The Twin Towers in Popular Film: The Changing Meanings of an Iconic Image

Jessica Nelson

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By: Jessica Nelson

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_____ Chair

Dr. Alessandra Renzi

_____ Examiner

Dr. Brian Lewis

_____ Examiner

Prof. Timothy Schwab

_____ Supervisor

Dr. Charles Acland

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ABSTRACT

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Studies of memory and film have touched upon the implication of watching productions from different time periods. However, little scholarship has investigated how memory can draw attention to certain powerful images rather than others. This thesis explores how audiences respond to films in light of the passage of time and the public's changing memories. The thesis focuses on the Twin Towers of New York City's World Trade Center (W.T.C.), images that have obtained new meanings when they appear intact in pre-9/11 films. The writing of Stuart Hall, John Fiske, and Roland Barthes assist with theories of the mutability of meaning. Maurice Halbwachs, George Lipsitz, Marita Sturken and José van Dijck provide understanding of popular memory. The impact of representations of major historical events, such as 9/11, is elucidated with the research of Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, and Barbie Zelizer. A case study focuses on the W.T.C. in popular pre-9/11 films and examines how viewers encounter that image today. The results demonstrate that the appearance of the W.T.C. impacts the viewers' historical understanding by situating them in time and place, and therefore, giving them a sense of present to compare to the past.

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Introduction

       Every December, the first two "Home Alone" films, both directed by Chris Columbus, played on various television networks repeatedly leading up to Christmas Eve. The films, while noticeably more geared towards children, are also enjoyed by an older audience. *Home Alone* has gained a following as the films display and preach the importance of family values and generosity surrounding one of the most important and celebrated holidays of the year. They also serve as a time capsule of the world portrayed in both movies. The idea of a young child being forgotten at home, as shown in the first film, or left to wander New York City alone, as set in the second film, is difficult to imagine today. In fact, unless the films were purposefully set in the 90s, these two movies would be impossible to create with a contemporary tone. If a child were accidently forgotten at home, they could call a parent's cell phone. It is safe to assume that the "Home Alone" films are truly a representation of their time. However, it is not only the television networks that occasionally play older films; streaming services, such as Netflix and Crave TV, offer a catalogue of movies for a monthly fee. Included in the selections are older Hollywood movies. Consequently, contemporary audiences regularly engage with older films.

       Since audiences watch films from the perspective of the present, some images have noticeably gained new meanings due to the passage of time. The images that we understand today are different than the ways in which they were intended to be used in past films. The image that I will be focusing on for my research are the Twin Towers. These buildings possess a long history that originates as far back as their planning. From the development of their architectural design to the protests from residents and businesses in the Lower Manhattan region that were to be pushed aside for the creation of the W.T.C., the Twin Towers made an impression on New York City before they were even constructed. Once built, the Towers beat the Empire State Building in height, becoming the tallest buildings in the world, and were what many thought to be a permanent fixture on New York City's famous skyline.

       The Twin Towers were considered to be the center of financial capitalism during the time they were intact. As a place that represented a concentration of power, the buildings drew both iconic and tragic moments. As documented in the biographical film *Man on Wire* (2008), directed by James Marsh, Philippe Petit walked between the Twin Towers on a wire in 1974 without a harness or safety net. A more terror-filled moment was in 1993 when a group of terrorists

detonated explosives in an underground parking garage of one of the Towers, killing six people. In Marshall Berman's text, "When Bad Buildings Happen to Good People" (2002), regarding the Twin Towers, he explains, "[A]fter the bombing of 1993, many people came to feel their vulnerability, and took pity" (7).

The terrorist attack of September 11th, 2001 caused more destruction and death than the 1993 bombing as it was executed on a larger scale. Two planes were hijacked by terrorists and flown into both buildings, killing nearly three thousand people. Even though the Towers no longer stood in their original form after the event that would be referred to as "9/11", their destruction caused a ripple effect throughout many institutions and even the world. The media continuously reported on 9/11 for weeks as viewers watched the news to come to terms with what transpired that fateful day. The United States government declared "war on terror" and sent American soldiers to invade Afghanistan and Iraq. Muslims were endlessly depicted as terrorists in all forms of media. Countries began taking measures to heighten their security and keep citizens safe from another potential attack. Accordingly, the image of the Twin Towers as an iconic landmark and image continue to stretch on despite their ruin as they became representative of a city and world that had little to fear until 9/11.

These buildings are a perfect example of images that have gained new meaning due to a traumatic and historical event. The magnitude of 9/11, itself a highly mediated event, is reflected in our perception of such images. How does an audience view the intact Twin Towers in films given our knowledge of their destruction? This question is what will be explored in this thesis.

The first chapter provides a literature review of key work on cultural studies, meaning, and memory. It focuses on theorists, such as Stuart Hall, Roland Barthes, Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz, and Barbie Zelizer, and their ideas within these fields of study to pinpoint notions that will guide my analysis of the Twin Towers. Their respective research demonstrates how the combination of memory and representation affect the meaning of the W.T.C. as time moves forward, obscuring how we view 9/11 as a media event. However, the chapter outlines a set of processes that argues that meaning of the Twin Towers is ultimately created through individual interpretation of the image. The work of Michael Sorkin and Sharon Zukin, David Harvey, and Zelizer, further explain how the meaning of the Twin Towers is linked to concepts of wealth, power, and terrorism.

The second chapter offers an historical review of how the Twin Towers were used in popular film. The first half of the chapter explores how the Towers were positioned in pre-9/11 productions in accordance with the time that the films were released. The films that I examine are *Godspell* (1973), *Meteor* (1979), *Trading Places* (1983), *Home Alone 2: Lost in New York* (1992), and *Super Mario Bros.* (1993). These films are compared to how the image of the Towers are used in post-9/11 films, which is addressed in the second half of the chapter. The post-9/11 films that I explore are *Munich* (2005) and *Remember Me* (2010). Through this comparison, the chapter discusses how the image of the Twin Towers is used differently in the present.

Lastly, the third chapter deals with a case study to establish the multiple meanings viewers experience when viewing the image of the W.T.C. in pre-9/11 films. The case study is modeled on the approaches of S. Elizabeth Bird, Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz, and Raymond L. Gorden and it explores the active, meaning-making, aspects of media audiences through film viewings and interviews. The films that were presented to participants were the pre-9/11 films introduced in the second chapter. After their respective screenings, participants were asked if anything stood out to them in the films, which eventually led to conversations regarding the W.T.C.

As we gain regular access to older films, it is important to understand the implications of viewing images used in a different way than they are in the present. The Twin Towers is presented in *Home Alone 2: Lost in New York* in a brief and joyous moment. I want to understand how we respond to the Twin Towers placed in such a manner given the new connotations associated with the structure.

CHAPTER 1

Meaning, Memory, and Media: An Analysis of the Twin Towers

When we watch films, we have access to images and sounds from a different era. Some of these images and sounds can seem contemporary to us, but they always represent the era in which they were produced and circulated. Since ideas and cultural norms changed over time, our understanding of what we access when we consume media from the past changes as well. Literature from cultural studies, media studies, journalism, film studies and memory studies touches upon how meaning is created, conveyed, and interpreted by audiences who engage with media, and can be used to help us understand this changing historical experience. I will draw upon this scholarly literature to demonstrate that the work on film and memory is highly developed. Their insights on meaning, memory, and media will allow me to properly identify concepts that will guide my analysis of the Twin Towers in popular film. The connection between these three themes draws out broader concepts concerning the image of the Twin Towers, such as wealth, power, and terrorism.

Cultural studies is a foundational literature regarding the creation of meaning. This field provides an understanding of how meaning is created, circulated, and interpreted, which is central to my study. In John Fiske's text, "British Cultural Studies and Television" (1987), he properly explores and questions cultural studies in relation to media. This work is particularly important because it explores the various influences, such as Marxism and structuralism, on cultural studies. He begins by introducing cultural studies as being "concerned with the generation and circulation of meanings in industrial societies" (254). He then proceeds to analyze the various concepts in cultural studies of how meaning is created and circulated.

A key concern of cultural studies is ideology. A traditional Marxist assumption about "false consciousness" claims that meanings and their production can only be explained in terms of social structure. In return, social structures are maintained by the meaning that culture produces. Fiske further explains,

> These meanings are not only meanings of social experience, but also meanings of self, that is, constructions of social identity for people living in industrial capitalist societies that enabled them to make sense of themselves and of their social relations. (255)

Consequently, people living in a capitalist society experience a false consciousness because the way things appear are natural and common sense, drawing them into the same cultural process. This understanding of ideology is challenged by cultural studies. For example, Fiske analyzes the different responses towards popstar Madonna. He explains that her fans are not cultural dupes, and are actively watching, listening, and imitating her. This means, "there must be some gaps or spaces in her image that escape ideological control and allow her audiences to make meanings that connect with their social experience" (271). For many of her female fans, this experience is one of subordination in which Madonna, as a site of meaning, represents the semiotic struggle between, for instance, the forces of patriarchal control and feminine resistance (Fiske 271-272). Cultural studies offers two overlapping strategies to understand this cultural struggle. The first derives from ethnography, which would require the researcher to study meanings that the fans make of her through texts, such as listening to them or reading their fan letters. The second derives from a semiotic analysis, which recognizes that every text and every reading has a social and political dimension, which is to be found "partly in the structure of the text itself and partly in the relation of the reading subject to that text" (Fiske 272). Subsequently, semiotics, as deployed by Fiske and others, challenges the Marxist idea of false consciousness because it leaves room for interpretive freedom that might resist social structure.

In an early semiotic critique, *Mythologies* (1957), by Roland Barthes, explores the ways meaning is constructed within popular images. This approach ultimately challenges the conventional Marxist assumption about social structures and false consciousness because he believes that the meaning of a sign lies, in part, within the reader's interpretation of it. Barthes applies an analysis on the "signifier" and the "signified" of a sign to understand how it produces meaning. He uses the example of a black pebble to explain that the literal form of what we are seeing in an image is a signifier and the signified is the symbolic meaning that interprets a form. The signifier is the literal form of the pebble while the signified symbolizes, for instance, a death sentence. The signifier and the signified together create a sign, which is a site of meaning (Barthes 222).

Stuart Hall's understanding of Barthes' concepts of "denotation" and "connotation" in relation to the signifier and the signified in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practice* (1997) helps in reflecting upon the representation and meaning of the image of the W.T.C. The two terms are separate, yet linked processes that evoke representation.

Denotation is "the simple, basic descriptive level, where the consensus is wide and most people would agree on the meaning" (Hall 38). In other words, the signifier and the signified join to shape a sign with a plain denoted message. Connotation is the denoted message's broader, symbolic message. There is no obvious and descriptive level of interpretation of the connoted message (Hall 38-39). Barthes gives an example of how denotation and connotation work by examining a photo of "a young Negro in French uniform […] saluting with his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the tricolor" (Barthes 225). The simple denoted message is a black soldier saluting the French flag. The connoted message signals a broader ideological theme about French imperiality (Barthes 238). In regards to the Twin Towers, the connoted message of the buildings would perhaps signal global capital and American centrality in contemporary international economies.

In *S/Z* (1974), Barthes contends that the meaning produced in the relationship between the signifier and the signified is arbitrary due to the act of interpretation. However, it is important to note that in the same work, he proposes five codes in which the act of interpretation works, demonstrating that interpretation is not necessarily free. For instance, he believes that the title of a literary work and the first sentence of the story employ all five codes because these aspects showcase a point in which all textual signifiers can be gathered (Barthes 19). Regardless, even though Barthes focuses more on literary texts in his book, his ideas on how readers interpret texts can be applied to how people interpret images. He states that a text is

> a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one; the codes it mobilizes extend *as far as the eye can reach*, they are indeterminable […]; the systems of meaning can take over this absolutely plural text, but their number is never closed, based as it is on the infinity of language. (Barthes 5-6)

Hence, there is no single, universal meaning in an image. Hall further explains, comparably to Barthes, that meaning is socially and historically contingent and that it involves the act of interpretation from the reader (Hall 32-33).

Before 9/11, the W.T.C. connoted many particular meanings. The buildings themselves that we see are signifiers, and the signified is the meaning of its form, which could represent many different things. For example, in Michael Sorkin and Sharon Zukin's introduction to the collection of essays, *After the World Trade Center* (2002), the two authors explain that the

W.T.C. was never merely architecture, but a site where global capital flowed (Sorkin and Zukin xi). In his chapter, Berman (2002) discusses why New Yorkers hated the W.T.C. pre-9/11: "they were expressions of an urbanism that disdained the city and its people" (Berman 7). Yet, Berman admits that it was mostly people who remembered a time before the W.T.C. that usually felt this sentiment. He acknowledges that younger generations were in awe of the Towers' size and enjoyed them as landmarks (Berman 7). In another chapter, "Cracks in the Edifice of the Empire State" (2002), David Harvey states that the W.T.C. was a tourist mecca that could represent a type of freedom that gave market opportunities to everyone (Harvey 59-60). These authors demonstrate the multiple meanings that the W.T.C. signified and show that as time went by, it gained more connotations depending on who was seeing or thinking about them. However, after 9/11, the way an audience would interpret the image of the W.T.C. in film would possibly change whether it is a past or contemporary production as both Hall and Barthes suggest that meaning is neither universal nor fixed. Sorkin and Zukin believe that the modifications to the sign are inherently political because of New York's sudden commonality with other cities that have been damaged or destroyed by terrorists, Manhattan's site at the center of finance and real estate development, and the power-brokering that will determine the future development of the space (Sorkin and Sukin xi). Therefore, the ideological meaning of the W.T.C. today would possibly be linked to 9/11 because the meaning of the sign has transformed.

