Presence and Absence:
The World Trade Center in Film Before and After Sept. 11, 2001

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Abstract

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This thesis traces the changing visual significance of the World Trade Center (WTC) in fiction film, from its completion in 1973, to its haunting afterlife since September 11, 2001. This study gathers and critically assembles various representations of this financial icon in order to find new meaning for the representation of the towers in film prior to 2001, along with the significance that they acquired in light of their material destruction. To do so, this study relies on a textual analysis of selected films in which the towers appear, while utilizing a stylistic and formal analysis to dissect their visual and narrative treatment. It locates the towers as a crucial node within global transnational capitalism and draws from a number of critical texts, methods, and traditions, including those of Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin, particularly, the conceptualization of the image as a ruin of its profilmic moment, and the afterlife of the image. Essentially, this thesis reconsiders the towers' status as traces in photographic media and audiovisual culture, and examines how they have resisted a totalizing meaning. Retrospectively returning to moving images, viewers notice objects, and events that escaped their notice upon first viewing, which is the case with the Twin Towers in film post-2001 as they affect the viewer's response in new ways.

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Table of Contents

List of Figures

Introduction

The World Trade Center (WTC), or the Twin Towers, was built as a financial monument to an emergent American empire in a global transnational, and consumer market economy that has come to dominate most nations since the end of the Second World War (1939-1944). Despite its romantic conceptualization, the Twin Towers are not, however, represented in a generally positive way in moving images prior to 2001, as the towers were often represented in films that were in some way or form critical of unbridled capital and the triumphalism of the market. While there are many moving images of the towers in film prior to 2001, likely numbering several hundred, these are moments that are usually captured very briefly and fleetingly. In effect, moving images of the WTC are scattered fragments that exist in a broad number of audiovisual works. In more local terms, New York City is represented in film as a problematic and decaying urban space in contrast to the optimistic financial world represented by the WTC. There are a number of films that make use of the towers not only as a background image iconic of the New York City skyline during the period between 1973 and 2001, but as a controversial landmark that is part of a wider cultural discourse involving the uneven economic, social, and political development of the United States and, on a much larger scale, the rest of the world.

Post-2001, moving images of the WTC take on new and uncanny meanings. These are images which now have a strong afterlife and which reinforce the image as a ruin of its profilmic moment. When experienced retrospectively in film, the towers function as a ghostly presence that haunts both the frame and landscape. The fleeting appearance of the towers punctures and disrupts the flow of a film's images. This is not only true of films released prior to 2001, but also of films released after the attacks that recreate the WTC for its skyline using computer generated imagery (CGI). The towers are never merely present, as they possess a deeply complex and ever-evolving iconicity. However, when assembled and gathered, these fragmentary and fleeting appearances of the WTC come to both represent and symbolize the events of September 11th. To understand the experiential phenomenon of moving images of the WTC, it is first prudent to consider the historical context that led to this monument's inauguration in 1973, and to situate critically the discourse that developed in response to its place in the city soon afterwards.

Neoliberal Globalization

Neoliberal Globalization from 1973 to 2001 increased rapidly, as the world became more and more interconnected through the spread of transplanetary and supraterritorial interrelationships.[1] A contributing factor to this new world order was the development of a range of digital technologies, which reduced the distance between previously disparate regions and made communication increasingly instant and simultaneous. Jan Aart Scholte stipulates a surge in global connectivity following international calls and international bank loans.[2] In the physical sense, transplanetary relations, like transportation, bridged the planet, shrinking and compressing the world for mobile individuals, giving them greater access to travel and opportunity to explore. In the specific context of the WTC, supraterritorial relations allowed communication to develop and to exist in a virtual world. Under this paradigm, financial capital was dematerialized and set free; it was now possible for money to move more freely and new financial products to become available. Almost any place on earth could now be easily accessed.[3] However, accessibility, stability, and sustainability began to emerge as areas of conflict within this new neoliberal order.[4]

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[1] Jan Aart Scholte argues that globalization can be conceived of as the spread of transplanetary and supraterritorial relations between people. These are two components of globalization which also tend to intermingle. Transplanetary globalization refers to the physical and multidirectional flow of people across the globe, or the physical movement of bodies from one place to another. Scholte cites the infamous trade network, the Silk Road, as an archaic form of transplanetary globalization. Meanwhile, supraterritorial globalization is defined by a virtual framework, one that is delinked from territory, or by what Scholte sees as facilitating an increasingly borderless world. There is no movement of the body through physical space The global circulation of dematerialized financial capital would be an instance of supraterritoriality, and is of background relevancy to this thesis. For more see Jan Aart Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

[2] Jan Aart Scholte, *Globalization: A Critical Introduction*, 86.

[3] *Ibid*., 90.

