauma of the twentieth century, and the one in relation to which trauma theory understands its own return, is the Holocaust. A number of theorists have followed Jean-François Lyotard in defining postmodernism as a culture-wide post-traumatic stress disorder, whose characteristic forms—pastiche, seriality, simulation—are supposed to be symptoms of a past that has been repressed and is now returning (1614). Traumatic events have been multiplying, as have the number of victims, but trauma becomes a theoretical obsession in the context of postmodernism, which (in the Lyotardian reading) redefines culture as a symptom of the Holocaust (cf. Eaglestone; Rothberg, *Traumatic Realism* 181-86).

While Lyotard's theory has generated considerable scholarship (including the Felman, Rothberg, and LaCapra texts already referenced above), it bears asking if cultures remember (or forget) in the same way individuals do. Public memory has a history, and any account of why the Holocaust became so prominent in the 1990s would have to pay attention not only to the psychological mechanisms of anamnesis but to memory's specific historical context. A part of that context is certainly the end of the Cold War. Walter Benn Michaels has argued that with the collapse of old political and cultural mappings, identity began to replace ideology as the dominant trope of political and cultural debates. Memory, linked to identity, became increasingly popular as a mode of historical writing, in some cases eclipsing traditional historiography, which seemed tainted by obsolete ideological commitments (Michaels 31). In the process, the Holocaust emerged as a central element of a new "global memory culture" concerning itself, ostensibly at least, with human rights rather than the conflict between communism and capitalism (cf. Levy and Sznajder 18-21). By the 1990s many historians and cultural critics were voicing suspicions that official Cold War histories of World War II had neglected

the memories of actual Holocaust survivors in their rush to condemn totalitarianism (in the West) and capitalism (in the East). Video testimonial projects, eye witness documentaries, and survivor narratives became increasingly prominent in the United States and elsewhere, thus preserving personal accounts for the historical record, and beyond this, as many historians—such as those designing the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum—advocated, placing previously repressed memories at the center of historical projects. The privileging of survivor memories was arguably part of a wider trend to reinterpret history as a branch of public memory (cf. Kammen 7; Nora). LaCapra epitomized the shift in critical perspective when he argued that even seemingly objective histories testify to the past by acting out their relation to traumatic events through characteristic gaps and aporias (“Representing the Holocaust” 110).

The redefinition of history as a form of public memory prompted critical reflection on the prominence of trauma as a key theoretical term, and particularly on its privileging of specific limit events, extreme experiences, and expressionistic rather than representational forms. Even the proponents of so-called ‘trauma theory,’ as it was already being called in the 1990s, sounded a cautionary note. Precisely because it was supposed to be returning with all the force of a repressed memory, the Holocaust had become a talisman of the real in an age of simula-cra (cf. Hartman; LaCapra). Perhaps more troubling, the prominence of the Holocaust seemed to reflect the increasing significance of victim-status in cultural politics: in the global, cosmopolitan frame which Daniel Levy and Natan Sznajder sketch out in *Erinnerung im globalen Zeitalter* (2001), but also in the American context characterized by Seltzer as wound-centered. Historian Peter Novick points out the increasing importance of Holocaust remembrance as a marker of ethnic difference for a rapidly secularizing American Jewish community—this in spite of the fact that few of its members experienced Nazi persecution directly (6-13). Trauma has thus established itself as a central site of cultural negotiation, defining collective claims, group affiliations, and moral and political hierarchies. This traumatic definition of group membership and status is often antagonistic. “Holocaust envy” contends with “Holocaust possessiveness” (197-98), as Novick puts it, encouraging unfortunate debates about who has suffered more: Jews (the Holocaust), African Americans (the middle passage, slavery, and segregation), or Native Americans (one influential scholar, David E. Stannard, polemically called the colonization of the New World the “American Holocaust”).