While Barthes and Hall both examine how the reader interprets a sign, in her book, *The Audience in Everyday Life: Living in a Media World* (2003), S. Elizabeth Bird demonstrates how meaning-making lies in the audience. She explains that the concept of "audience" is problematic as we "cannot isolate the role of the media in culture, because the media are firmly anchored into the web of culture, although articulated by individuals in different ways" (3). Through this statement, Bird suggests that audiences not only consume media, but they do so in different ways; thus, there is no single meaning when interpreting media content.

Shaun Moores thoughts correspond with Bird's in *Interpreting Audiences* (1993) that we cannot separate and classify a stable entity and deem it as the media audience. While he states that the plural "audiences" is preferable, the term still presents conceptual difficulties. For instance, he explains that the theatre audience is different from the television audience: "[C]onsumption is geographically dispersed across a multitude of settings and frequently in competition with other practices as a consequence of its embedding in day-to-day life" (2).

Consequently, the boundaries of what makes audiences are unclear and unstable. Nevertheless, Moores has an optimistic perspective that refers to a reality beyond discourses that constitutes the audience as a category that can be reached. His solution to accessing the audience is through ethnography as he believes this mode of research brings us closer "to engaging with the production of meaning in everyday life" (3). By situating ourselves in consumption practices, we are placed in the perspective of an audience and therefore, gain a better understanding of how messages are interpreted.

Several of these authors owe considerable debt to the groundbreaking work of Hall. For instance, in *Rethinking the Media Audience: The New Agenda* (1999), Pertti Alasuutari partially credits the opening of ethnography in media culture on Hall's encoding/decoding approach. He claims that this model shaped a series of studies that focused on the reception of various television programs by different audiences (Alasuutari 4). In "Encoding/decoding" (1980), Hall analyzes what texts mean to an audience by offering a base to understanding the impact that a text could have on a viewer. He first examines encoding and decoding, which represent the "determinate moments" in the communicative process (Hall 129). Creators of mass media encode meaning into television programs through messages using frameworks of knowledge, relations of production, and technical infrastructure. These messages are then decoded and interpreted by viewers (Hall 130). In relation to my research, messages are encoded into films and are decoded by audiences.

A vital point for my research, Hall mentions that "decodings do not follow inevitably from encodings" (136). In other words, meaning is not determined by the sender nor is it transparent because audiences do not passively receive messages. He claims that messages are "polysemic", implying that texts have multiple, related meanings that can be read by an audience in different ways (134). He then identifies three hypothetical positions from which decoding of a televisual discourse may be constructed. The "dominant-hegemonic position" is when the viewer interprets the preferred meaning "full and straight," signifying they entirely accept and share the text's code (Hall 136). The "negotiated position" is when the viewer shares and accepts the text's code, yet occasionally opposes and adjusts the meaning to reflect their own experience, knowledge, or interests (Hall 137). Lastly, the "oppositional code" is when the viewer comprehends the preferred reading, but their current social situation places them in opposition to the dominant meaning. By not sharing the text's code, they reject the reading and bring an

alternative framework or reference to apply to the message (Hall 137-138). The meaning in these scenes are not static but depend on the viewer's own social situation.

The impact a contemporary audience has to a film is connected to the fact that messages are encoded at one point in time and viewers decode those messages in another. This temporal lag is always present, but in some instances it can be vast. For example, in *Time Passages: Collective Memory in American Popular Culture* (1990), George Lipsitz discusses the idea that whether commercial motion pictures are situated in the past, present, or future, they will ultimately "resonate with the value crisis of the times in which they appear" (Lipsitz 164). He observes in *Kramer vs. Kramer* (1979) that the film offers no sympathy for female autonomy and explores the tensions of the time (Lipsitz 169). Nonetheless, Lipsitz acknowledges that ideas are constantly being constructed and reconstructed over time (Lipsitz 170). Due to the passage of time and our evolving collective memories, our individual understanding of a film will change.

As Barbie Zelizer claims that we are still living in the war on terror era (Zelizer 5), we would possibly view the W.T.C. in films differently than the time in which they were made as each era presents a different value crisis. According to Zelizer in "Seeing the Present, Remembering the Past" (2017), the war on terror era began after 9/11 with the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and is still the era in which we are currently living in (Zelizer 5). In "The Persistence of Memory—A Bridge Across Time" (2009), Dan Falk describes the momentous nature of the 9/11 terrorist attacks: "Even the fact that we refer to it by the date that it happened – "9/11" or "September 11th" – suggests that the date itself has already made a permanent imprint on our collective memories" (Falk 120). While Falk's point demonstrates the magnitude of the event itself, John Keane and Zelizer explain how its effects are still felt today. Keane states that the war on terror represents a series of "black swan moment[s] when democratic values and institutions are being challenged frontally," whose mediated form remains "calculated, cold-blooded, daringly simple and staged in the heartlands of the secular West, for a global audience" (qtd. in Zelizer 5). Harvey writes that after 9/11, the idea of freedom was curbed to preserve freedom in the face of terrorism (Harvey 63).

However, while still U.S. president, Barack Obama pushed to reduce the idea of engaging in war to defeat terror, declaring in December 2016 that in the past eight years, there has not been a foreign terrorist organization that planned and executed an attack on America. Mark Thompson argues against this declaration in his article, "The Jury's Out on Obama's Terror Fight" (2016),

that under Obama's watch, the U.S. fight on terror did not end, but became a quieter campaign involving drone strikes and clandestine military attacks (Thompson, "The Jury's Out"). Zelizer also counters Obama's claims by clarifying how terror has not necessarily been defeated. She cites media events that stretch from the 2004-2005 bombings of the Madrid train system and London subway to the 2015-2016 attacks on Paris and Brussels (Zelizer 5). She explains that we are still living in an era that displays the enemy formation of "us", who are virtuous, compassionate, and fair, versus "them", who are brutal extremists (Zelizer 5). The memory of 9/11 reflects in each of these media events, which are representative of the war on terror era. The ways in which we make meaning of the W.T.C. in the war on terror era would possibly be affected by the contemporary value crisis centered on freedom and the prevalent "us" versus "them" positioning in the media.

How signs and messages are interpreted is not only dependent on semiotics and encoding/decoding; memory studies equally offers a literature on the subject. Memory studies is a significant subfield of inquiry to examine in relation to meaning-making because our memories can affect the act of interpretation when engaging with media. A part of memory studies explores how people acquire their memories and how it affects the ways in which media creates an impact and response in viewers. According to Maurice Halbwachs in *On Collective Memory* (1992), people acquire memories within a societal context. They also remember, recognize, and localize their memories in relation to others (Halbwachs 38). This definition of collective memory offers a framework for comprehending how memories are rooted within a collective context. Consequently, the way we remember is dependent on others. Halbwachs further specifies, "While the collective memory endures and draws strength from its base in a coherent body of people, it is individuals as group members who remember" (qtd. in Halbwachs 22). This statement suggests that the amount of collective memories is equal to the number of groups and institutions in the world, including social classes, families, and corporations. Those who have experienced 9/11 in some way, whether they watched the attack unfold on the news or lived in New York City at the time, share the memory of the event itself. Individuals who are located in a specific group context draw on that context to remember 9/11 in their own way.

Similar to Halbwachs' definition of collective memories, José van Dijck refers to "mediated memories", which form sites where the collective and the personal meet. In *Mediated Memories in the Digital Age* (2007), she defines, "Mediated memories are the activities and

objects we produce and appropriate by means of media technologies, for creating and re-creating a sense of past, present, and future of ourselves in relation to others" (21). Mediated memories are items and acts that form sites for negotiating the relationship between how individuality relates to collectivity. According to Dijck, an object of mediated memories can be a video recording or photo album because they possess the power to mediate relationships between individuals and groups (1). Conversely, she uses "personal cultural memory" to describe the acts and products of remembering "in which individuals engage to make sense of their lives in relation to the lives of others and to their surroundings, situating themselves in time and place" (6). Dijck prefers to use cultural memory over collective memory because she wants to concentrate on how memory works in simultaneously building a sense of individual identity and collectivity (9). What Dijck adds to the conversation on memory is the role media plays in the process of remembering as individuals within a collective.

The term "tangled memories", coined by American media theorist Marita Sturken (1997) in her book of the same name, is comparable to Dijck's mediated memories, but focuses more on popular culture items that have gained recognition in the public realm rather than privileging private memory objects. Tangled memories derive from cultural memories and history being intertwined (Sturken 5). Sturken uses the AIDS Memorial Quilt to illustrate. She states that this item is composed from personal acts of remembrance, which facilitates a group statement about a shared trauma (Sturken 10-11). Therefore, the AIDS Memorial Quilt is an example of what Sturken deems a technology of memory, which embodies and produces memory and is thus "implicated in the power dynamics of memory's production" (10). A more relevant example to my research of a technology of memory that Sturken presents is the police beating of Rodney King, which was covered by news media around the world. The televised footage of the event counts as a cultural product and activity (Sturken 10). People ground their personal memories in recognized images that give meaning to their own experiences, which in turn assigns historical or political weight to the larger event of which they are included in.

While Halbwachs offers a framework for understanding how people acquire their memories, and Dijck and Sturken discuss how memory can be rooted in cultural objects, Lipsitz's approaches memory with a focus on popular film. Within the section of his book dedicated to film and collective memory, he asserts an important connection between lived experience and film viewing: "We require 'true' lies, depictions of the past and present that are comprehensible

to us and that locate our own private stories within a larger collective narrative" (163). This statement is in response to the idea that audiences watch movies with the expectation that they are meant to entertain us. Lipsitz argues that "Hollywood pictures need to engage the attention and the emotion of individuals who live within historical time and who construct their identities, at least in part, in dialogue with the past" (163). However, what happens when visuals from a past film are not in line with a larger and more present collective narrative? It is this question that the present thesis will explore.

The combination of memory and audience interpretation demonstrates how the meaning of a sign is unstable and changes through time. 9/11 has complicated the reviewing of a powerful historical marker such as the W.T.C. because it is a media event that has greatly been rooted in our memories. Daniel Dayan and Elihu Katz's book *Media Events: The Live Broadcasting of History* (1992) remains a key volume addressing major historical events and their mediated appearance. They describe media events as a certain type of program unique to television that demands and will receive focused attention from viewers (4). Some examples of media events that Dayan and Katz mention include the funerals of President Kennedy and Lord Louis Mountbatten, the royal wedding of Charles and Diana, the journeys of Pope John Paul II and Anwar el-Sadat, the debates of 1960 between John Kennedy and Richard Nixon, the Watergate hearings, the revolutionary changes of 1989 in Eastern Europe, and the Olympics (4). The commonality of these media events is that they were orchestrated, leading to Dayan and Katz's sixth feature of a media event: "Media events give insight into the *aesthetics of television production*, together with an awareness of the nature of the contract that obtains between organizers and broadcasters" (18). To give the event significance, broadcasters must focus on framing and reporting the story while planning on how to maintain viewer interest. Moreover, leading up to the broadcasts, the media elaborately advertise the events so that viewers know what to expect. For example, the royal wedding was advertised as a Cinderella story or the moon landings as the new American frontier (Dayan and Katz 12). The audience is prepared for the importance of the event that will be broadcasted. The media's use of advertising and framing help make the event meaningful to viewers.

9/11 was not an event that was orchestrated in advance, such as those addressed by Dayan and Katz, but it held the same level of impact as a media event. It is certainly the case that the terrorist attack was engraved in the public's collective memory and our individual memories. For

instance, they describe media events as "interruptions of routine" because they intervene in normal broadcasting and our lives in general (Dayan and Katz 5). More importantly, Dayan and Katz claim that it is a media event's interrupting behaviour that impacts our memory in the first place (Dayan and Katz 211-212). From my own personal experience, 9/11 not only interrupted my routine, but I witnessed the event interrupt the routines of others as well. As an elementary school student, I saw panic-stricken parents taking their children out of class. My mother also picked up my brother and I midway through the day so that we could watch the news coverage together as a family.

My experience on September 11th also marks another point defining a media event: "Media events *privilege the home*" (Katz and Dayan 22). They write,

> This is where the "historic" version of the event is on view, the one that will be entered into collective memory. […] the home may become a public space on the occasion of media events, a place where friends and family meet to share in both the ceremony and the deliberation that follows. (22)

Excluding the ceremonious function of Dayan and Katz's definition, a media event transforms the home from its routine purpose and turns it into a public space where deliberation takes place, becoming a site where 9/11 is engraved in our memories. Due to the media event's capabilities of disrupting the routine of individuals as well as subverting the private function of the home, 9/11 is given meaning.

Lastly, we remember 9/11 every year on September 11th as memorial events happen all over North America. Whether they are televised events or small moments of silence, we cannot forget the terrorist attack that defines our current era. Dayan and Katz's fourth point is that "media events have the power to declare a holiday, thus to play a part in the civil religion" (16). September 11th is almost on par with religious holidays as these memorials are a yearly interruption of routine as well as embody other aspects that the theorists specify, such as participation in ritual, concentration on a central value, and the similar demeanor of those gathered around to acknowledge the past event (Dayan and Katz 16). With the public being reminded of the event on a yearly basis, connecting the image of the W.T.C. to 9/11 when watching a past film is not unlikely as even the date itself is given meaning.