[4] For the purposes of this thesis, neoliberalism is treated as a condition, and/or economic, political, and social consequence resulting from the flow, or lack of, dematerialized global finance capital. The process of neoliberalization accelerated under the austerity policies enacted by both Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, although archaic forms of neoliberalism can be traced back to the retooling of the global market economy with the Bretton Woods' Conference (1944) following the Second World War (1939-1944). David Harvey describes neoliberalism as a process that values market exchange as "an ethic in itself, capable of acting as a guide to all human action, and substituting for all previously held ethical beliefs, it emphasizes the significance of contractual relations in the marketplace. It holds that social good will be maximized by maximizing the reach and frequency of market transactions, and it seeks to bring all human action into the domain of the market." Furthermore, Harvey concludes that neoliberalism has primarily been a "political project to re-establish the conditions for capital accumulation and to restore the power of economic elites." For more see David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 1-38.

Discussing the modern dilemmas resulting from neoliberalism, the Raqs Media Collective argues: "Capital transforms older forms of labour and ways of life into those that are either useful for it at present, or those that have no function and so must be made redundant. Thus you have the paradox of a new factory, which instead of creating new jobs renders the people who live around 'unemployable'; a new dam that instead of providing irrigation, renders a million displaced…"[5] Due to rapid neoliberal globalization, skills and objects quickly lose their relevancy. Labourers are forced to adapt and to struggle in a market that is both demanding and always in flux, as corporations strive to meet, anticipate, and stifle the competition. This produces a playing field that is highly speculative and very volatile. Indeed, the plight of the individual intensified from 1973-2001, for he or she was forgotten in favour of the needs of the corporation and/ or the nation state. The bright promises of the post-war years were lofty and unobtainable, or could have been obtainable, had the state undertaken a more equitable distribution of wealth. Privatization and the demands of corporate self-interest have for the most part deprived the public from sharing in this newly created transnational wealth.

While the globe has been bridged through transplanetary means, it is equally true that the movements of the individual are circumscribed by his or her wealth and status. In most cases, financial means and documentation are required in order to access air travel. The availability of documents might be easier, but an individual's mobility is often determined by his or her financial position. Having more money and a certain status likely guarantees greater mobility. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984), Michel de Certeau is concerned with the mobility of the individual, the way in which spatial practices secretly structure the conditions of social life in a restrictive capitalistic system.[6] From his vantage point atop of the 110th floor of the WTC, Certeau observes an array of vertical columns in front of him, where the "extremes of ambition and degradation, brutal oppositions of races and styles, contrasts between yesterday's buildings, already transformed into trash cans, and today's urban irruptions that block out its space."[7] Below

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[5] Melanie Gilligan, and Marina Vishmidt, "X Notes on Practice: Stubborn Structures and Insistent Seepage in a Networked World" in *Raqs Media Collective* (2005).

[6] Michel De Certeau, "Walking in the City," in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, 91-110), 96.

[7] Michel De Certeau, "Walking in the City," 91.

him, Certeau sees a geometrical city, rationalized in its structuring and functional in its approach to life. It provides the blueprint for the ground-level movement of New York City dwellers, but it also imposes itself upon the individual through its disciplined organization, contributing in many ways to a bifurcation of power. On the 110th floor, Certeau reads a poster with the *Icarian* message: "*It's hard to be down when you're up.*"[8] From his perch, close to the clouds, he is temporarily removed from the anonymity of the crowd. For Certeau the WTC becomes a place of spatial detachment, allowing for critical observation and thoughtful reflection.

Uneven Urban Development

Gwyneth Shanks reminds us that when the WTC was first planned, it was strongly opposed by both the press and the public.[9] The construction of the Twin Towers in Downtown Lower Manhattan was essentially an urban renewal project meant to bolster the city's finances and consolidate the city's position as an economic hub. The completion of the WTC in 1973 was, however, problematic from the start. It seems that the WTC overwhelmed the city with excess office space. Shanks notes that demand for office space "declined due to rising unemployment," and the market was subsequently inundated with thousands of units of available office space, which led office and residential rent rates across Manhattan to drop significantly, stagnating and inflating the city's economy.[10] Uneven development in New York City during the 1970s resulted partly from the Nixon administration's decision to end federal support for low-income housing. Sites like the Battery Park City lot, adjacent to the WTC, were left vacant and abandoned. Here, Shanks writes: "Floundering under rising interest rates, increasing unemployment, and ballooning debt, neither could fund construction at the landfill. The vacant site revealed the impossible myth of ever-triumphant urban development and renewal and showed that ghosting every urban plan is the possibility of perpetual deferral."[11] The U.S. government, as well as the municipality of New

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[8] *Ibid*., 92.