The pervasiveness of the Holocaust—as a historical reference as well as a more general trope—in contemporary American culture suggests that the so-called “Americanization of the Holocaust” (cf. Flanzbaum) involves more than the struggle for cultural ‘distinction’ and group recognition. There is undoubtedly an element of voyeurism involved—the frisson of vicarious victimization—but also a dimension of denial. The inclusion of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in the symbolically resonant Mall in Washington, DC, speaks for the central role which the memory of genocide in Europe had come to play in the constitution of American identity by 1993, the year of the museum’s dedication. Some critics suggested that this location was part of a political avoidance strategy. By focusing on a European catastrophe rather than on slavery or Western expan-

sion, Americans could bypass their own violent past or, in a more charitable reading, work through national or other collective issues in a process comparable to transference.

## II. From the Trauma Trope to Traumatic Community

The Holocaust has become a master trope of trauma, as Sabine Sielke argues in her contribution to this volume, significant for discussions of suffering generally, and particularly for accounts of 9/11. Following the attacks, scholars who had been writing about representations of the Holocaust turned their attention almost immediately to the collapsing towers (e.g. Ulrich Baer, Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, and Michael Bernard-Donals). This is not surprising. Trauma theory seemed better poised to address the immensity of the attacks and their aftermath than other critical vocabularies fashionable at the time, such as gender or ethnicity studies. The kinds of questions trauma theory raised and the answers it provided were also less political—or differently political—than the other critical discourses prepared to address international terrorism, such as transnationalism, globalization studies, and post-colonialism. Trauma theory focuses on the experiences of the victims and the sympathetic community forming around them. It can, at one extreme, represent the United States as a collective victim, although this position was more strongly supported in the popular media than in academia. Indeed, in contradistinction to arguments articulated in the media, especially on the right end of the political spectrum, trauma theory refrained from transforming the wound inflicted on the collective into a sanction for aggressive foreign policy. The other extreme, and the position advocated by a number of scholars, consists in the utopian hope that collective trauma could bring together all Americans, or even all right-minded people, in sympathetic solidarity. The trauma theory that gained in popularity after the attacks was linked to this form of sentimental utopianism. It occupied the stunned moment between wounding and retaliation, hoping that the circulation of media images might turn us all into vicarious victims, better prepared to empathize with the suffering that goes on in many parts of the world, and more committed to humane politics in the global age.

That utopian moment is past, but the kind of solidarity envisioned by trauma theory still bears exploring. The discursive roots of this theoretical approach are psychoanalytic, but they move beyond the subject as the primary unit of analysis. Trauma theory looks to language and linguistic distortions as symptoms of the past—a past that impacts individuals but in ways that are beyond their control and often their understanding. The traumatized individual is not a historian looking for what used to be called “the usable past” (cf. Brooks); on the contrary, the past expresses itself through the victim in the form of memories he or she cannot escape. Trauma cannot be represented; it manifests itself through testimony, a performative or non-representational mode of articulation. Felman has influentially described the form as follows: “testimony seems to be composed of bits and pieces of a memory that has been overwhelmed by occurrences that have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be constructed as knowledge

nor assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of reference” (5). Testimony is the speech act of traumatized subjects, so it does not, properly speaking, convey knowledge, originate in an intentional subject, or adhere to representational conventions. According to Felman, testimony *acts out* as symptom what cannot be *articulated* as knowledge, thus embodying the past, or making it present in a way distinct from—and defined as the limit of—representation and subjectivity.