We not only acknowledge 9/11 through memorials on September 11th, but also by re-watching footage from that day. Countless news stations rerun the footage from 9/11, preventing

the memory of the terrorist attack from fading. For example, MSNBC replays the day's horrific events in real time starting before 9 a.m. every September 11th. The footage begins with Matt Lauer and Katie Couric on the *Today Show* when the viewer is first informed of the first plane crashing into one of the Towers. The two speculate if the plane experienced mechanical issues. Newsman Tom Brokaw later joins them and the realization of what has actually transpired hits them. With cameras focused on the W.T.C., viewers hear the terror and shock in the reporters' voices as the second plane crashes into the other Tower (Bamberger, "MSNBC's Annual Replay"). In "MSNBC's Annual Replay of 9/11 Events in Real Time: Important Reminder or Tragedy Porn?" (2016), Joanne Bamberger describes, "As the day becomes more gruesome and surreal, for the newscasters and their viewers, there is a powerful rawness in the reporting and things unfold in a way no one expected" (Bamberger, "MSNBC's Annual Replay"). Since 2006, MSNBC has been replaying footage every year on September 11th, asserting that there is an historical importance to reairing the 9/11 coverage (Bamberger, "MSNBC's Annual Replay"). With news stations replaying the footage on a yearly basis, they demonstrate that remembering one of the most important moments in American history is almost a responsibility.

The yearly replaying of 9/11 footage as a mode of remembrance is related to what Dijck refers to as "autobiographical memories". Dijck explains, "Autobiographical memories are needed to build a nation of personhood and identity, and our minds work to create a consistent set of identity 'records,' scaffolding the formation of identity that evolves over the years" (2-3). Dijck opens up a sociopsychological perspective on autobiographical memory in relation to cultural theory and media studies. She uses the example of a fifteen-month-old toddler taking its first steps. The thrilled parents take out their video camera to capture the moment. Through recording the toddler's first steps, they are producing material artifacts that would help them and their child in evoking the experience at a later moment in time. Rewatching their child take their first steps is most likely to occur under a different circumstance or context (Dijck 4-5).

The autobiographical memory at work in this example consists of several layers. For instance, Djick claims that by at least orally sharing their experience with others, the parents can determine the implication of what happened and set the stage for later acts of recollection. Interpretation and narration form the mental framework in which the experience of their child taking its first steps can be retrieved later on in life (Dijck 5). She clarifies, "Memory work thus involves a complex set of recursive activities that shape our inner worlds, reconciling past and

present, allowing us to make sense of the world around us, and constructing an idea of continuity between self and others" (5). Dijck deals with a more immediate mode of memory-creation, such as personally created images, one distinct from that of the media event. Nevertheless, the idea of drawing upon memories under a different context is important to understanding how we remember 9/11 almost twenty years after it happened and how we use this memory to come to terms with the current state of the world whether it is through our engagement with media or orally sharing our experiences.

As Katz and Dayan neglect to include other types of events in their definition besides those that are orchestrated, Zelizer establishes a connection between terrorist attacks and media events. Through the analysis of how the war on terror draws from the memory of the Cold War, she offers a model that would help explain how the media makes terrorist attacks meaningful. Accordingly, her text exposes tactics used by the media, such as drawing on the past, to embed the W.T.C. in our collective memories. She mentions that the Cold War offers a mnemonic scheme that surfaces when difficult events occur in the present that require meaning. This "Cold War mindedness" is a way for the public to make sense of terrorist attacks and guide them on how to think about violence and the wars it facilitates. She states that the impact of "Cold War mindedness" is driven by a combination of three elements:

> a clear binary positioning of enemy formation as an uncrossable divide between us and them, a counterintuitive notion that one does not have to see war to act as if it exists, and a largely uncritical reliance on the media to realize the war's aims across the territory of the other side. (Zelizer 4-5)

While people have different responses towards 9/11, these three elements play with terror's public understanding and perhaps the connections a viewer would presently make towards the W.T.C. in films.

Representation is a key aspect that created "Cold War mindedness" because it was not a singular event and it did not represent an actual war, but an idea, allowing terror as a general term to attach itself to the notion of the Cold War (Zelizer 4). Hall defines representation as "an essential part of the process by which meaning is produced and exchanged between members of a culture. It *does* involve the use of language, of signs and images which stand for or represent things" (Hall, *Representation* 15). Through language and signs, the media is capable of easily resurrecting "Cold War mindedness" when reporting on terrorist attacks, making these events

meaningful. Zelizer explains, "This makes Cold War mindedness a rich mnemonic scheme, a repressed memory waiting to pounce into relevance, whose traits have been creatively used in lending shape to terror's contemporary representation" (Zelizer 4). Thus, the media's role in reviving Cold War mindedness in the face of 9/11 has given meaning to the event, embedding the terrorist attack in our memories. Nevertheless, while the media revived aspects of Cold War mindedness to make sense of the terrorist attack, the two events had different implications. Arguably, 9/11 launched something comparable, a "mindedness" that enunciated an idea of fighting terror.

With the news coverage surrounding 9/11, certain factors need to be taken into consideration as to why the footage of planes crashing into the W.T.C. became the defining image of the event. No question, the image itself is extraordinary because it was something that people had not seen before in real time. Still, it is important to understand why the footage has resonated with those who have seen it. In her other work, *About To Die: How News Images Move the Public* (2010), Zelizer introduces the concept of the "about-to-die image". She states that these images offer visuals of death-in-process, focusing on people facing their imminent deaths (24).

While Zelizer refers to photographs of people jumping out of the Towers to their deaths, I am more interested in how the footage of the W.T.C. during 9/11 became the representative moment of the event. This footage fits her definition of an about-to-die image because it does not necessarily showcase people dying, but implies that they are. Zelizer explains, "By stopping action at a potentially powerful moment of meaningful representation, the frozen moment of impending death forces attention even though people know more than what it shows" (24). Through our own knowledge, we can understand that people were dying when watching the footage even though we do not actually see those individuals. While this notion is obvious, the idea that the footage breaks from routine is not. The about-to-die image requires viewer involvement, which goes beyond what a news image normally demands through imagination and contingency (Zelizer 62). Since these photographs portray a narrative that depicts individuals and their impeding deaths, they also rely on viewer interpretation and response to gain importance. Imagining and interpreting the deaths within the footage of the W.T.C. on 9/11 gives this particular moment stature.

Other scholars of 9/11 portrayed the Towers as victims. Urbanist Mark Wigley describes the simplest level of understanding buildings in his text, "Insecurity by Design" (2002). He states that buildings are seen as a form of protection as their solid build protects the fragile people inside. Furthermore, they are supposed to last longer than bodies. In fact, we use buildings to imagine what we would want the body to be like. This point demonstrates how we identify with buildings, acclaiming them with substantial representational force: "the place where you live continues to represent you when you are hidden within it, away, asleep, or dead" (Wigley 71). Wigley states that this identification is the reason terrorists target buildings as this makes people feel unsafe: "Damaged buildings represent damaged bodies. […] If you can identify with the target, then your own buildings become unsafe, and every body becomes vulnerable" (72). Arguably, the footage of people falling from the W.T.C. is also about as iconic as the planes crashing into the Towers as they explicitly represent Zelizer's definition of the about-to-die image. Nevertheless, watching the Towers crumble from frame to frame is almost like watching an impending death as we not only imagine the casualties within the footage, but also start to see the buildings as victims themselves, pushing the images as the representative moment of 9/11.

It may be a stretch to assume that the W.T.C. would symbolize a whole era and consequently, a series of events that would happen after 9/11, but the footage of the terrorist attack provokes a strong emotional response from viewers, which could lead to many different processes about how we think about the Towers. In *Camera Lucida* (1981), Barthes introduces the idea of the "punctum", which is a sting or speck that the viewer feels when looking at a photograph (27). Even though Barthes discusses photography in opposition to cinema, his theories surrounding the punctum is effective in understanding the emotional impact of the footage of the W.T.C. during 9/11. He further explains that the punctum is a detail in a photograph that arouses emotion in the spectator. The mere presence of this detail changes the reading of the image (Barthes 42-43). In light of 9/11, when viewing a film, the image of the W.T.C., whether alone in a shot or merely in the background, may evoke the punctum within viewers.

In *Compassion Fatigue* (1999), Susan Moeller affirms that a photograph impacts a spectator emotionally, but gives a wider explanation as to how a viewer would respond due to the impact and their thought process. Barthes indicates the emotional response a person would have towards a photograph but does not necessarily account for why as he leaves out the spectator's

lived experience, memory, and knowledge. She states, "A photograph provokes a tension in us—not only about the precise moment that the image depicts, but also about all the moments that led up to that instant and about all the moments that will follow" (Moeller 39). She uses the example of a picture of a Somali infant with flies attached to the child's face trying to nurse from the mother's breast. We use our imagination to create a narrative surrounding before and after the photo was taken. Moeller assumes that the African infant cannot possibly survive and, if it does, its health will be compromised because of the ravages of famine. Consequently, we apply our intellect and reason to the image and "respond, emotionally, to what Walter Benjamin called the aura: an image's elusive, charismatic and sometimes haunting presence" (39). A past shot of the W.T.C. in film would most likely evoke this emotional response as well because a viewer may think of what life was like before the footage was taken versus what life is like now. Similar to Moeller's feelings with the African infant, what may resonate through our memory is our sympathetic response when looking back on our lived experience and our own knowledge about the world.

Unmistakably, plenty of work has explored memory in relation to media. Halbwachs work on collective memory offers a framework for understanding not only how individuals acquire their memories, but also how they remember. Dijck's mediated memories and personal cultural memory explains the role media plays in the process of identity building and individually remembering within a collective. However, while Djick's work privileges private memory objects, Sturken's idea of tangled memories addresses popular culture items that are recognized publically. Lipsitz's work on film and memory is the most directly applicable to comprehending how watching older films in the present has an impact on our historical understanding. He explains that there is an important connection between lived experience and film viewing as people attempt to locate their private stories within a collective narrative. He also mentions the idea that films resonate with the value crisis of the time in which they are made. Therefore, there is a possibility that our outlook on certain films changes as we move from era to era.

It is important to understand how an event, such as 9/11, impacts people and therefore, potentially affects the ways in which we view the W.T.C. in film. Viewing 9/11 as a media event works to establish how the terrorist attack makes an imprint on our memories. What makes a media event impactful is that they are unique to broadcast media in that they demand and receive focused attention from a large audience. For example, Dayan and Katz claim that the main

function of a media event is to interrupt the routine of viewers. To elaborate on this idea, they offer many points as to what makes a media event. For instance, they state that a media event can declare a holiday. This point has been proven with 9/11 as we remember the terrorist attack through news outlets every September 11th. Therefore, from the importance surrounding a media event established by broadcasters, 9/11 becomes embedded into the public's collective memory and thus, individual memory. Zelizer also examines media events in her text, but makes a direct connection with terrorist attacks, which Dayan and Katz neglect to do. She proposes that the media draws upon the memory of the Cold War to make 9/11 meaningful and embed the terrorist attack in our collective memories.

   With my research, I will bring studies of memory and media events together, and add how people talk about 9/11. Through capturing what happens when people see the W.T.C. in films, I will explore how these scenes or shots offer an understanding of both the past and present.

CHAPTER 2

Cross-cutting Pre-9/11 and Post-9/11: A History of how the Twin Towers are used in Film

While the original W.T.C. no longer exists since the 9/11 terrorist attack, modern technology has allowed filmmakers to recreate the Towers in their respective films. The contemporary films that have recreated the W.T.C. take place in the past and the appearance of the Towers is a way to signal that. However, the use of the buildings in contemporary films differs from their appearance in older films. The difference in their placement is perhaps due to 9/11, which opened up new meanings for the W.T.C. and therefore, has changed the ways we produce and use the image.

This chapter will examine the use of the W.T.C. in popular films before 9/11 and compare it to how the image is used in popular films post-9/11. I will first discuss the connotative power of the Towers. I will then explore the multiple meanings and connotations of the appearance of the W.T.C. in all the films that I will be presenting. To do so, I will use the insights of my scholarly literature on meanings and use the image of the W.T.C. to show how those insights are operating in each film. The productions that I wish to examine produced pre-9/11 are *Godspell*, *Meteor*, *Trading Places*, *Home Alone 2: Lost in New York*, and *Super Mario Bros*. The reason I chose these films for my analysis is because, while the W.T.C. is not at the center of each film, the Towers make appearances whether they are in a shot alone, in the background, or being showcased in a brief, but important way. For post-9/11 films, I will be looking at *Munich* and *Remember Me*. Through my comparison, I hope to gain a greater understanding as to what kind of power the placement of the W.T.C. has when viewed by an audience. More importantly, this comparison is essential for my research because it allows me to examine how the image of the W.T.C. that has become loaded with meaning is used differently in contemporary productions as a result of an historical event.

Since its construction, there was a general fascination with the W.T.C. In "The Shadow of the World Trade Center" (2004), Murray Pomerance links this fascination with the physical build of the Towers:

> By 1973, when some 200,000 tons of steel, 425,000 cubic yards of concrete, 600,000
> square feet of glass, and 12,000 miles of electrical cables had been assembled and lit with

23,000 fluorescent lights to form its twin towers, the WTC utterly eclipsed the Empire

State Building as the world's tallest building and a wonder of engineering. (46)

For instance, due to its size and grandeur, the W.T.C. was a natural choice for Kong to climb in

the 1976 *King Kong* instead of the Empire State Building (E.S.B.), which he had climbed in 1933

two years after that building's completion (Pomerance 45-46). Both sites represented the

technological wonder of their times. Pomerance explains that the top of the E.S.B. was "the topos

of military advantage, the site of the unobstructed view, and the position that maximally exploits

the investment of capital" (46). With this statement, Pomerance is not claiming that Kong

climbed both buildings because he wanted the best possible view, but because the filmmakers

wanted to evoke command and power of the narrative and its construction.