[9] Gwyneth Shanks, "The Politico-Aesthetics of Groundlessness and Philippe Petit's High-Wire Walk," *Performance Matters* 2.2 (2016): 44, accessed November 22, 2017.

[10] Gwyneth Shanks, "The Politico-Aesthetics of Groundlessness and Philippe Petit's High-Wire Walk," 52.

[11] *Ibid*., 53.

York City, chose to allocate funds into big money investments supporting the lifestyle of the neoliberal elite at the expense of everyone else. Shanks provides a still from Robert Zemeckis' *The Walk* (2015) in order to articulate the implicit contradictions behind the WTC.

Figure 1: Philippe Petit (Joseph Gordon-Levitt) in *The Walk* (2015), dir. Robert Zemeckis

The Walk is a dramatization of Petit's death defying tightrope act, which he performed on August 7, 1974, and in many ways the film operates as a eulogy for the towers in the post-2001 context, while at the same time articulating a critique of neoliberal globalization and panopticism. The still above depicts Petit lying flat on his back on a wire suspended between the roofs of the two symmetrical structures. He uses his pole to keep himself steady against the wind. The Twin Towers appear to sparkle in their freshly inaugurated ornamental design. In stark contrast is the dingy and vacant Battery Park City lot, which can be seen far below the WTC on the right side of the frame. Shanks argues:

> The landfill, which lingered for over a decade as an expanse of undeveloped land, pointedly reveals the lack of federal, state, or municipal support for the project. The juxtaposition between the WTC and the landfill renders legible the tension embedded within a politico-aesthetics of groundlessness; it is a tension that plays on the literalness of Petit's groundless walk and the underdeveloped, abandoned ground of the landfill. Groundlessness frames the lack of financial support that left the landfill abandoned and, more broadly, left so many of the city's citizens neglected and funding for social services gutted. The vacant landfill and the towering WTC each rendered legible an earlier,

> brighter moment in the city's planning, one backed by big money and sleek midcentury designs. If the empty landfill, devoid of development, more clearly telegraphed the city's financial instability, the WTC remained no less an image of the city's instability: a large-scale building project conceived over and above (literally) the welfare of the city's residents.[12]

In effect, New Yorkers, "as reflected in community protests and articles in the *New York Times,* disliked the WTC" and, at the time of their inauguration, the towers were criticized as "large and imposing" as they blocked out sunlight from surrounding blocks and displaced numerous small business owners who had long worked in Lower Manhattan.[13] Shanks argues that it was Petit's tight rope performance that helped humanize the towers, giving them their iconicity. His walk, however, which epitomized non-conformity, ultimately came to be "re-packaged as publicity" for the buildings. Following his stunt, the 107th, and 110th floors of the WTC were converted into public observation decks, where Certeau later stood to advance his own critique of urban development.[14] While the towers may have been made more accessible to the public, making for greater acceptance following Petit's performance, their neoliberal signification persisted in film from 1973 to 2001 for many of the same reasons.

History and the Construction of the WTC

Early planning for the WTC unfolded during a period of global economic resurgence. In July 1944, allied nations met in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire, for the Bretton Woods' Conference, formally referred to as the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference, chaired by John Maynard Keynes and Harry Dexter White. As the Second World War (1939-1944) neared its end, allies sought to establish an international system that would prevent future wars. By creating an open world market, it was believed that trade would be freed from political and economic barriers, and nations would therefore be less inclined to enter into interstate conflict with one another, as they would now be dependent on one another's trade partnership and support. Discussing

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[12] *Ibid*., 54-55.

[13] *Ibid*., 44.

[14] *Ibid*., 47.

Bretton Woods, David Harvey writes: "Free trade in goods was encouraged under a system of fixed exchange rates anchored by the US dollar's convertibility into gold at a fixed price. Fixed exchange rates were incompatible with free flows of capital that had to be controlled."[15] The US allowed the free flow of the dollar beyond its borders in order for it to function as the global reserve currency. The Bretton Woods' agreements, as a precursor to neoliberalism, was based on the idea that participating nations should accept that the state "should focus on full employment, economic growth, and the welfare of its citizens, and that state power should be freely deployed, alongside of or, if necessary, intervening in or even substituting for market processes to achieve these ends."[16] Resulting from the conference was the establishment of multilateral organizations like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD). The objectives and accomplishments of the Bretton Woods' Conference were, however, founded upon rather utopian ideals.