Trauma’s complex relation to subjectivity and representation—at their limits, but for this reason so affectively powerful—are issues to which we must return. First, however, we want to touch on what the “bits and pieces of a memory” mean for witnesses and those who “bear [...] witness for the witness.” This recurrent phrase in trauma theory, borrowed from the end of Paul Celan’s “Aschenglorie” (1965), raises a question about traumatic community that Celan’s phrasing dismisses out of hand (“Niemand/ zeugt für den/ Zeugen” [260]). Who, if anybody, serves as the second order witness to trauma? For Felman and her collaborator Dori Laub it is the interlocutor in ‘talking’ practices, whether cure or pedagogy, who assumes this function. In regard to September 11th, however, one can argue that it is less the analyst or teacher than the viewer who was positioned to witness at a distance. There is a significant and growing literature on second-hand trauma and prosthetic memory (cf. esp. Landsberg), originally intended to make sense of the intense feelings of visitors to Holocaust memorial museums and readers of Holocaust testimonies, but more recently applied to the millions who watched the collapsing towers on TV (cf. Douglass and Vogler; Redfield). The basic issue this literature concerns itself with is how we remember events that did not happen to us directly. Most theorists answer this question through an appeal to collective or public memory, or the way certain commemorative rituals and institutions produce group identities, often in honor of their posthumous members. Going back to the Freudian idea that trauma disturbs the protective shield between ‘self’ and ‘other,’ we might say that the collapse of the basic psychological dualism that results in anachronism (the presence of the past) might also enable community (the communion of self and other). Ideally, this would be a sympathetic community forged through shared affect and the mutual working through of traumatic experiences.

Recent scholarship is optimistic regarding the possibilities offered by media—especially visual media—for compassionately regarding the pain of others and developing multidirectional or prosthetic memories conducive to sympathy and community (cf. Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*; Landsberg). An older line of thinking, however, views extreme situations as inimical to community and basic humanity. This position should not be dismissed out of hand. There is a distinction to be drawn between suffering and the kind of extreme and destabilizing experience denoted by the term trauma. Brute violence causes injury, but *trauma* occurs when victims are denied their agency and forced into a situation Lawrence Langer conceives of as the ‘choiceless choice.’ Human autonomy in such cases is degraded to a decision between neither life and death nor the ethical and abominable, but rather between equivalent, aberrant horrors. The concentration camp is paradigmatic for this situation. As Hannah Arendt observed more than half a

century ago, the camps systematically dehumanized their victims, targeting, with particular perfidy, their civil and moral agency before taking their lives (“The Concentration Camps”).

There have been efforts, most recently by Giorgio Agamben, to further pursue the line of thinking inaugurated by Arendt: to seriously consider the de-subjectified figure of the camp victim or *Muselmann* and to listen to his or her testimony (151, 156-57). In literature such attempts often go consciously—and in key instances perversely—astray. In his novel *Sophie's Choice* (1979), William Styron personifies the ‘choiceless choice’ in a protagonist who is not wholly innocent, but who is nevertheless a victim. The male characters in the novel profess sympathy for Sophie. At the same time, they eroticize her and subject her to their aggressions and desires—a downward spiral of degradation that culminates in her death in a suicide pact. The disturbing premise of the novel is that the affect attached to victims, under the guise of sympathy, may be erotic or sadistic. This perversion of sympathy into sadism, sentimentalism into pornography, is a phenomenon Susan Sontag was already exploring in the 1960s and 70s in essays such as “Fascinating Fascism” (1974) and “The Pornographic Imagination” (1969). It is worth noting that Sontag’s description of the objects and affects of pornography are uncannily resonant with contemporary accounts of trauma: pornography’s focus is not on the individual, but on moments of “psychic dislocation” (47) in which extreme states of consciousness and feeling are only “contingently linked” to “concrete persons” (42). Might ‘feeling’ the pain of others—a pain that in a sense dislocates itself from concrete persons as it dehumanizes them—be voyeuristic in similar terms? At the very least, Sontag’s essays, like Styron’s novel, should inject a note of caution into current discussions of the sympathetic community forming around trauma and the memory of the ‘choiceless choice.’

In the record of 9/11, the ‘choiceless choice’ is embodied in an affectively and ethically charged visual icon: the falling man. The men and women who jumped from the towers, rather than dying within them, also found themselves positioned between horrors. The visual documentation of their ‘choice’ has proven the most powerful and controversial afterimage of the attacks, returning prominently in artistic responses to the event, but at the same time subject to divisive debates over artistic and journalistic but also (as in pornography) the moral limits of representation.