Yet, Kong, of course, eventually falls. Pomerance explains that the reason why Kong fell

from the top of the W.T.C. theoretically was because he did not belong there as a foreigner:

When *Kong* is examined from this point of view, the fault of the ape is his

presumptuousness in attempting to bond with a white woman and in trying to give himself

the advantage of the position at the top of the tallest building, a position reserved for the

cultural elite and one that is, simply, the best point of view around. (Pomerance 51)

Kong's status as a foreigner excludes him from a position of power, which is meant for the elite.

Harvey (2002) argues that the W.T.C. embodied the concept of freedom. He explains, "If

freedom is exclusively defined in terms of market freedoms, of course, then the space of the

World Trade Center could be (and was) depicted as a "space of freedom" delivering market

opportunities to everyone in the world" (Harvey 60). Accordingly, the W.T.C. represented a

place where anyone can gain the opportunity to make money and gain power.

The film *Godspell* demonstrates the interest in the W.T.C., giving a group of young

hippies access to the top of one of the Towers, a site with an unobstructed view. Directed by

David Greene, *Godspell* was one of the first films to feature the W.T.C., at the time still under

construction and completed only later that year. This musical is a modern take on the Gospel of

Matthew as it follows the group of hippies singing and dancing from location to location as Jesus,

played by Victor Garber, preaches to them between musical numbers. While the W.T.C. is

occasionally seen in the background of certain scenes, one of its more prominent appearances is

during the singing of "All for the Best" halfway through the film. With this number, we see the

characters visiting different areas of New York City. Towards the end of the song, the cast is seen

dancing on the rooftop of an unknown building that appears to be under construction. As the camera pulls away during the last moments of the song, we begin to see the Twin Towers in its entirety.

Since 1973 was the year the W.T.C. was completed, it made sense that the Towers would be featured in the film and in a prominent way. With the newly created Twin Towers snatching the title as the tallest buildings in the world, it would possibly be more desirable to want to be at the top of the Towers over the E.S.B. Since the number ends dramatically on the W.T.C., the cast is attempting to evoke command and power. The use of the W.T.C. in *Godspell* has religious undertones as well. Firstly, "All for the Best" is a song that sermonizes about how going to heaven is the most important reward that one could receive. Singing this song on the tallest building in the world at the time makes sense considering that it is the point in New York City that brings Jesus' disciples the closest to the heavens. Secondly, they are expressing their excitement regarding their devotion at a place of commanding power. From this point-of-view, the musical number is an invitation to join the group in their love of their devotion at the top of a building meant to offer various opportunities to anyone in the world regardless of race, religion, or social class.

Also using the W.T.C., *Meteor*, directed by Ronald Neame, is a disaster film centered in the middle of Cold War politics that follows American scientists as they determine how to prevent a five-mile asteroid from hitting Earth. This asteroid originated from a larger asteroid named Orpheus that was hit with a comet. While the United States government is deciding how to deal with the asteroid, smaller fragments of the space rock are hitting different parts of the earth and causing mayhem in the process. The W.T.C. is shown prominently during two points in the film. The first is towards the end when there is a discussion concerning how the Russians will fire a first round of rockets at the giant meteor as it approaches earth followed by the Americans launching their own rockets forty minutes after. During this discussion, the setting sun, or possibly even an approaching meteor fragment, is displayed in the distance, shining in between the two Towers and foreshadowing their destruction in the film. The second moment is when one of the meteor fragments is shown approaching New York City as it passes by the Statue of Liberty with a clear image of the W.T.C. in the frame. Ultimately, the meteor fragment violently hits the Twin Towers, going through it and continuing on to destroy whatever else is in its path.

To properly understand the use of the W.T.C. in *Meteor,* it is necessary to take a closer look at the pleasure one could feel when seeing its destruction in the disaster film prior to 9/11. In "Real Horror" (2003), Robert C. Solomon compares real-life horror to fictionalized horror or art-horror. He explains that there is no pleasure when experiencing real-life horror. He uses the image of the second jetliner crashing into one of the Towers on September 11th to get his point across. Despite the extraordinary nature of this image, there is no sense of pleasure, but a feeling of overwhelming horror (Solomon 231). In terms of art-horror, he claims that we choose to be horrified by books and films (232). In other words, we choose to engage in the make-belief that characterizes all horror or disaster films. I believe this can also be applied to films that portray reality or real-life events. For instance, Solomon references Plato at the beginning of the text when claiming that whatever their qualities, imitations are merely poor copies of reality (Solomon 230). For example, watching a C.G.I. tsunami hit a city on the silver screen is an imitation of a real disaster. He further explains that when we watch horror, we are one step removed from it and therefore, we can find enjoyment in other people's horror, including characters onscreen. We can also enjoy our own horror when we laugh at our own screams (Solomon 230). However, Solomon is firm on his belief that if we do feel entertainment or pleasure when viewing art-horror, then what we are experiencing is not feelings of horror. Horror cancels out any possibility of pleasure (Solomon 234). Therefore, we watch art-horror when we seek out horror for pleasure.

To create the pleasure that stems from horror, it is only natural that the W.T.C. is the beloved landmark that the meteor crashes into and destroys. As explained in my analysis of *Godspell*, the Twin Towers represented the technological wonder of its time as they were the tallest buildings in the world and therefore, was a prominent site for Kong to climb as both the giant ape and the Towers were spectacles in their own right. Only six-years-old when *Meteor* was made, the W.T.C. was still one of New York's newest and most prominent features. The awe of the Towers being struck somehow magnifies the implications of the giant meteor fragment hitting New York as well as amplifies the destruction of the city itself. The ruin of the great W.T.C. creates a devastated city and, in the process, horror. Nevertheless, when applying Solomon's theories, while the film uses the W.T.C. to create a scene of horror prior to 9/11, the audience is actually experiencing pleasure at seeing the destruction of the Towers due to its fictionalized nature. Thus, the W.T.C. is used by Neame to create a remarkable image of horror via the

remarkable image of the Towers themselves. For both *Godspell* and *Meteor*, the W.T.C. was used in film because it was a new and important site representing wonder and greatness for New York City during the first decade of its completion. Despite how the image is used in *Meteor*, it is important to note that the destruction of the W.T.C. is no longer evoked for pleasure two decades later in popular film. The real-life consequences of 9/11 have cancelled out the fictionalized nature attached to the destruction of the Towers in film, which I will explore later in this chapter.

Conversely, the 80s comedy *Trading Places*, directed by John Landis, uses the W.T.C. for its function as a site where global capital flows rather than what it represents physically, which is the tallest buildings in the world and therefore, a beloved landmark. In the film, a homeless man named Billy Ray Valentine trades places with a rich stockbroker named Louis Winthorpe III due to an elaborate bet made by the former's bosses, Randolph and Mortimer Duke, who own a commodities brokerage in Philadelphia. *Trading Places* follows Valentine and Winthorpe as they adjust to their new lives. At the end, the two learn of the Duke brothers' experiment and decide to turn the tables on them by visiting the W.T.C. On the commodities trading floor, they launch their plan that turns the Dukes poor while simultaneously Valentine and Winthorpe become rich. Despite the W.T.C.'s appearance in the background of certain scenes throughout the film, the shot of Valentine and Winthorpe approaching the Towers at the end is arguably the most impactful. The scene plays out with the two men exiting their taxi with Valentine looking up in wonderment at their destination. The audience is then directed to a low-angle shot looking up at the Twin Towers. The shot then cuts to the two men walking towards what we assume is the W.T.C. with Winthorpe coaching Valentine on how to conduct and handle himself on the trading floor: "In this building, it is kill or be killed." The rest of the scene takes place on the commodities trading floor of the W.T.C., showing crowds of rowdy people attempting to trade and make money. However, The W.T.C. is composed of seven buildings with the Twin Towers only making up two of them. The commodities trading floor was in fact in W.T.C. 4, which was not as distinctive architecturally and cinematically impressive as the Towers. Perhaps it is due to these reasons that the scene seems to suggest that the commodities trading floor is in one of the Towers rather than where it was actually located.

The use of the W.T.C. in *Trading Places* is important because the Towers were used as a site for Winthorpe to get his wealth back. Accordingly, the way the W.T.C. is depicted in *Trading Places* is of how Harvey described—a place where anyone can gain the opportunity to

make money. In the film, this includes those who are both rich and poor, giving the ending a secondary function of promoting the W.T.C. not only as a site of power, but as a site of equal market opportunity. In one day, Winthorpe and Valentine were able to transform their social standing and financial situation for not only themselves, but also the former's butler and prostitute love-interest through investments.

Similar to other films discussed in this chapter, the image of the Twin Towers in the comedy *Home Alone 2: Lost in New York* is meant to represent that of wonder and greatness, portraying a landmark illustrative of New York. The film follows a young Kevin McCallister, as he accidently finds himself alone in New York City with plenty of cash and credit cards at his disposal to turn a scary situation into a more pleasant one. Within the film, a montage shows Kevin putting his newfound wealth into good use as he takes a taxi around the city to sightsee. Among many of the sites shown within the montage are the Twin Towers. This scene depicts Kevin approaching and looking up in amazement at the grandness of the two buildings. The film then shows him on the observation deck of the south tower, taking pictures of the magnificent scenery that is presented to the audience through a variety of shots.

The placement of the W.T.C. in the montage demonstrates the workings of the culture industry as a way to promote the city. Described as a dystopian view of industrial culture, Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno directly link the business aspect of the culture industry to entertainment. In their text, "The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception" (1944), they state, "Pure amusement indulged to the full, relaxed abandon to colorful associations and merry nonsense, is cut short by amusement in its marketable form" (Horkheimer and Adorno 114). While Horkheimer and Adorno's outlook of the culture industry is pessimistic and rather extreme, it offers an understanding of the placement of the W.T.C. in *Home Alone 2*. When viewing the montage, the audience is not necessarily experiencing amusement in its purest form, but an amusement through the marketability of New York. Meaning, we indulge in amusement with a particular intention that is not always clear to viewers. This intention can be described in Josh Stenger's "Return to Oz: The Hollywood Redevelopment Project, or Film History as Urban Renewal" (2001). Stenger explores how the LA Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) is trying to integrate a romanticized version of Hollywood's perceived Golden Age into the contemporary L.A. urban landscape, using the history of film as a form of urban renewal (Stenger 60). While the text focuses on L.A., there are parallels to how New York City is presented in film

as well. Stenger mentions *Hollywood Hotel* (1938) and the brief montage of the city that is shown at the beginning of the film. He describes the sequence as a tour of the city's most recognizable landmarks (Stenger 62). He also discusses *Pretty Woman* (1990) and how the two main characters meet on Hollywood Boulevard, a site of fantasy (Stenger 63). Stenger concludes, "Hollywood the culture industry reminds spectators – potential tourists and consumers all – that the LA landscape can be read most conveniently as a series of consumer-cultural metonymies" (Stenger 63). In the case of *Home Alone 2*, the montage is meant to be a tour of the city as the spectator lives through Kevin as he is visiting some of its most recognizable landmarks with the W.T.C. saved as the last destination. As Stenger establishes, New York City is presented in *Home Alone 2* to cater to viewers who recognize the landmarks, treating audiences as consumers.

Released a year after *Home Alone 2* and the last pre-9/11 film I will be discussing is the comedy *Super Mario Bros.*, directed by Annabel Jankel and Rocky Morton. This film uses the W.T.C. because of what it represents as a landmark and also because of how it functions in the real world as a site for global capital flow. The film follows two plumbers living in Brooklyn, Mario and Luigi, who travel to another dimension filled with dinosaurs that have taken on humanoid forms to save N.Y.U. student Daisy from the dictator, King Koopa. Koopa has his henchman kidnap Daisy because she is revealed to be a princess that descended from dinosaurs and brings her to Koopa-Tower. He believes that only Daisy can merge the two dimensions due to her royal heritage and therefore, allow him and his fellow dinosaurs to return to their original world to rule over humans. Ultimately, the two dimensions merge, and Mario and Koopa are transported to the Brooklyn Bridge where the media is covering a story concerning dinosaur bones in the area. It is difficult to understand what is going on in the film at this point, but it seems as though when Daisy and Luigi remove a fragment from a meteor in Koopa-Tower, the dimensions begin to separate once again. As Daisy and Luigi separate the two dimensions, which appears to cause a lot of destruction around them, the Twin Towers in the human world begins to partially dissolve and decay. A woman points at the W.T.C. and indicates that the Twin Towers is Koopa-Tower. The owner of the Mafia-run Scapelli Construction Company, Anthony Scapelli, then says as he looks upon the destruction of Koopa-Tower/the Twin Towers, "those guys will do anything for publicity."

As confusing as this scene is, it offers a strong indication that Koopa-Tower in the dinosaur dimension is the W.T.C. in the human world or, due to the merging of the two worlds,

Koopa-Tower as the W.T.C. appeared in New York City. Regardless, the W.T.C. is meant to be the home base of the royal King Koopa. Given that it is 1993 and the W.T.C. has cemented its status as being the center of the global economy as well as one of New York's greatest landmarks, the Towers as King Koopa's base also lends Koopa-Towers status. As explained in the previous chapter, the W.T.C. was considered a site where global capital flowed (Sorkin and Zukin xi). Therefore, it was a site of power and wealth, making it a place for the elite in the real world and supposedly a suitable home for the dictator in the film.