In the ensuing years the working conditions for labour deteriorated and opened to exploitation and abuse. The conference also failed to establish international stability. John Mearsheimer notes: "International relations is not a constant state of war, but it is a state of relentless security competition, with the possibility of war always in the background."[17] He further emphasizes the international system as a "brutal arena where states look for opportunities to take advantage of each other, and therefore have little reason to trust each other whereby daily life is essentially a struggle for power, where each state strives not only to be the most powerful actor in the system, but also to ensure that no other state achieves that lofty position."[18] A consequence of international competition is also the uneven geographical development of nations. Harvey discusses the trade relations which developed between Mexico and the US following Bretton Woods, noting that in 1956, the controlled entry of foreign capital under the Maquila Programme allowed US capital to produce goods in Mexico's border zone with the advantage of using cheap

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[15] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 10.

[16] *Ibid*., 10.

[17] John J. Mearsheimer,"The False Promise of International Institutions," *International Security* 19.3 (1994-1995): 9, accessed November 22, 2017.

[18] John J. Mearsheimer,"The False Promise of International Institutions," 9.

labour that was unhindered by any tariffs or restrictions on commodity movements.[19] The economies of Mexico and the US were intertwined, but there was an imbalance between the two countries.When an early 1980s recession hit the US, demand for Mexican produced products decreased, reducing Mexico's state revenue, while the cost of servicing the debt soared.[20]

Mexico was forced to declare bankruptcy in 1982. They subsequently appealed to the IMF, World Bank, and US Treasury for financial support. Mexico received a bailout, but it came at a steep cost, as the country had to implement neoliberal reforms such as: "privatization, reorganization of the financial system in ways more consistent with foreign interests, the opening of internal markets to foreign capital, lowering tariff barriers, and the construction of more flexible labour markets."[21] The effects of opening Mexico to the global economy under these conditions were in the long run detrimental to the population. Mexico City went from being one of the more tranquil cities in Latin America to one of the most dangerous, as a perpetual crime wave seized the country within a decade of the nation's attempt at economic reform.[22] It seems then that in the dematerialized market-driven world, geopolitical dependency has an element of unpredictability. Changes and fluctuations in the market can lead to an erosion of partnership and support between countries. Total international cooperation is very difficult to regulate, as the needs of one nation tend to be placed before the needs of any others. Equilibrium is non-existent. The move to privatization in Mexico, after the country's declaration of bankruptcy in 1982 due to a recession in the US, left lower and middle classes vulnerable and in a position to be exploited, thus providing an opening for a corporate elite to rise to power. Historical examples such as the fallout from the Maquila Programme reveal the reality of asymmetrical power relations between nations in the global transnational market. The economic and political culture of neoliberalism imperialistically imposes itself upon nations seeking market integration and partnership in unpredictable ways. The WTC was seen as both emblematic of, and, at the center of, this oppressive market regime.

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[19] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism*, 98.

[20] *Ibid*., 99.

[21] *Ibid*., 99-100.

[22] *Ibid*., 100.

The idea to build a WTC in New York City was first raised in 1946 and was subsequently taken up by David Rockefeller and his Downtown-Lower Manhattan Association in 1956.[23] Shortly afterwards, the Rockefeller-led Manhattan Association decided to sponsor the Port Authority, which was then charged with the development, ownership, and operation of the WTC.[24] Founded in 1921, the Port Authority continues to function as a "bistate, semiautonomous entrepreneurial institution" responsible for "maximizing the revenue-generating flow of goods, vehicles, and people that pass within and through New York's harbour, bridges, tunnels, and airports."[25] David Salomon argues that it was the Port Authority's experience in designing, building, and operating pieces of urban infrastructure, along with its power of eminent domain that made it the "only existing agency qualified to take on, and to pay for, a project that advertised itself as being both profit driven and in the public interest."[26] The New York City WTC was conceived as neither a governmental nor as a cultural institution; rather, it was first established as a speculative site for the economic reinvigoration of the Lower-Manhattan core. The challenge, however, lay in appointing an architect who would give form to the commission's lofty ambition.

Architect Minoru Yamasaki is generally considered to have been the lead builder and auteur behind the WTC. While certainly not the only creative mind to bring the building into physical existence, Yamasaki was one of the project's driving forces. He was initially tasked with creating an icon that would represent the increasing interdependence of international commerce and the world peace that was anticipated following Bretton Woods. It was felt that the building's architectural design should evoke this in its design.[27] However, the selection of Yamasaki was a bold decision given that his reputation had been damaged some years prior to his appointment to the project. In 1956, as part of the promised post-war urban renewal projects, the Wendell O.

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[23] David L. Salomon, "Divided Responsibilities: Minoru Yamasaki, Architectural Authorship, and the World Trade Center," *Grey Room* 7 (2002): 94, accessed November 22, 2017.

[24] David L. Salomon, "Divided Responsibilities: Minoru Yamasaki, Architectural Authorship, and the World Trade Center," 88.

[25] *Ibid*., 88.

[26] *Ibid*., 88.

[27] *Ibid*., 88.