The imagery has lingered in collective recollection: not, however, as the result of mass media saturation. The footage itself was only briefly broadcast; the print media circulated photos, but held to a self-imposed protocol keeping all images soft-focused and at a distance (cf. Brotman; Junod). Thus, while certainly part of the memory of September 11th, the falling figures are actually not part of the event’s more official, visual master narratives. If the drive to ‘remember’ 9/11 took hold early and with a politically driven ‘will’ to memorialization (cf. Goldberger; Simpson), there has at the same time been a tendency to ‘disremember,’ in Toni Morrison’s phrase, the falling men and women or, at least, maintain their marginal status at the edges of the collective recollection generated and maintained by public memorial spaces. Two cases are instructive. The first and earlier concerns Eric Fischl’s *Tumbling Woman*. The bronze sculpture of a naked woman, whose posture

could either depict rolling on the ground or descending in free fall, was intended for temporary display at the Rockefeller Center. Protests, however, resulted in the removal of the piece after only eight days in September 2002: the sharpest critique coming from the pen of *New York Post* journalist Andrea Peyser. The headline, “Shameful Art Attack,” deliberately suggests a repetition of the terrorist attacks. Peyser’s comments and the quotations from a passerby cited within the article further suggest that the art constituted another traumatic experience, “drag[ging]” people against their “will back to that terrible day” (Peyser; for further discussion see also Doss). Four years later, a poem by Wislawa Szymborska generated comparable controversy. Jenny Holzer originally planned to include the Nobel Prize winner’s “Photograph from September 11” (2005) in her text-stream installation for the foyer of 7 World Trade Center. Szymborska’s evocation of those who “jumped from the burning floors—” disturbed the commercial developer Larry A. Silverstein and his wife Klara Silverstein. Like Peyser in reaction to Fischl’s sculpture, Klara Silverstein deemed the poem “too graphic” and feared that it might “bring back images that people might want to forget” (qtd. in Collins). Holzer demurred and the text was excised from the installation (Collins).

If 9/11 has become synonymous with a highly normed, strongly visual narrative whose discussion tends to the consensual, the debates surrounding the poem and Fischl’s sculpture mark a segment of September 11th discourse resistant to consensus, persistently disquieting, and thus subject to compulsive repetition. From early responses in film such as the Naudet brothers’ documentary *9/11* to Alejandro González Inárritu’s contribution to Alain Brigand’s omnibus project *11’09’’01* (both 2002) to Jonathan Safran Foer’s *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* (2005) and Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* (2007) in addition to ongoing poetic, poetological reflection (cf. for example Cohen and Matson; Johnson and Merians; Gilbert), the image of the falling figure has defined the limits of post-9/11 remembrance. We began by pointing out that most people agree that 9/11 was traumatic. But if the term trauma can be usefully applied to collectivities, then it should mark places where consensus gives way to debates over propriety, community, and what constitutes humanity.

### III. “The Pathos of the Literal”

Trauma theory assumes that victims are overwhelmed by their suffering and that suffering leaves its imprint on language. It is post-humanist or even anti-humanist, to use Hal Foster’s term, in the diminished role it allots the subject as a maker of meaning, and it relocates this lost agency in language itself, which acts out the trauma that individuals cannot understand (cf. Foster 67). Language, not subjectivity, is the locus of memory, which speaks through us and in spite of us, and in ways distinct from conventional history. The medium of traumatized memory is testimony, which is supposed to act out or transmit the past directly, in accordance with a concept Ruth Leys calls “the pathos of the literal” (266-97).

Leys is skeptical that language can have a literal and non-representational link to the past. This is partly because the language of trauma seems, in most descrip-



tions, to speak in the familiar idiom of literary modernism. The description of the testimonial speech act which we find in Felman, among others, recalls the aesthetic conventions which modernists like T. S. Eliot developed through attacks on the literary conventions of their predecessors. Miriam Hansen, in discussing representations of the Holocaust, draws attention to a “type of aesthetic expression that is aware of its problematic status—the nonrepresentational, singular and hermetic *écriture* to be found in the works of high modernism” (294). Viewed within a broader historical framework, the similarities between modernist aesthetics and current conceptions of testimony seem to indicate a genuinely ‘familial’ resemblance. This may be due to the fact that both forms of expression were forged in response to the traumatic. Another possibility is that trauma is merely the new label applied to the traditional modernist style.