While the W.T.C. represented power and freedom pre-9/11, the image began to encompass new meanings and connotations after the terrorist attack. In "Architectural Nostalgia and the New York City Skyline on Film" (2004), Steven Jay Schneider discusses how after 9/11, corporate decisions were made to eliminate shots of the W.T.C. from films such as *Zoolander* (2001), *Spider-Man* (2002), and *Men in Black II* (2002) that were captured before the attack. The concern of these production companies would be that "cinematic images of the New York City skyline from before September 11 would now *rupture* the fictional world of the film in question, especially for residents of Manhattan and the surrounding areas" (37). Consequently, productions companies believed that the strong connection the image of the Towers would have to real-life terrorism would disturb the viewing process for viewers. As a result, the W.T.C. in post-9/11 films would serve as a distraction and remove the audience from the fictional narrative, diverting our attention to 9/11 and our experiences of it.

Despite the removal of the W.T.C. from films due to the belief that it would have strong connotations to terrorism, John Markovitz examines how audiences responded to terror in general in post-9/11 films. In "Reel Terror Post 9/11" (2004), he discusses how after 9/11, production companies delayed the release dates of films about terrorism, such as *Collateral Damage* (2002) and *Big Trouble* (2002). Despite these delays, the box-office receipts for movies that were shown the year of 9/11, such as *Behind Enemy Lines* (2001) and *Black Hawk Down* (2001), demonstrate that there remained a market for violence. Markovitz believes that the popularity of these films has more to do with the audience's desire for revenge over their connection to real-life events (Markovitz 201-202). His notion correlates with the rhetoric of the Bush administration's desire to defeat terror in retaliation for the destruction of the W.T.C.

While Schneider and Markovitz both examine the public responses towards the W.T.C. and terror post-9/11, Karen Randell tackles how Hollywood tends to depict 9/11 in general. In

"'It was Like a Movie': The Impossibility of Representation in Oliver Stone's *World Trade Center*" (2010), she examines both Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) and *World Trade Center* (2006). Both films do not show planes crashing into the W.T.C., which can be interpreted as a sign of respect on the part of Moore and Stone, thinking that using the footage is exploitive. However, in regards to *Fahrenheit 9/11*, Randell states that the absence of the image also demonstrates the assumption that the audience has seen the destruction of the W.T.C. and that they will have a personal response towards the terrorist attack through that memory (142). In these cases, 9/11 is considered a collective trauma. Nonetheless, these two assumptions lead her to another one: "there is no ambivalence or ambiguity to this shared memory" (142). As discussed in the previous chapter, this notion of memory could be problematic as it ignores the possibility that there can be numerous ways one can respond to and interpret 9/11 as well as the W.T.C. Randell asserts that there have been films that displayed "the other side" of the dominant narrative that Hollywood has claimed, but these independent films have not gotten as much exposure (142).

While films pre-9/11 used the W.T.C. for its representation of wealth and generally because it was one of New York's most prized landmarks, post-9/11 films use the W.T.C. assuming that it would trigger memories concerning the terrorist attack. For example, *Munich*, directed by Steven Spielberg, is a post-9/11 historical drama that appears as a response to the series of events that unfolded after 9/11, including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. The film is based on the true story of five Jewish men who assassinate Palestinians around Europe allegedly involved in the murder of several members of the Israeli team at the 1972 Munich Olympics. After the completion of his long mission, Israeli team leader and ex-Mossad agent Avner Kaufman arrives at his new home in Brooklyn where he is haunted by the bloody events that have occurred throughout the film. The last scene shows his handler for the mission, Ephraim, visiting him in New York City and asking Avner to return to Israel and Mossad while they are taking a stroll in the park. Avner refuses Ephraim's request and the camera pans to a shot of the New York City skyline with the W.T.C. in site. The camera lingers on the shot as the end-credits roll.

The placement of the W.T.C. in *Munich* was not only to illustrate a 1970s New York City skyline, but also served to direct audience attention to the very real consequences of the terrorist attack in 2001. Spielberg (2006) even explains that he wanted audiences to make the connection

between how terrorism is handled in the film and apply it to how it is handled in a post-9/11 society. He states, "These were unforgivable actions but until we begin to ask questions about who these terrorists are and why terrorism happens, we're never going to get to the truth of why 9/11 happened, for instance" (Anthony, "Steven Spielberg on Munich"). In *Munich*, an unforgivable event in our history is portrayed with the immediate action being revenge. In the film, even former Israeli Prime Minister Golda Meir is seen saying that they need to set aside peace for now and hold those responsible for the attack accountable. Nonetheless, with the placement of the W.T.C. in *Munich*, Spielberg questions our current vengeful counterterrorism tactics considering that at the end of the day, Avner and his team could not kill all terrorists, but in fact, their hunting down of particular Palestinian targets merely led to and created more targets to kill. The image of the W.T.C. that connotes 9/11 draws parallels to the perhaps poor handling of the 1972 Olympic massacre and therefore, calls for a more diplomatic solution to counterterrorism. The Towers stand as a reminder and almost a warning to Americans that the revenge they desire is pointless.

   As Spielberg showed a shot of the W.T.C. to convey a message about terrorism, *Remember Me*, directed by Allen Coulter, uses the image of the W.T.C. to illustrate the impending death of its protagonist on September 11th. While this scene is not necessarily the first time the Towers appear, as they are present in the background at the beginning of the film during a scene that takes places in 1991, the image at the end is used in a more effective manner. This romantic drama centers around two lovers: the young and rebellious Tyler who has a strained relationship with his father, Charles, in light of his brother's suicide and Ally, who is a young woman that witnessed her mother's murder as a child ten years earlier and therefore, lives everyday like it is her last. Towards the end of the film, Tyler becomes aggressive and violent at his younger sister's school due to her bullies and as a result, winds up in jail. Charles becomes impressed with his son for defending his sister and the two reconnect when he bails Tyler out of jail. Charles then suggests that Tyler meet with his lawyers at his office. Tyler is later seen looking through old slideshow pictures of him and his siblings on Charles' office computer, who is late for their meeting because he drove Caroline to school. After Charles drops his daughter off, Caroline sits at her desk with "Tuesday September 11, 2011" shown written on the blackboard. The camera then cuts to Tyler looking out the window of his father's office. The camera slowly pulls away from his face, revealing his location to be the north tower of the

W.T.C. The camera keeps pulling away until the Twin Towers is shown in its entirety. Once the shot cuts, the audience is shown a montage of people looking up at an undisclosed object in disbelief. The viewer is left to assume that they are gazing at the Twin Towers as the events of 9/11 unfold. As the montage plays and the camera pans over the rubble where Tyler's journal lies, the audience hears his voiceover, revealing that he forgives his brother for committing suicide and loves him. We are aware that Tyler has died because his gravestone is shown later in the montage.

Like *Munich*, the placement of the W.T.C. in *Remember Me* assumes that the viewer has knowledge of 9/11. The difference between the two films is that Spielberg merely uses a single shot of the W.T.C. to convey his message whereas Coutler uses the Towers to overtly recreate 9/11 without showing the planes crashing into them through editing. Before the W.T.C. is even revealed, the date written on the blackboard, which the director assumed we recognized, was meant to insinuate that the terrorist attack was approaching. This moment is rather surprising considering that there is no hard indication that this film is taking place in a pre-9/11 world. Nevertheless, the primary shock in the film was to learn that the protagonist would be caught in the conflict once it was revealed that he was located in the north tower. The image of the W.T.C. is meant to convey to the audience that Tyler's journey of mending his relationship with his family will end with a twist of fate in his unforeseen death even though we do not see his demise firsthand. Furthermore, the viewer is meant to comprehend that his passing will profoundly impact all the characters that we had followed and developed emotional attachments to throughout the film. This point is highlighted in the montage at the end as each secondary character is shown in despair while looking up at what we figure is the damaged W.T.C. While the viewer is not explicitly shown the terrorist attack, skillful editing is used to assume that the audience understands what the date means and what tragedy is unfolding throughout the montage.

Remember Me portrays the one-sided Hollywood narrative of 9/11 through Coutler's use of the W.T.C., the absence of planes crashing into it, and the similar reactions of the characters towards the destruction of the Towers. Through this one-sided narrative, Coulter uses the W.T.C as a plot device that does not necessarily have a profound meaning other than to simply say that we should cherish our loved ones because we do not know what the future holds. Conversely, this message is a bit confusing and dicey considering that Tyler had already mended his broken

relationships as well as generally improved his life. Thus, it might be safe to say that the use of the W.T.C. was purely to create a classic Hollywood twist ending to invoke an emotional response from the audience. The insinuation of 9/11 through the image of the W.T.C. would definitely provoke a response from its audience, but those responses may vary, opposing the collective narrative model of 9/11 that many Hollywood films portray. When I speak to some of my friends about *Remember Me*, they recall the movie fondly. Some of them admit to crying at the end, claiming that the way Tyler died was sad, but made the production better. Yet, the formal reviews lend a different perspective on the twist ending. *The New York Times*'s Manohla Dargis (2010) writes in her review of the film that the many deaths throughout the film were just part of a warm-up act to get us ready for the "shamelessly exploitative end" (Dargis, "A Revel, Brooding and Smoking"). In *Entertainments*' review of the film, Jennifer Arellano (2013) recalls the theatre transforming into a "bubbling cauldron of audible audience outrage, severe shock, and popcorn projectile" (Arellano, "I'm Still Not Over"). Arellano felt that this movie ending did not tie up any unanswered plot ends and caused her to feel offended (Arellano, "I'm Still Not Over"). Therefore, the placement of the W.T.C. in this film served its purpose—raising a response in audiences through a tragedy that connects with each viewer on an individual level.

From my analysis, I have concluded that before 9/11, the W.T.C. may have been shown in different ways depending on the year and genre of film, but its use always connected to what the Towers represented at the time. All the films used the W.T.C. for its status as a technological wonder, cementing the Towers as one of New York City's greatest landmark. Since the W.T.C. had taken on a new representation since 9/11, the way the Towers are used in popular films has changed. Both *Munich* and *Remember Me* have used the W.T.C. through its connection with 9/11, assuming that the viewer has a general awareness of the events that transpired on September 11th, 2001. While both films present the W.T.C. differently, there still remains a correlation with terror as *Munich* is a film about terrorism and *Remember Me* overtly recreates the attack on the Towers. Over its forty-five year history, the W.T.C. has had a singular presence in popular film. With its connotation of power and wealth, the Towers create differing moods. Through the Twin Towers' destruction, the image now connotes terror and sorrow. Accordingly, we may see their earlier appearance differently. The next chapter focuses on the pre-9/11 films and examines how audiences today encounter the W.T.C. when it appears in them.

CHAPTER 3

Audience-oriented Analysis of Film Viewing

The following case study examines a reader's reaction or interpretation in making meaning of texts. S. Elizabeth Bird's writings on the various modes of audience reception research has guided the method and analysis. To capture audience media activity, Bird (2003) argues that merely watching people in front of a television is lacking (16). One method that she recommended for her audience reception of scandals is interviewing. She prepared videotapes that were sent to 22 people. Each videotape included excerpts from a tabloid TV show, a reality-based show, and an episode of ABC's *News with Peter Jennings*. The participants were permitted to watch the tape with a family member or friend in their respective homes. Along with the videotape, she provided a few questions to facilitate a recorded discussion among the different groups. A small audio tape recorder was included to record the conversation that would follow after the screening. Since Bird was not present during the discussions, the recorders containing the data were sent back to her. She then interviewed the same people by phone asking them similar questions (24-25).

In the present study, I drew from Bird's methods, also interviewing subjects, but with a difference in approach. I felt that directly asking at least fifteen viewers through individual or group interviews would give me the data needed to understand a contemporary audience's response toward the changing meaning of a troubling image, namely the W.T.C. Nevertheless, I believed that face-to-face interviews would benefit my study over Bird's approach. Being present allowed me to interject and prolong discussions if I felt that there could be more said on a topic. Moreover, I wanted to account for facial expressions when discussing the W.T.C as the participants' physical responses, such as a sad or angry demeanour, sometimes led to more questions. For example, before engaging in a discussion about 9/11, the participants would seem upset when speaking about the appearance of the W.T.C. in general. I would ask them why they were upset when discussing the image, which usually led to a conversation about the terrorist attack, helping me properly segue into a conversation about 9/11 in relation to the image.

My interview subjects were at least eighteen years old. I left the maximum age of my participants open because I wanted to record a range of responses from people who were older

when 9/11 happened to people who were young and did not possess an awareness of what was transpiring on that day. Each participant did not receive prior knowledge of my research regarding the W.T.C. However, they were given a short letter a few days before their scheduled screenings explaining the goal of the study excluding any reference to the Twin Towers. I had gone through the full ethics review for this research required by Concordia University.

I further applied some of Bird's methods when interviewing audiences to understand the various possible responses to watching a film. For instance, I believed that in addition to interviewing my subjects about media, I required them to first watch a film with the W.T.C. to prepare them for my interview questions. It was important for the participants to watch a film that included the Twin Towers so I could record a direct response about what it meant for them to encounter such an image. Through recorded discussions, Bird captured naturalistic conversations. With phone interviews, she drew out a more self-reflective opinion (Bird 25). Accordingly, I attempted to do both; general discussion was followed by more personal questions about their experience of 9/11 and the filmed image of the W.T.C.