Pruitt Homes and the William Igoe Apartments, or the Pruitt-Igoe, a series of housing projects in St-Louis, Missouri, were inaugurated. Yamasaki was appointed lead builder, making this his first major project. It is worth noting that all this happened prior to the civil rights movement in the United States. The project was conceived with separate blocks reserved for black and white Americans. Advancements in civil rights ended these policies, at least on paper, if not in practice, as processes of ghettoization remained in place even into the 21st century. Attempts at gentrifying these modern St-Louis blocks failed following the end of legally enforced segregation, and the Pruitt-Igoe ceased to be, becoming a major failure in urban renewal. Its blocks were systematically demolished in the 1970s.

Minoru Yamasaki was no doubt left devastated by the disastrous result of his first project. While part of the Pruitt-Igoe's failure was because of entrenched racism and poor public policy targeting low-income workers, the buildings also had their share of structural problems, and were beyond recuperation. Architecturally the buildings were not sound. The units were plagued by poor ventilation. Narrow corridors and stairwells left tenants vulnerable to thieves, and at one point the blocks came to be overpopulated.[28] As a modern neighbourhood, the Pruitt-Igoe was intended to fulfill the credo of modernity, to maximize efficiency and space at a low cost. Yet the project substantially exceeded its budget. The structural and ideological failure of the Pruitt-Igoe prompted Yamasaki to reconsider and critically reevaluate his formal and stylistic approach, which radically affected his architectural conception of the WTC.

Reportedly, a 1954 trip to the Far East, India, and Europe, led Yamasaki to question modernism's dogmatic formal and ideological restrictions. His exposure to the many different historical traditions across the Atlantic helped him upon returning to the United States to actively incorporate historical and ornamental forms into his work in an attempt to produce what he viewed to be more "serene" and "humanist" spaces.[29] The WTC was envisioned by Yamasaki as a subversion of the prevailing architectural norms that emphasized "hyperrationality" and "efficiency per-

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[28] Lawrence Larsen, and Richard Stewart Kirkendall, *A History of Missouri 1953-2003*, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2004, 60-63.

[29] David L. Salomon, "Divided Responsibilities: Minoru Yamasaki, Architectural Authorship, and the World Trade Center," 90.

formance." The form of the WTC was meant to express "enjoyment" and "delight."[30] The two pillars were meant to be harmonious in material form.

Although the pseudo-Gothic style of the WTC was initially criticized by both traditionalists and modernists, they eventually appreciated the formal audacity and technological advances represented by the WTC.[31] Moving away from modernism, Yamasaki was especially interested in prefabricated building components and precast concrete. The exterior bearing walls were designed by Yamasaki and his own hand-picked structural engineer, John Skilling, using technologically advanced methods and material. Salomon describes the building's design as:

> enormous Vierendeel trusses made up of hundreds of prefabricated sections. As in the IBM tower, the absence of a structural frame allowed the interior spaces to be column-free, providing the maximum flexibility and efficiency for tenants and landlords alike. The extreme height of the Twin Towers required that each exterior column be a fourteen inch, square steel box column spaced at only three feet four inches on center, a structural design that resulted in twenty-two-inch windows between the columns. Clad in aluminum, the façade differed from the standard and ubiquitous metal-and-glass curtain wall in that it completely integrated the previously separate functions of structural, enclosure, and fenestration systems.[32]

The result was two nearly symmetrical vertical forms that secured for themselves an enviable position of dominance on the New York City skyline; the building's form was harmonious and unified, which pleased Yamasaki's benefactors, both the Rockefeller Manhattan group and the Port Authority. Despite its post-modern sensibility, the harmony of the WTC symbolically captured the economic harmony believed to be present and definitive of an open and free market, representing the exchange in relations between nations. On this, Yamasaki is quoted as saying: "The WTC should, because of its importance, become a representation of man's belief in humanity, his need for individual dignity, his beliefs in the cooperation of men, and through cooperation, his ability to find greatness."[33] However, to reiterate Mearsheimer, an open and free market places every nation in a state of competition and has potentially detrimental consequences for each na-

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[30] *Ibid*., 90.

[31] *Ibid*., 90.

[32] *Ibid*., 92.