Hayden White has proposed making use of the link between modernism and trauma. In dismantling the clear categories of agent, object, action, and trajectory, which grounded pre-modernist stylistic conventions, modernism, in his view, offers the most apt forms for conveying the fragmentary quality of traumatic experience (see esp. 32). Near the beginning of the last century, writers in the English tradition turned to elegy as a means of responding to the ravages of World War I: taking up but also transforming central elements of the form, such as its reliance on metaphors of the natural cycle as a source of comfort, and thereby making the lyrical negotiation of trauma a central site in modernism's wider, antagonistic interaction with established literary and socio-cultural protocols (cf. Gilbert 366-97; Ramazani). Eliot's *The Waste Land* (1922) offers the most compelling and in its influence certainly most resonant example of this interconnection. Haunted by destruction, the poem offers fragments “shored against [...] ruins” (69, 431), thus suggesting both the return of the past in the present as well as the constitution of a new order that emerges not by denying, but confronting those horrors that necessitate revision of now anachronistic tropes of comfort. “That corpse you planted last year in your garden,” the poem asks with historical resonance and calculated provocation, “Has it begun to sprout? Will it bloom this year?” (55, 71-72).

But if trauma has a style, modernist or otherwise, how can it have a direct connection to the real (“the pathos of the literal”)? Styles, after all, can be imitated or faked. James Frey's *A Million Little Pieces* (2003) offers a contemporary case in point which, in bringing interconnections (and popular assumptions) regarding ‘truth,’ ‘fiction,’ and ‘trauma’ to the fore, offered in some respects a domestic version of the debates surrounding Benjamin Wilkomirski and his ‘fabricated’ Holocaust autobiography (cf. Maechler). Controversy ensued in the more recent memoir scandal not merely because the publisher marketed Frey's fiction as autobiography. Readers such as Oprah Winfrey, who initially pushed the text in a Book Club endorsement in 2005, felt tricked less by the publisher than by the author and, most disturbingly, by their own reading experience. Not only the extreme descriptions, but the text's fragmentary quality was perceived as evidence of a narrowly defined veracity: a grounding in real-life trauma as opposed to the imagination of personal degradation through drug use (see the episode transcript “Oprah's Questions for James”).

The outrage over fake memoirs and the periodic recurrence suggest that the current prominence of trauma and the application of this originally psychological term to cultural and collective phenomena might ultimately have something to do with nostalgia. Trauma theory is post-humanist in its attempts to locate memory outside the subject, but what it longs for is the personal, the therapeutic, and the classically modern. The basic element of 'trauma's continuum' might, after all, be the persistence of the subject, which keeps returning after repeated reports of his or her death. Much has been made of the so-called 'memoir boom' of the last decades, which has taken life writing genres from the low-status margin of the publishing world to center stage (cf. Gilmore). The collected, coherent memories of the statesman or public persons have certainly been part of this trend, but contemporary readers seem more interested in the damaged life, an interest which has fueled both popular and academic preoccupation with the personal story: be it the fate of those engulfed in warfare, victims of domestic violence, Holocaust survivors, or, in the new millennium, the individual life directly or indirectly affected by September 11th. Writing about a life shattered by trauma allows for a thematization of discontinuities which, through the act of self-representation, can be resolved into a continuity of, at the minimum, narrative; the continuity of voice offers, as Beverly Haviland phrases it in this issue, a 'counter' to traumatic rupture and dislocation. Thus for all its emphasis on the damaged subject, the thrust of trauma theory may be ultimately humanistic.