I modeled the presentation of the films on Tamar Liebes and Elihu Katz's research on the popular television show, *Dallas*. In *The Export of Meaning: Cross-Cultural Readings of Dallas* (1990), they wrote about how they asked each of their participants to watch an episode at their respective homes. The goal of the study was to understand the different ways audiences from various cultures respond to the show (Liebes and Katz 4). Liebes and Katz expressed their satisfaction with the naturalness of their study as participants were given the choice to invite others to watch with them or not (23-24). In other words, they emphasized the importance of the participants creating a viewing environment for themselves that reflected how they watch a film or television show in their daily lives. With my research, I gave my subjects both the power to choose whether or not they would like to invite others to watch with them and where they would like to watch the film.

I asked my participants to select one out of five films. Under each title, I indicated who was starring in the film, the director, the length, and a short synopsis. Giving my participants a choice in what they watched added an element of naturalness to the study, despite the fact that they were picking a film from a limited selection. The five movies that I included on the list, presented in the introduction and third chapter, were *Godspell*, *Meteor*, *Trading Places*, *Home Alone 2: Lost in New York*, and *Super Mario Bros.*, all of which were released prior to September

11th, 2001. The W.T.C. only makes a brief appearance in each film, but this selection gave the research subjects a variety of genres to choose from.

Furthermore, I gave the participants a choice of watching their selected film without other subjects, with another person, or in a group of people. Nonetheless, each participant was asked to watch the film in its entirety with me present. I informed the participants that if they chose to watch the film with other people, then the extra viewers must participate in the study.

All the participants received a letter outlining the study and a consent form. For group viewings, I conducted the interview as a focus group instead of interviewing the participants individually. Lastly, I asked that each participant took notes on elements in the film that stood out to them: a person, a part of the plot, dialogue, a building, something in the background, etc. I also presented the possibility that they might have nothing to write down at all. Recommending notetaking encouraged noticing and remembering key moments in the viewing process.

Lastly, Raymond L. Gorden (1969) emphasized the importance of having the interview take place promptly after the relevant events and experiences. He cautioned on the distorting effects of fading memories that could misinform the interviewer (159). Therefore, I interviewed the participants almost immediately after they finished watching the film, so their responses would be fresh in their minds.

I began the interviews by asking general questions, such as what did they think of the film and if anything stood out or seemed unusual. After, I asked if they noticed the original W.T.C. If the answer was yes, I asked them how they felt when the Towers appeared onscreen. Did they feel that the W.T.C. transformed the scene as a whole? What did they think their reaction to the W.T.C. would have been before 9/11 even happened? Where were they when they first learned of what was happening on September 11th? Have they seen the video footage of the planes going into the Towers before? Did they see the footage during the time that it happened or was it later on in life? Did seeing the original Towers appear onscreen and having a response towards it teach them anything regarding the past as well as the present?

The participants in my study were mostly acquaintances. Recruiting for specific age brackets proved too difficult and I relied on friends and family members. Moreover, I had acknowledged an ethical issue beforehand that showing movies with the W.T.C. might bring up upsetting memories. To help with this issue, I gave the research subjects the option to end their participation in the study at any time whether it is during the viewing of a film or during the

interview. Regardless of this issue, I believed that asking the research subjects their thoughts on a film is the most effective way of obtaining data.

RESULTS

Table 1

Demographic Profiles based on Age and Gender

	Ages 18-22	Ages 23-30	Ages 40-60	Ages 70-90	Total
Male	2	2	1	1	6
Female	1	2	4	2	9
Total	3	4	5	3	15

Table 2

Films Watched by Age

	Godspell (1973)	*Meteor (1979)*	*Trading Places (1983)*	*Home Alone 2: Lost in New York (1992)*	*Super Mario Bros. (1993)*	Total
Ages 18-22	0	0	0	3	0	3
Ages 23-30	0	0	3	0	1	4
Ages 40-60	0	0	3	2	0	5
Ages 70-90	0	0	1	2	0	3
Total	0	0	7	7	1	15

Table 3

Films Watched by Gender

	Godspell (1973)	*Meteor (1979)*	*Trading Places (1983)*	*Home Alone 2: Lost in New York (1992)*	*Super Mario Bros. (1993)*	**Total**
Male	0	0	3	3	0	6
Female	0	0	4	4	1	9
Total	0	0	7	7	1	15

All the interviews went smoothly without any technical difficulties. I connected my laptop to a television for optimal viewing. Most of the participants preferred watching the films at my house over their own.

The screenings were pleasant as each participant was engaged with the film that they chose. I rarely had to worry about whether or not they were paying attention or if they were looking away from the screen during the viewing process. Most of the participants enjoyed the film, but some voiced that the movies they watched were not ones that they would watch again, especially *Home Alone 2* because it is more oriented towards children. As a researcher, the screenings were exhausting: I had to watch the films multiple times. Despite my fatigue, I felt it was vital for me to be present as ten of my participants had an audible reaction to the appearance of the Twin Towers. For instance, when a shot of the Towers appeared onscreen, one participant blurted out, "Oh no!". Another participant turned to me and said, "I can definitely tell now that this is a film made before the 2000s." Being present for these reactions was necessary for my research and the way I conducted my interviews. Most of the time at the beginning of the interviews, my subjects would forget to mention the Towers as something that stood out to them regardless of their audible responses during the screening. Thus, I would bring up their reaction during the interview to get more information on why they responded the way they did and to segue into a proper discussion about the W.T.C.

None of the participants selected *Meteor* or *Godspell*. I thought that people who enjoyed musicals would select *Godspell* and I thought that a middle-aged and senior participant would be drawn to *Meteor* because the film stars Sean Connery. A participant claimed that she was going to choose *Meteor*, but decided to select *Trading Places* instead because she had a taxing week and wanted to watch a comedy to improve her mood. In fact, all the participants decided to watch comedies over the more dramatic films. From the fifteen participants, seven watched *Trading Places*, seven watched *Home Alone 2*, and one watched *Super Mario Bros.* (see tables 2 and 3). From my research, I gathered that the way each participant responded was partly influenced by the film that they chose. For example, while I do not have much data on *Super Mario Bros.*, the person who watched the film felt that seeing the damaged Twin Towers onscreen was a sort of prediction of what was to come with 9/11. Further, she drew a strong connection between King Koopa and the current president of the United States, Donald Trump, in both physical appearance and personality. She noted that the latter once bragged that after 9/11, Trump Tower became the tallest building in Lower Manhattan. Trump's cruel way of thinking and lack of sympathy for those affected by the terrorist attack, for the participant, mirrored that of the dictator, King Koopa.

For *Home Alone 2*, the participants were fascinated by the airport scene when Kevin got separated from his family. Many of them indicated how it was strange to see the easiness of navigating an airport prior to 9/11. They specified the lack of security and how simple it was for Kevin to board a plane without his family in sight. Moreover, they noted that he did not need to show his passport or scan his boarding pass before boarding the plane. A few participants mentioned that as a young child boarding the plane alone, the airport staff neglected to take proper care of Kevin. For instance, one staff member escorts him onto the plane and asks Kevin to point out his parents, which he mistakenly gestures towards a man who is wearing the same coat as his father. Without verifying the identity of the man, she instructs Kevin to go find an empty seat and left him alone. The participants thought that her handling of the situation was wildly irresponsible and that it would have been impossible for Kevin to board the plane alone today with heightened airport security. One of the participants revealed that he traveled as an unaccompanied minor in a post-9/11 world and claimed that he had to have a tag and was under constant surveillance. Their comments on this scene were expressed before I provoked a direct

discussion on 9/11, showing that their way of thinking is slightly wired to the terrorist attack when viewing images other than the Twin Towers.

Another aspect that stood out to participants was Donald Trump's cameo. In *Home Alone 2*, Trump appears inside the Plaza Hotel where Kevin asks him for directions to the lobby. All the participants who watched the film had an audible response towards this appearance. One participant observed that Trump looked much younger and thinner in the film. Another participant said that Trump stood out to her given his current role as president. Seeing him in the film as a businessman, casually walking through the Plaza Hotel without security, was strange to her.

When the Twin Towers appeared in *Home Alone 2*, almost all the participants remarked upon the landmark. Since the Towers appeared at the beginning of the film, their feelings quickly went away and they returned to being engrossed in the comedy for the duration of the viewing process. Unlike both *Trading Places* and *Super Mario Bros.*, *Home Alone 2* was the only film in which the Towers appeared at the beginning instead of the end. Two of the participants who watched the film together did not notice the Towers in the film. However, one of the subjects had a verbal response to the aerial shot of the Towers with Kevin at the top because she was captivated by the view. Watching the film with a modern mindset, the participant thought that Kevin was at the top of the Empire State Building because she possessed an awareness that the Twin Towers no longer existed.

In *Trading Places*, all except for one of the participants noticed the W.T.C. When the Towers flashed onscreen, none of the participants could recall the conversation that Winthorpe and Valentine were having as they approached the commodities floor. Many of the participants were fixated on the unique design at the bottom of the Twin Towers while others were surprised and processing the image itself. Even though one participant did not recognize the W.T.C. during the screening, she still could not help but say "Wow!" when the Towers appeared onscreen. When I asked her about her reaction during the interview, she explained that she was stunned by the beauty of the buildings and how they were framed. She compared them to a shot of a building she greatly admired in *Fifty Shades of Grey* (2015), directed by Sam Taylor-Johnson. She felt that the shot made the buildings look as if they represented wealth and power, paralleling the shot of the female protagonist approaching her love interest's workplace for the first time.

Many of the participants also noted how when the W.T.C. appeared, they knew the film was set in New York City at the end. This fact was particularly stark for some of the participants when watching *Trading Places* because most of the film took place in another city. At the beginning of the film, these participants noticed the Rocky statue, which is a recognizable landmark in Philadelphia and a clear indication of where the film was set. Many of them said that the Twin Towers was the most obvious landmark that the creators of the film could have chosen to signal a setting change to New York City. This idea that the Twin Towers were the ultimate representation of New York City was prevalent in most of the interviews regardless of the film that was chosen, or the fact that the original landmark has not stood for nearly twenty years.

Besides the image of the Twin Towers, the participants had a lot to say about stereotypes and Dan Akyroyd wearing a blackface costume. All the research subjects felt uncomfortable when confronted with the racist language and undertones present in *Trading Places*. Many of them indicated how the hired help, except the main butler, were all black men. They even noticed how all the prisoners in the jail were black. A participant mentioned that the racism within the film was a "sign of the times." A few lines that were particularly jarring to her was when Mortimer describes Valentine as a "Negro" who has probably been "stealing since he could crawl." Another moment was when Randolph calls black people very musical, referring to a classic stereotype. She suggested that nowadays, Hollywood is "extremely politically correct." She speculated that if this movie were remade today, the black man would have been the stockbroker while the white man would have begun the film as homeless. Others mentioned how seeing a white man dressed as a Jamaican was an image that might have been amusing in the 80s, but certainly was not funny today. However, there were a few participants who thought that it was humorous and Dan Akyroyd was merely playing a role.

There were three participants that had seen *Trading Places* the year that it was in theatres and they all claimed that in the past, they took the film as a comedy and nothing more. Nevertheless, seeing the film a second time in the present, they noticed different meanings. One of the participants spoke about a cliché scene where Winthorpe tries to commit suicide with a gun after a dog pees on him and it starts to downpour, signaling that he had hit rock bottom. When the gun jams, he decides to take a bunch of pills in his bathtub. The participant said that this was a scene that would not be considered comedic today. His viewing partner added that there is now more public awareness on topics such as suicide and prejudices. Both participants attributed our

new and more serious way of thinking to 9/11. This opinion came before my introduction of the 9/11 topic, but not before the participant's mentioned that the Twin Towers was a feature that stood out to them in the film.

In fact, before I engaged them in conversation about the Twin Towers, after watching the airport scene in *Home Alone 2*, most participants attributed their more serious way of thinking to 9/11 as well. Perhaps this is because the Twin Towers appear in the film only a few moments after the airport scene. Regardless, they claimed their heightened sense of public awareness on various topics is due to the terrorist attack, such as security. As mentioned earlier in the chapter, it is not only the image of the Twin Towers that provoke memories of 9/11, but other images suggest a more "9/11" way of thinking as well. In other words, the way we view certain images is somewhat influenced by the terrorist attack.

RESPONSES TOWARDS THE W.T.C.

Out of fifteen participants, twelve noticed the Twin Towers. They felt strong emotions when the W.T.C. appeared onscreen because each participant had an awareness that the buildings have been destroyed. Seeing the original Towers in their former state brought up feelings of nostalgia. One participant said that he never saw the Twin Towers in person, but he felt nostalgic towards how the landmark used to be. Another research subject claimed he felt a strong sense of nostalgia while admiring the Towers architecturally. When they appeared onscreen, he was not only admiring the beauty of the Towers, but also the small square in which they once stood. He similarly spoke about how it was common for people to buy souvenirs of the Twin Towers because they were famous and striking buildings.