[33] Gwyneth Shanks, "The Politico-Aesthetics of Groundlessness and Philippe Petit's High-Wire Walk," 51.

tion's citizens. Harmony can never truly be achieved under this model as each nation seeks to prosper, and strives to strike the more favourable bargain for itself. These are economic and social practices that prey on other countries' misfortunes and their position of weakness in the market. As Harvey puts it: "The anarchy of the market, of competition, and unbridled individualism generates a situation that becomes increasingly ungovernable. It may even lead to a breakdown of all bonds of solidarity and a condition verging on social anarchy and nihilism."[34] The utopic harmony that the WTC was meant to inspire, and the American exceptionalism it stood for, did not adequately capture the asymmetrical realities of capitalism emerging in the globalizing world. For capitalist apologists, on the other hand, the towers stood for the triumph of the global transnational market structure. It was through cinema that the Twin Towers came to be understood as symbolic of a disharmonious and unstable American state and market economy, representing, in turn, a culture of excess for many. This view can be attributed partly to the uneven distribution of wealth and social opportunity that became characteristic of the neoliberal state. Such conditions have only worsened since the 1970s, and films often represent the struggle of the individual caught in the abuses of capitalist economic practice.

Literature Review

The subject of September 11th, 2001 has been written on extensively, particularly, in terms of its impact on film, television, and literature, Anna Froula, in her essay, "What Keeps Me Up at Night: Media Studies Fifteen Years After 9/11," provides a comprehensive sketch of the available scholarship that is concerned with "analyzing the resulting discursive shifts, tropes, and representations of terrorism, war, and surveillance in popular culture since 9/11."[35] Froula argues that the "seemingly ever-impending disasters that have plagued the popular imagination in the wake of US and multinational responses" to the terror attacks, continues to "reengender fear in the collective unconscious."[36] She understands post-9/11 texts to have a wider scope, as the af-

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[34] David Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism,* 82.

[35] Anna Froula, "What Keeps Me Up at Night: Media Studies Fifteen Years After 9/11," *Cinema Journal* 56.1 (2016): 112-113, accessed May 30, 2018.

[36] Anna Froula, "What Keeps Me Up at Night: Media Studies Fifteen Years After 9/11," 112.

termaths of the event deal with "compounded chaos in warzones and increased national and international surveillance. They intersect with crisis in climate and infrastructure readiness (or lack of readiness), global hunger, increasingly hypertoxic environments, and "superbugs," such as the Zika virus."[37] Drawing from Fabrizio Cilento, Froula acknowledges further how many post-9/11 films and media texts "in essence are documents of desperation, failure, and loss."[38] American cinema, after the attacks, is defined by narratives and content that either explicitly or implicitly evoke these sentiments. Grief and mourning are mediated on screen through an allegorical use of images, for instance, and much has been written on the state of the horror genre and the representation of military violence and torture in post-9/11 American cinema.

Roger Stahl is concerned with the rise of "militainment," or the manner in which state violence has been translated into an object of "pleasurable consumption" and can serve a "propaganda function," whereby "entertainment media have become subject to an invisible hand, a network of corporate and government interests that nudges cultural narratives to the profitably bellicose."[39] Guy Westwall argues in *Parallel Lines: Post 9/11 American Cinema*, that various conceptions of a "national identity" often compete with one another. He discusses how the film industry altered release schedules so that a cycle of war films that reinforced a jingoistic response to the attacks created a narrative in which torture and retribution were seen as both necessary and an effective means for winning the war on terror.[40] Responses that criticized the dominant media and political discourse on September 11th were declared unamerican and unpatriotic. This tended to be the case with films that held the U.S accountable for the attacks, suggesting it was a result of American foreign policy. Thus, Westwall emphasizes how post-9/11 cinema seeks "mechanisms for reconciling political difference in service of hegemonic renewal."[41] He is concerned with how the US "reveals a sense of self via popular culture," and how such a "fraught revelation

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[37] *Ibid*, 112.

[38] *Ibid*., 114.

[39] *Ibid*., 116.

[40] Guy Westwall, *Parallel Lines: Post 9/11 American Cinema*, (Colombia: Colombia University Press, 2014), 41.

[41] Guy Westwall, *Parallel Lines: Post 9/11 American Cinema*, 14.

is a marker of wider political struggle."[42] In line with Westwall, Karen Randell posits a series of underlying principles and emotions which guide and generate a "9/11 aesthetic."[43] Post-2001 films, particularly, genre and superhero films, reverberate with a look that recalls the wreckage of September 11th. Randell places an emphasis on the materiality of collapsing verticals - the debris and shrapnel which fall from above; she argues that fifteen years after the attack, "American popular culture is no nearer to assimilating the traumatic experience of 9/11…rather, the belated repeated image of the destroyed city and its aftermath point to the ways in which this event remains a wound in the American psyche."[44] Cathy Caruth writes that "a traumatic event cannot be 'assimilated' or experienced fully at the time, but only belatedly, in its repeated possession of the one who experiences it."[45] There is no easy resolution to representing the moment after the event, according to Randell, as trauma is not linear, and is only understood through a circular return to the site, which in American genre cinema is continuously signalled by the recurring image of urban wreckage.[46] In the post-2001 years, traumatic reactions to the attacks come to fruition in varying capacity in American visual culture, and have only evolved as the years have unfolded.