Trauma stands for destruction, excess, the ravaging of those categories which ground our selves and experiences. Viewed from the vantage point of literary composition and community formation, however, trauma reveals itself to be enabling. It disorients but also situates us: placing the personal experience in relation to larger historical events and thereby in relation to others within a social, historical, and, in the case of traumatic incidents, an emotive and, potentially, recuperative continuum. In responding to trauma, we bear witness to the overwhelming. We thereby also strive to overcome its effects. In other words, a drive to recovery drives trauma discourse. The repetitions which tormented trench war veterans, and which continue to haunt the victims of the multiple tragedies of the long twentieth century, were seen by Freud as a means of coming to terms or 'mastering' the events which had once 'mastered' and thus psychically wounded the subject (*Jenseits des Lustprinzips* 224-27). Humanistic interest in recovery and consolation in this sense works against what we have called the post-humanist or linguistic basis of traumatic memory. Writing is not merely a documentation of this process, but a potential means of personal recovery.

#### IV. The Contributions to this Issue

9/11—September 11th—11 September. The variations carry with them different cultural, political resonances and imply divergent perspectives on the event. In this issue of *Amerikastudien / American Studies* we wish to utilize this plurality of perspectives to historicize the recurrence of trauma and consider September 11th within the framework of the various continuities trauma engenders and/or oper-

ates in: affinities with aesthetic modes and forms detectible in trauma discourse, the persistence of the past marking the traumatic symptom, and the traumatic constitution of sympathetic communities. The contributions also explore the status of trauma theory as a powerful contemporary discourse as well as trauma's status as a key trope in cultural consensus and debate.

Sabine Sielke begins our investigation of 'trauma's continuum' with the last central issue: the status of trauma as trope. "'Why 9/11 is [not] unique,' or: Troping Trauma" explores what has alternately been called an 'obsession' and 'fetishization' of the trauma concept. Central to Sielke's analysis is the paradoxical way the Shoah has become the paradigmatic trope of trauma: its transformation, in other words, from a proper noun grounded in historical particularities to the more free-floating and deliberately comparativist adjective 'holocaustal.' Ultimately, as Sielke argues, trauma tropes are a risky business. They seem to stabilize our relation to purportedly unique events via a trope that resists closure and invites comparison.

In his analysis of Phillip Roth's novel *The Plot against America* (2004), Andrew S. Gross also takes up the paradoxical nature of non-comparativist analogies between 9/11 and the Holocaust. While September 11th has nothing to do with the Holocaust, comparisons are widespread. Roth's novel takes these comparisons literally—or literarily—by projecting them into an imagined past, when real American anti-Semitism might have resulted in an obviously fictionalized policy of official discrimination. This emplotment of one of the key comparisons underlying the contemporary concept of memory allows Roth to historicize memory as counter-factual fiction. Gross argues that the novel revises this Cold War genre to explore the emergence of memory as a historical and literary discourse in the decade following the fall of the Berlin Wall. Ultimately, the novel does not further the cause of identity politics, as some critics have asserted, but recoups the memory that is currently linked to "the pathos of the literal" for literature. Memory, in Roth, isn't the real. It's the mother of the muses.

The question of comparison can be seen as an underlying concern of Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*. The novel brings together a quest set in motion by September 11th loss with the protracted working through of Dresden's bombing in the last days of World War II. In "After the Fact: Mourning, Melancholy, and *Nachträglichkeit* in Novels of 9/11," Beverly Haviland particularly focuses on *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close*, contrasting her understanding of Foer's work as a 'novel of mourning' with DeLillo's *Falling Man* as a 'novel of melancholy.' *Extremely Loud & Incredibly Close* in particular, Haviland argues, takes on a critical, reflective function in regard to trauma. In its complex diegetic framing, composed of multiple narrative perspectives and divergent temporalities, the novel negotiates the equally complex phenomenon of trauma and its cultural scripts. The thorny question of collective trauma, particularly its general transmission, and its deferred effects are negotiated via narrative means, thus, in Haviland's reading, paving the way for a more complex understanding of the therapeutic and aesthetic possibilities of belatedness.