Other participants expressed sadness for the fact that the Towers did not exist anymore and because their appearance reminded them of 9/11. In fact, all the participants who noticed the Towers instantly thought of 9/11. Conversely, their emotional response to the Twin Towers in relation to 9/11 varied. For example, while most participants said they felt sad, others in their mid to late twenties felt differently. These participants reported feeling slightly desensitized from seeing the W.T.C. They spoke about how there have been many other terrorist attacks since then and unfortunately, saying it has become the norm today. Thus, they seemed to agree that terrorism has less of an impact in the present than it once did in the past. One participant said that

she attributes her desensitization to the fact that we are farther away from the event in time and therefore, believes that the image has less of an impact on her. Another one claimed that 9/11 did not have much of an impact on him when it happened to begin with. He said that when the events of September 11th were unfolding, he could not process what was transpiring. It was only later on in life when he re-watched the Twin Towers collapsing that he was able to understand what happened on that day, but still felt detached because of the terrorist attacks that have occurred since. He believed that this is why he was able to admire the Twin Towers architecturally and think less about terrorism.

As for the other participants who were deeply impacted by the image of the Twin Towers, it made them recall what happened that day and personal memories surrounding the event. Some of the participants spoke about how they spent the whole week watching news coverage and others spoke about the photos that were released of people jumping out of the buildings. One participant said she just recently did a tour of New York City and that she was brought to the area in which the Twin Towers once stood. When she took a tour of the memorial, a woman spoke to them about how she lost her husband in the tragedy. She told the tourists that if her husband had just been a few floors lower, he would have survived. When the participant was watching the scene, she thought of that woman's husband and was trying to pinpoint where his office could have been. The participant further mentioned how the woman explained that the higher you were in the Towers, the more socially elite or wealthy you were. The irony of her husband's situation is that if he had been a bit lower in the Towers, he would have most likely survived.

The image of the Twin Towers not only brought back memories of what happened on September 11th, but also where some of the participants were on that day. Two of the participants who are immigrants to Canada had interesting responses based on where they used to live in the world. One of the participants immigrated to Canada from Israel before 9/11. On the day that the terrorist attack unfolded, she was at work trying to get a hold of her customers that were coincidentally in New York City and she could not reach them. As reports started coming out that a plane had gone into the Twin Towers, she knew it was a terrorist attack even before the media was confirming it. She spoke about how in Israel, there were terrorist attacks all the time, but for her, the idea of there being a terrorist attack in the United States was inconceivable. She said that when 9/11 happened, she realized that we are all potential victims to terrorism.

She recalled how distraught she was and that she needed to immediately pick up her young children from school and bring them home. She went on to say that the world that she watched in *Trading Places* is a very different world than the one we live in today. To the participant, when 9/11 occurred, "the world was no longer innocent": it changed the way we do banking, go through airports, and the way we perceive Muslims. However, she believed that for Israelis, terrorism was always a reality. 9/11 was the first time that the world "got a taste of what Israel gets on a daily basis," which "broke her heart." She concluded, "the terrorist attack brought the problem to not only Israel's doorstep, but forced the whole world to pay attention as well."

Despite the fact that eleven participants were able to remember their experience on September 11th in great detail, there is no conclusive evidence from this study that it is related to not only recognizing the Twin Towers in film, but also measuring the degree in which they felt emotion towards the image. For instance, one of the participants grew up in China and immigrated to the United States before living in Canada. Living in China when 9/11 happened, he was unable to recall the details of that day. He remembered his parents telling him that something bad occurred in America, but no one really knew what was transpiring. He was incapable of registering the magnitude of the word "terrorism" at the time because the Chinese government censored what was happening in America. The media would seldom mention the terrorist attack or reference what had transpired in the States. Despite having minimal recollection of September 11th, he was able to recognize the Twin Towers instantly when watching *Trading Places* and had a very emotional response to the image.

Conversely, the participant clearly remembered the day that he learned of 9/11 when he moved to the United States. He went to high school in Minnesota and was in a U.S. history class. They were studying 9/11 and he remembered that they showed the plane footage. They saw different versions and angles of the plane crash and they heard people screaming and jumping out of the Towers. He added that there was a whole chapter on 9/11 in one of their history books for school. All his fellow students were watching the footage "as if it were the first time they saw it even though they had seen it before." He concluded his interview by saying that "Americans were extremely proud of their Twin Towers." The W.T.C. was a place where "decisions of power and money were made and Hollywood liked to show them in their films." Nevertheless, he mentioned that the meaning of the Towers became different after 9/11 and Hollywood began to

edit the image out of their films due to the new connotations they possessed, which were associated with terrorism.

Other participants could not recall the details of September 11th as well, but because they were too young to remember what transpired on that day. A twenty-one-year-old participant recognized the Towers instantly. She was surprised to see them in *Home Alone 2* because "when you go to New York City now, you will not see them there." She was too young when 9/11 occurred to remember what happened on that day, but she recalled learning about the terrorist attack afterwards in class where she saw the footage of the planes going into the Towers. Despite not growing up with the original Towers, she was sad to see them. The image transformed the moment for her when they appeared onscreen, but not necessarily the whole scene. She continued to state that most of society would always have an awareness of the terrorist attack regardless of age because we are reminded of it every year on September 11th.

Another participant who was too young to remember the details of September 11th responded to the image of the W.T.C. because of how it visibly affected the people around him. This participant had plenty to say regarding the Twin Towers given his love for movies. He began by stating that it was interesting to see the original Towers in *Home Alone 2* because "there are no films and shows being made today with them in it." He noted that in most films, New York City is the center of most supernatural events: "If aliens attack, it is happening in New York City. In one of the *Percy Jackson* films, the key to entering Olympus is on top of the Empire State Building." Regardless of his interest in movies, he had rarely seen the image of the Towers in any form of entertainment, which he assumed was because of his age. Nonetheless, he thought his fascination with the image stemmed from the fact that the movie did not focus on the Towers, but a "small snippet" managed to have a great impact on him. He said that the Twin Towers appeared "nonchalantly" in the film because of the time that it was made, but now the image has more of an impact because of 9/11 even though the original Towers do not exist anymore.

This participant reported that every year his community commemorated the event. By the time he was six years old, he had friends who had been affected by 9/11 in some form. One friends' mother was supposed to be on one of the fateful flights. She always reminds her children of how lucky they are that she is still alive. Another friend lost his dad in one of the Towers. With these conversations, he noticed the impact that the terrorist attack had not only on his own life,

living in a time with heightened security, but also for the people around him regarding their loved ones. Seeing the Twin Towers in the film reminded him of all these stories.

The participant continued to say that his whole life, he had generally been fascinated with the Twin Towers. He mentioned the film, *The Walk* (2015), directed by Robert Zemeckis. He described how when the main character walks across the Towers on a single wire, people admired the beauty of the massive structure and in "the proudest country in the world." He persisted, "The image of the Towers was very patriotic like two siblings standing over the city side-by-side." To the participant, when the Towers collapsed, the image changed our perspective of America. He finished, "9/11 was meant to set an example. The terrorists were aware that it would impact every single person in the United States and other people in other parts of the world."

PAST VS. PRESENT

To many of the participants, the image of the W.T.C. served as a middle ground between the past and the present as it signified both a representation of what the world once was and a representation of what the world is now. For example, one participant said that the Towers transformed the scene in *Trading Places* for him because he automatically pictured the aftermath of 9/11 in his mind. The movie is meant to be funny, but the Twin Towers reminded him of the "loss of innocence" that our society had undergone. Both him and his viewing partner believed that 9/11 changed our way of thinking in that we became more cautious when traveling. They believed that the United States and Canada had not taken notice of terrorism until 9/11 happened. However, they stood firm on the idea that a large-scale attack, such as 9/11, most likely would not happen in Canada. Both stated that Canada is a very welcoming country and would not deny anyone entry based on their race or religion. Consequently, they felt as though people do not possess a reason to attack Canada whereas in the United States, there is plenty more public discrimination especially from politicians.

Another participant stated that "we take for granted what we had in the past," such as the W.T.C. The participant revealed that because of 9/11, she does not like to be in large crowds. She spoke about how the world represented in *Home Alone 2* was a lot simpler because people lacked awareness: "9/11 had opened our eyes." Both the participant and her viewing partner felt that

because they are both Jewish, they need to be more cautious because of the terrorist attack. They felt that their Jewish backgrounds made them targets to these types of extremists. Since gaining a new sense of awareness, their lives have changed. For instance, the first participant said that she used to go to Paris frequently, but the climate has become increasingly anti-Semitic and therefore, she does not feel comfortable visiting again. The other research subject said that she worries if something bad could happen while she is praying at synagogue during the holidays.

Two of the younger participants, while growing up in the 2000s, expressed a sense of past and present when the W.T.C. appeared onscreen in *Home Alone 2*. For one, the appearance of the Twin Towers reminded her that the world portrayed in the film was not the world she grew up in. She felt that life portrayed in the movie was much more "laid-back" than today. She claimed that in the present, we are more "strict, hands-on, and security-based." The other younger participant who watched *Home Alone 2* as well had similar feelings. The Twin Towers changed his perspective on the film because the moment they appeared onscreen was when he understood that he was viewing a "simpler time" as 9/11 did not happen yet. He did not grow up in the 90s, but he understood that the mindless humour and clichés of the film was a representation of what life was like back then. The participant explained, "Americans thought that their security was where it needed to be to keep people safe. When 9/11 happened, they realized that they were far from where they needed to be security-wise." Additionally, the participant noted a scene where Kevin was stopped by the robbers that he battled in the first *Home Alone* film. The participant stated that when Kevin was running and screaming in the street because two suspicious grown men were chasing him, "nobody bats an eye" possibly because they think he is "just another dumb kid from New York." He said that because we have more awareness today, someone would have intervened, as "the world is no longer as simple."

ANALYSIS

Active audience theory guides my analysis. It argues that viewers do not merely receive information passively, but are aware during, for instance, the viewing of films, past and present. John Fiske argues in *Television Culture* (2011) how audiences are active while watching television, making meaning of what they are viewing. He states that when audiences are understood as textual subjects, formed by the structures of what they consume, they are perceived

as powerless and inactive. However, Fiske draws upon theorists that challenge this view by understanding audiences as made up of social subjects. Such audiences make meaning, a process influenced by history and social formation, which includes class, gender, age, region, etc. For Fiske, the television viewer is primarily a social subject over a textual subject: "The social subjectivity is more influential in the construction of meanings than the textually produced subjectivity which exists only at the moment of reading" (Fiske 62). As discussed in the second chapter, Fiske reiterates this notion through cultural studies and his analysis on Madonna, indicating that there are spaces or gaps within texts that allow audiences to create meaning based on their social experience (Fiske 271). Other scholars advance this position. For instance, Rob Hodge and David Tripp study the multiple and even contradictory readings of an audience by exploring how a television text connects with the social lives of viewers. They conducted their research by gathering a group of school children and having them watch an episode of *Prisoner*, a soap opera taking place in a female prison. Their findings determined how many of the children built parallels between school and prison, demonstrating how a viewer's social experience plays a part in how a reader makes meaning of a text (Fiske 67-68). Conversely, as previously mentioned by Hall (1997) and Barthes (1974), there is no single, universal meaning in an image, which is apparent through the interview results (Barthes 5-6; Hall 32-33).

My case study similarly captures the social subject in action. Firstly, the majority of the research subjects had an audible response towards the W.T.C. during the viewing process. Their immediate response is representative of Barthes' (1981) idea of the punctum, as introduced in the second chapter. The Twin Towers clearly stirred emotions in the viewers based on their audible reactions, changing the reading of the scene. Moreover, many of them voiced their thoughts on other images as well during the screening, such as the racist connotations of using only black actors as prisoners in *Trading Places*. Another moment in which the participants were particularly vocal was the airport scene in *Home Alone 2* because it did not reflect their experiences today, especially the younger participants who had never traveled in a pre-9/11 world. These moments established that the participants were active and attentive when watching their respective films instead of passively absorbing the information presented to them onscreen.

Secondly, racial or religious background shaped how some of the participants made meaning of the image of the W.T.C., such as the Israeli and Jewish participants. The research subjects' ages played a role in how the image was read: it was clear from the interviews that the

middle-aged and elderly audience had a more emotional response when discussing the Twin Towers and 9/11. The older audience both experienced and remembered what the world was like before 9/11 as they spoke about it in their responses and therefore, understood how much society has changed since the terrorist attack. The younger participants were only able to hypothesize and grasp at old memories from when they were toddlers and young children to visualize a pre-9/11 world. Since they never experienced a pre-9/11 world, they did not have a complete understanding of what has been lost (see table 1).

Lastly, the research subjects' personal history influenced how they made meaning of the text. For instance, one of the participants remembered 9/11 in the context of the censorship in China and learning about it later when he began school in America. Another participant recalled 9/11 through the experiences of his friends because he was too young to remember the terrorist attack at the time it occurred. Others who only learned about 9/11 in school seemed to have less of an emotional impact when seeing the W.T.C. in comparison to those who experienced the reporting of the attack on the day that it unfolded. When the middle-aged and elderly audience referred to 9/11, their faces and voices were unhappy and somber. They made many references to the amount of lives that were lost that day. The younger audience spoke very casually about the terrorist attack, but with a slight seriousness in their tone. These various responses are representative of Stuart Hall's (1980) understanding of the negotiated position when making meaning of a text. In terms of the negotiated position, the participants accepted the film's use of the W.T.C. and understood that the film was shot within a different period of time. However, they made meaning of the Twin Towers in relation to their own experience and knowledge of 9/11, an event that occurred before each film was released.

Both the second and last point show how Dijck's (2007) mediated memories and personal cultural memories work in the meaning-making process as well. While audiences do not necessarily produce the image of the W.T.C. when watching a film, they are engaging with an item or form of media that mediates the relationship between individuality, through personal experience, and the collective. In terms of personal cultural memory, the participants used the image of the Twin Towers to make sense of their own lives as the films situated them in time and place. They were able to see the difference between the past, through the films, and the present through their contemporary experiences.