The events of September 11th, 2001 sparked a vast volume of critical work and study, of which continues to develop and expand even at the time of this writing. Discourse was generated as soon as the planes made impact with the towers, and European cultural theorists such as Jean Baudrillard, Paul Virilio, and Slovaj Žižek, were quick to situate, and attribute the terror attacks to the United States' larger history of oppressive and imperialistic foreign policy. They argued that the attacks of the day should not be seen as a separate event; rather, that they should be seen as an event within a series of interconnected events occurring as a result of an increasingly globalizing world, for which the United States is to be held accountable, given their prominent status at the time of the attacks and, due also to the active lengths they went to secure and maintain said

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[42] *Ibid*., 15.

[43] Karen Randell, "It Was Like a Movie, Take 2: Age of Ultron and a 9/11 Aesthetic," *Cinema Journal* 56.1 (2016): 138, accessed January 30, 2018.

[44] Karen Randell, "It Was Like a Movie, Take 2: Age of Ultron and a 9/11 Aesthetic," 139.

[45] *Ibid.*, 139.

[46] *Ibid*., 139.

status. Critical tropes of Americanization and Westernization figure prominently in this discussion, as developing nations were threatened by the dominance and pervasiveness of US ideology and culture. Baudrillard writes: "The collapse of the Twin Towers is the major symbolic event. Imagine they had not collapsed, or only one had collapsed: the effect would not have been the same at all. The fragility of all global power would not have been so strikingly proven"[47] The attacks of September 11th were aggressive acts of resistance enacted in order to challenge and undermine an exceedingly monolithic order within a globalizing world that discriminated against those outside the Eurocentric and Western paradigm. While the events of September 11th, have had far-reaching international and global ramifications, and the attacks themselves can be seen as reactionary, there is a need to understand the effect of the attacks on their local site, which European cultural theorists neglected to do so amidst their polemics aimed at the US.

Responding to Žižek's criticism, E. Ann Kaplan believed that the "political/ psychic symbolism of the attacks" was overstated, and that he looked "at the event from a distant intellectual perspective."[48] She did, however, agree that the attacks "broke through an illusory haze in which many Americans had been living."[49] Walking the streets of New York in the aftermath of September 11th, Kaplan observed the extent of the attack's impact on the city's locals; how its citizens were left in a state of mourning and grief, and suffering from trauma. Thus, she saw a need for therapy, and a much needed public-discussion on the nature of the attacks that did not forsake substantial political analysis.[50] The takeaway is the complexity of September 11th, and the range and diversity of people at the local, national, and international levels who have been affected across time and different periods due to various forms of policy enacted within the globalizing world, aimed primarily at ascertaining and maximizing wealth at the expense of others. September 11th, 2001 is the end of a chapter in human history and the marker of a new chapter that will likely continue to be defined by struggle and security competition.

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[47] Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Requiem for the Twin Towers,* (New York: Verso, 2002), 47.

[48] E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*, (New York: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 15.

[49] E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*, 15.

[50] *Ibid*., 16.

Methodology

This study gathers and critically assembles various representations of the Twin Towers in order to find new meaning for their representation in film prior to 2001, along with the double meaning they acquired in light of their material destruction and absence. To do so, this thesis relies on a textual analysis of select films in which the towers appear, and utilizes a stylistic and formal language to dissect their visual and narrative treatment, and situates them further as a crucial node within neoliberalism. It examines films such as *Taxi Driver* (1976), *The American Friend* (1988), and *Fight Club* (1999) with the objective of assessing the presence and symbolic use of the WTC. Frequently, the towers are indexed by way of a long shot; other times they are captured through the frames formed by buildings and urban objects in the space of New York. The towers loom in the mise en scène, obtaining greater visibility in old films in the post-2001 period. Prior to 2001, the towers were invisible - an architectural component of the skyline to be taken for granted. The indexation of the towers in moving images nonetheless requires attentiveness on the part of the spectator, as their appearance is often fleeting and fragmentary. Thus, this thesis is concerned with the towers and their semiosis. It acknowledges how the towers came into being, along with how their destruction increased their symbolic role and allowed them to enter into an infinitely imaginary realm in American and global consciousness.