The question of aesthetic form's relation to dynamics of comfort and critique continues in the next two contributions. MaryAnn Snyder-Körber takes

up the *New York Times* series *Portraits of Grief* as an adaptation of impromptu urban memorialization in response to September 11th. “Lost and Found Lives: *The Portraits of Grief* and the Work of September 11th Mourning” positions the both highly praised and pointedly criticized journalistic project between an actualization of the snapshot ideal in a supposedly post-photographic age and a continuation of the elegiac ‘work of mourning.’ The result is a case study in adaptation which, as Snyder-Körber argues, sheds light on the dynamics modulating mourning, its constitution of national feeling, and thus community post-9/11.

Art Spiegelman’s *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004) can also be seen within the framework of adaptation. The work foregrounds its interaction with comic tradition as well as the intersection of the discourses of central concern to this volume: trauma theory, discursive formations of Holocaust response, and the impact of September 11th. Its aim, however, is certainly not to comfort. Rather, as Christina Meyer emphasizes in her close reading of Spiegelman’s negotiation of ‘framing’ in the double sense of formal device and frames of reference, *In the Shadow of No Towers* works towards critical reflection. “‘Putting it into Boxes’: Framing Art Spiegelman’s *In the Shadow of No Towers*” investigates Spiegelman’s negotiation of form as a negotiation of, in Meyer’s phrase, ‘trauma as a commonplace’ as well as trauma’s imbrication in media image- and meaning-making.

Among the images generated by September 11th reporting and the elaboration of the event in wider cultural discourse, that of the terrorist is marked by particular ambivalence: simultaneously an object of loathing and a source of morbid fascination. In “‘Close Neighbors to the Unimaginable’: Literary Projections of Terrorists’ Perspectives (Martin Amis, John Updike, Don DeLillo),” Birgit Däwes explores three key responses to 9/11, Martin Amis’s short story “The Last Days of Muhammad Atta” (2006), John Updike’s *Terrorist* (2006), and Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* (2007). Drawing on the work of Winfried Fluck, Däwes argues that “new circumstances interact dialectically with the individual and cultural imaginary to produce new (cultural) meanings and realities” (499): an interaction which, in her view, is foregrounded in what could be called the ‘new’ literature of terror post-September 11th. These texts take up not only the figure but the perspective of the terrorists in modes inflected by multiple literary traditions and cultural discourses. Ultimately, however, they are underwritten by the gothic as the exemplary literary mode of haunting. The past continually returns in gothic fictions, rendering the continuation of trauma, its continuum with present concerns perceptible (if not wholly resolvable). If fiction strives for a position in ‘neighborly’ closeness to the unimaginable, as Updike suggests in the quote Däwes has chosen for her title, it simultaneously works to imagine the interconnection of past and present, self and Other, trauma and the formation of national and transnational feeling in arguably new, potentially critical ways.

### V. Coda

In 2002, *Amerikastudien / American Studies* considered the impact of September 11th in a forum which brought together Americanist scholars working throughout Europe. Reflections were essayistic, markedly personal and exploratory. Contributors gave vent to their shock at the scenes which they had witnessed at various distances to the sites of impact, expressing empathy and solidarity paired with, for the majority, a marked discomfort with the event's political instrumentalization. The question of the attack's potential impact for the disciplinary and professional interests which brought these diverse writers together was, in the face of the still comparatively fresh and emotional nature of reaction, less an explicit question than an undercurrent running through the forum. Gönül Pultar of Bilkent University, Ankara, however, took up this disciplinary dimension in a reworking of Leo Marx's iconic image of the machine in the garden: "The aircraft in the tower [...] has changed the landscape in America. It has altered not only the skyline in NYC, but consciousness about the moral and political landscape." One must see, she concludes, where "America" will go from here (132).

A decade after the attacks we can now look back to where America 'has gone.' With this issue we hope that we can contribute both to a more thorough understanding of the responses to September 11th which have unfolded in the years since 2001 as well as to the complex historical resonances and discursive, theoretical frameworks which constitute the contemporary American scene in the shadow of, as Spiegelman has put it, "No Towers."

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