A common and unexpected theme that was apparent during the interviews was the nostalgia the participants reported when the Towers appeared onscreen. In *Nostalgia: A Psychological Resource* (2016), Clay Routledge explores the history of "nostalgia" and the implications it had on society's outlook on the term. The term was first coined in 1688 by a Swiss medical student named Johaness Hofer, who deemed it a medical illness. It had negative implications and was presumed to cause physical and mental agony (Routledge 4). This may not have been how the participants experienced nostalgia, yet they reported a certain mental anguish, such as when they compared a perceived peaceful past to a terror-filled present.

In the twentieth century, nostalgia obtained new meaning with the growing field of psychology. Psychologists saw the upside to nostalgia. For example, in *Yearning for Yesterday: A Sociology of Nostalgia* (1979), Fred Davis understood the feeling as a coping mechanism for when a person underwent major life changes or experiences of discontinuity by "encouraging an appreciative stance toward former selves; excluding unpleasant memories, reinterpreting 'marginal, fugitive, and eccentric facets of earlier selves' in a positive light; establishing benchmarks of one's biography" (Davis 35-36). In the late 1980s, marketing researchers noticed the positive side to nostalgia as well. They realized that consumers display an attachment to products that they used in their late teens and early twenties (Routledge 6). In "The Influence of Evoked Nostalgia on Consumers' Responses to Advertising" (2002), Vincent Pascal, David Sprott, and Darrell Muehling found that nostalgia-induced advertisements increased a positive viewpoint towards a brand.

Both psychology and marketing help in understanding what nostalgia has become today, which is what Routledge calls "a desired state" (Routledge 7). Psychology discusses nostalgia as a desire for a past self, creating a more self-reflective term. The participants of this study showed a desire for their former selves when talking about the Twin Towers. They deemed 9/11 as "the moment where the world changed" or they described how the world before was more "innocent." They do so by discussing how they are paranoid when in public spaces, fearful that they might find themselves in the middle of a terrorist attack or shooting. In this sense, they viewed their former selves more fondly to cope with their current selves. While they described their innocence and simplicity from the past as positive and desirable, they also saw their naivety and understood that their more cautious selves are necessary for today's world, demonstrating the coping effects of nostalgia. The desired state in this context is the worriless self of the past—a state of mind

where the individual wishes to go back to, but understands that this sort of reversal is impossible. To enjoy the effects of the term from a marketing standpoint, the consumer must buy products that induce nostalgia. As noted by both Berman (2002) and Harvey (2002) in the second chapter, people were in amazement of the Towers and enjoyed touring them (Berman 7; Harvey 59-60). From the participant's perspective, they can never again touch or retain the original Twin Towers and therefore, there was sadness in their nostalgic outlook on the landmark. The Towers no longer exist and may never exist again in their original form; thus, the desired state cannot be reached, representing the shortcomings to the self-reflective nostalgia that the participants described.

An even more common theme was the idea that the Twin Towers was the ultimate representation of New York City whether it was before or after 9/11. Given the early history of the structure as discussed in the third chapter, the Twin Towers were famous buildings. They were considered a technological wonder as they were the tallest buildings in the world (Pomerance 46). Eventually they would represent a sort of freedom that gave market opportunities to everyone (Harvey 60). As one participant explained, Americans took pride in the Twin Towers and enjoyed displaying them in their shows and movies based in New York City. Thus, the Twin Towers had built a reputation as being one of New York City's most recognizable landmarks.

As for the degree in which the Twin Towers represented New York City after 9/11, the participants referenced how the event is taught in schools. Most of all, participants referred to how the event is commemorated every year on September 11th. This point coincides with Dayan and Katz's definition of a media event, which they stated has the power to declare a holiday (Dayan and Katz 16). Images of the Twin Towers are displayed throughout the day. Therefore, due to its history as a celebrated landmark and the destruction that followed to the city during 9/11, the Twin Towers have a strong connection to New York.

Terrorism was the most common theme as it was spoken about in every interview that the participants noticed the Twin Towers during screenings. The theme was mostly mentioned before I directed their attention towards 9/11. According to Randall D. Law in *Terrorism: A History* (2016), the term is as old as human civilization and its meaning is constantly in fluctuation or unclear as most groups tend to use the word in "mutually exclusive ways" (3). Law explains, "Our understanding of terrorism is rooted in an emotional reaction and moral revulsion. But this

understanding undermines our efforts to define and analyze what we also try to pretend is a neutral phenomenon" (3). This is understandable as many of the research subjects' emotional responses towards the image of the W.T.C. were connected to a general idea about terrorism. One participant asserted that it is virtually impossible to gaze upon the Twin Towers without thinking about terrorism—the word had simply clung onto the landmark regardless of the fact that the original Towers do not exist anymore. All participants who have seen the films before 9/11 stated that, in the past, when the Twin Towers flashed onscreen, they viewed the structure as a normal and impressive landmark that represented New York City. The participants who have never seen the films assumed that before 9/11, they would probably not have paid as much attention to the image as well. Everyone claimed that the Towers would have been a structure that they would not have been drawn into in any way emotionally and thus, as one participant described, they "would never think-twice" when the landmark appeared onscreen. Finally, all the participants believed that new meaning was added to the image after 9/11 and therefore, they cannot observe the Twin Towers without feeling sadness.

Law makes two core assertions about terrorism. He claims, "individuals or groups choose to commit terrorist acts as part of a process of rational and conscious decision-making within particular political and cultural contexts" and "terrorism is a communicative act intended to influence the behaviour of one or more audiences" (3). My research demonstrates that the latter statement best represents how the participants defined the word. Their responses indicated that they were more fixated on society's behavioural changes since 9/11 and less on the terrorists' political motives. Nobody mentioned the intricate planning behind the attack. Instead, some deemed the terrorists as people who strove to kill as many people as they could. Another participant defined terrorists as people who want to "destroy the beauty in the world." Therefore, the image of the W.T.C. caused participants to think of the transformative changes of terrorism in terms of politics and culture rather than the political or cultural motives behind attacks.

This case study demonstrates that the image of the W.T.C. did not necessarily shed its meaning of wealth and power, and its representativeness of New York City, but instead gained new connotations as the image is decoded in the present. The responses towards the image show that the prevalent themes when viewing the Twin Towers are nostalgia and terrorism. Each participant credits these new connotations to 9/11. Interestingly, there were other images that also encouraged a reaction from viewers throughout the viewing process, such as stereotypes. All of

the participants understood that these images may have been considered ordinary or customary in the past, but are received differently in the present. Their reasoning was that society has changed over time and thus, so has our understanding of these images, displaying a sense of past and present. Hence, these images clearly affected their historical understanding and demonstrated how they gain more meaning over time.

Conclusion

Screening a pre-9/11 film that contained shots of the W.T.C. and interviewing my research subjects after offered more concrete details on how our public understanding of 9/11 impacted the way we make meaning of certain images. Through key works on cultural studies, meaning, and memory, I was able to identify concepts that guided my research of the Twin Towers. Representation was a major concept in understanding how meaning was reflected in the structure. As discussed in the second chapter, 9/11 facilitated a way of thinking that articulated an idea of fighting terror. Zelizer (2017) partly credits the media in fostering this type of terror-filled representation by, for instance, creating a sharp divide between "us and them" (Zelizer 4-5). These tactics employed by the media play with terror's public understanding when reporting a media event. This understanding is representative of the way we make meaning from the image of the Twin Towers today. For example, during the interviews, the most dominant meaning that the W.T.C. represented was terrorism. Before I would purposefully lead the interview on the topic of 9/11, the participants would mention the terrorist attack on their own. During the screening of *Trading Places*, many of the participants spoke about how they were distracted with thoughts of 9/11 after seeing the image of the Twin Towers and could not concentrate on the conversation between Winthorpe and Valentine during the scene. Due to the passage of time, ideas of terrorism have attached itself to the structure as 9/11 had a major impact on the participants. Moreover, this type of representation was not only felt when the viewers saw the Twin Towers, but also during the airport scene in *Home Alone 2*. Many of the participants were baffled at the lack of security while Kevin was navigating through the airport. Some of them claimed that this scene was characteristic of a pre-9/11 world, signifying a "war on terror" mindedness. Their understanding of these images are demonstrative of another major concept explored in this thesis, which is memory. As Lipsitz (1990) explains, ideas are being constructed and reconstructed all the time, and films are always representative of the time in which they are made (Lipsitz 164 and 170). Therefore, due to our evolving memories, our understanding of a scene or image in a film might transform as time passes.

Research on memory interpreted how viewers understood the image of the W.T.C. in relation to themselves. Theories on mediated memories and personal cultural memory in particular as both concepts demonstrated how the viewers use the Twin Towers to make sense of

their own experience of 9/11 in relation to the lives of others. Their memories of 9/11 upon viewing the W.T.C. also situated them in time and place and therefore, gave them a sense of past that they compared to the present. Furthermore, the literature on media events measured the weight of 9/11 and how such an event could add meaning to the image of the Twin Towers. The participants spoke about 9/11 as a media event in accordance with Dayan and Katz's (1992) definition in the second chapter. Once again, 9/11 was not an orchestrated event, but the responses of the participants towards the image of the W.T.C. showed that it held equal if not more weight. From what I gathered from the interviews, one of the more impressionable aspects of 9/11 was that it was an inconceivable event. The idea of the Towers crumbling to the ground was unimaginable whereas a media event from Dayan and Katz's definition is expected and orchestrated through advertisements and news media (Dayan and Katz 18). However, as a result of the interviews, I believe that it was 9/11's unexpectedness and inconceivableness that contributed to the long-lasting impression it had on people that defines the terrorist attack as a media event.

Nonetheless, even though ideas of terrorism was the dominant theme when the participants viewed the Twin Towers, it is important to note that it did not completely transform the image for them. The participants recognized the Towers as being a representation of wealth and power, but more so, they saw the structure as the embodiment of New York City. Even when I screened *Home Alone 2*, some spoke about how they were expecting to see the W.T.C. the moment Kevin realized that he flew to New York City instead of Miami with his family. Almost every participant spoke about how before 9/11 happened, you could not watch a film or television show set in New York City without a W.T.C. appearance as Americans took pride in the buildings. Thus, ideas of wealth, power, and New York City still remained as themes associated with the W.T.C., indicating that new meanings do not replace old meanings when looking at an image.

Certain aspects of my approach had drawbacks. If I were to change anything regarding my research method, it would be to disallow group screenings and focus groups. During the group screenings, when the Twin Towers appeared onscreen, most of the time there was an audible reaction towards the image. Consequently, I was unable to properly determine if the participants noticed the Twin Towers on their own or if it was because of their viewing partners' outbursts that led to their awareness of the landmark.

As for the focus groups, while it was effective for my research when the participants would build upon each other's viewpoints, the drawback was that sometimes a participant would be influenced by their viewing partner's answer and therefore, change their original response. I noticed this issue at the beginning of the interview during my last group screening. Two of the participants were engaged in a conversation on the topics of suicide and stereotypes after watching *Trading Places*. This conversation took place before I even had the opportunity to redirect their attention towards a discussion about the W.T.C., which they both mentioned they noticed instantly when watching the film. The participants stated that they regard these topics a lot more seriously today than they did when they were younger. The first participant claimed that he attributed this different outlook to his age. He believed that as you grow older, people generally become more mature. He thought that individuals looked at life differently when they were younger in comparison to when they are older. The second participant interrupted and said that he was wrong. She argued that people today have more public awareness on prejudices and different races. To further her argument, she claimed that I was the same age as him when he saw the movie and yet, I could properly comprehend the negative stereotyping and representation of suicide in the film. Consequently, she believed that it is our public awareness within society that has changed and not a person's age or maturity level. With this argument, he changed his response and said that my generation is "a lot smarter than his was and our world is a lot bigger."

As discussed in the second chapter, Bird (2003) asserted that the concept of the audience is problematic because viewers consume media in different ways (3). Ironically, both Bird and I did not take this issue into account when conducting our own respective research. I interpreted her point as a general statement regarding how every audience is different; however, I did not take into consideration how individuals within an audience can interpret an image differently from their viewing partners. Ultimately, it was difficult to determine which comments and responses were altered and influenced by their fellow participants. Instead of allowing my participants to watch their selected films within an audience setting, I should have required them to watch the films only with me to draw out as much as possible their true thoughts.

Despite the drawbacks of this study, the evidence assembled through these records of film viewing suggests that when faced with a troubling image, viewers reflect on their own past experiences with it. Using this experience allows them to make sense of or come to terms with the present. In regards to my case study, whether the image was the Twin Towers, Donald

Trump, stereotypes, suicide, or airport travel, watching a film situated the viewer in time and place. By doing so, the viewers were inclined to reflect upon the past in relation to the present. Additionally, while the responses towards the image of the W.T.C. included themes of terrorism, nostalgia, representation of New York, and wealth and power, every participant understood these themes differently. Their responses towards the image revealed points in which collective memory meets individual understandings.

Regardless of the fact that these films were released before the 2000s, they continue to resurface today. And, as mentioned in the second chapter, NBC commemorates the terrorist attack each year by playing the news footage from that day (Bamberger, "MSNBC's Annual Replay"). With these troubling images having a permanent place in our culture and articulated by various media, it is important to understand the effect that they have on audiences and our historical outlook. As this research demonstrated, meanings are added to an image that may sometimes prevail over other older meanings as time passes, situating us in time and place, and impacting our historical understanding through the differences between the past and present.

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