Post-2001, representations of the towers undergo a shift, as filmmakers are forced to recreate the structure for the skyline when they are dealing with a period in time that takes place prior to the attacks, such is the case with *Munich* (2005), *Watchmen* (2009), and *A Most Violent Year* (2014). The use of the towers in these films is allegorical, which is to emphasize the structure's rich iconography. The WTC possesses and acquires different meanings at different times; it is the endeavour of this work to critically assess the monument's various representations throughout cinematic history. An intervention of this nature, where the focus is on the structure's indexation in film has yet to be conducted, as the emphasis in "9/11 studies" tends to be on reading formal and narrative arrangements in American films that are symptomatic of September 11th. This work is, however, constrained by the volume of fiction films which contain the trace of the towers, and it does not detail every appearance. Furthermore, and for the most part, this thesis is informed by a North American context, and consists primarily of a corpus of American films. It is

hardly comprehensive in the sense that the towers themselves can be considered from a myriad of perspectives. The towers should also be situated within a discourse that is beyond the binaries of West/East and US/Terrorism that have evolved since September 11, 2001. Ultimately, future moving image studies of the towers in audiovisual culture would do well to locate the towers in films outside the Hollywood paradigm. In this thesis, both *The American Friend* and *News from Home* (1977) are marked by the styles of their respective European directors. Wim Wenders is from Germany, while Chantal Akerman is from Belgium. The towers play a key narrative and formal role in both of these films, albeit to different effects. Even in the pre-2001 context, the towers possess the capacity to lure and solicit the gaze of the tourist, or of the filmmaker, which is to say that this thesis is partially concerned with how the outsider looks in on American culture and represents it by way of the towers. It would therefore be worthwhile to expand this research by tracing and charting the appearance of this monument in cinemas from all around the globe both prior to and after the events of 2001. For now, this thesis is driven mostly by the presence of the towers in American film.

This thesis draws from Walter Benjamin throughout, notably, his conceptualization of the image as a ruin of its profilmic moment and, also, his musings on the afterlife of the image.[51] Essentially, it reconsiders the towers' status as traces in photographic media and audiovisual culture, and examines how they have resisted a totalizing meaning. In this regard, the material aesthetics of film advanced by Siegfried Kracauer are likewise fundamental to a number of arguments advanced throughout, as he discusses at length the camera's ability to capture the anonymous state of reality.[52] With this in mind, Kracauer's focus is not with what is foregrounded or central to the narrative; rather, it is with the residual detail that resides in the background. For example, the face in the crowd, or the architecture of buildings, which have been indexed by way of composition and the recording capabilities of the camera. Retrospectively returning to moving images, viewers notice objects, or events that escaped their notice upon first viewing, which is the case with

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[51] See Walter Benjamin, "Little History of Photography," *Selected Writings Volume 2 1927-1934*, (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 507-528.

[52] Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1960, 69.

the towers in film post-2001, for they may or may not stand out and affect the viewer's response in new ways. This study treats the appearance of the towers as a ghost that haunts the frame.

Structure

This thesis is divided into two chapters. The first chapter focuses on the presence of the WTC in film prior to 2001. This is a historically situated consideration of the towers, and does not take into account the events of September 11th, as the emphasis is on the structure's life prior to its destruction rather than on its absence. As will be argued, while the towers were able to evoke touristic awe and prompt wonder due to their overwhelming stature and revolutionary design, a number of films make use of the towers as a symbol of economic, political, and social conflict and disparity. Chapter one begins by examining the omnipresence and geographical positioning of the WTC in film. These are often evocative representations of the towers that are both popular and romantic. This chapter then traces the appearance of the WTC in neo-noir, disaster, and science fiction films and, in turn, argues that the narrative and visual placement of it in film is used to highlight the disparities created by the flow, or lack of capital. Filmmakers consciously represent the towers as both an oppressive presence and as a celebration of consumer culture, usually being very critical of the building's place in the urban fabric of the New York City grid. It is argued further that the towers are emblematic of urban decay. While the destruction of the towers prompted people to mourn their absence and loss, the WTC was disliked by many during its lifetime, as it was viewed to have helped consolidate class power at the expense of the less fortunate. Representations of the towers in film address these concerns.

The second chapter focuses on the absence of the WTC in film post-2001. It begins by taking into consideration the immediate impact of September 11th on American cinema, while also examining the wider cultural and nationalistic discourse which developed in response to the event. A number of New York City films that include shots of the towers were scheduled for release following the terror attacks, for instance, *Spider-Man* (2002). The destruction of the WTC, however, prompted its removal from these films. An effort to sympathetically represent New York City was encouraged by the United States' government as a means of uniting the nation and inspiring patriotic fervor. More importantly, the scrubbing of the towers was the result of a collec-

tive belief in Hollywood that the structure's presence would be difficult for audiences to cope with; it could possibly solicit the unwanted memory of its destruction and cause an unpleasant response in viewers. As will be argued, neo-conservative visions of New York dissipate as the century unfolds. A number of genre films recall the terror attacks via the imagined destruction and total collapse of the vertical city. These are images that take on strong metaphorical meaning, but arguably re-appropriate the destruction that took place on September 11th.

Although a tradition had developed in the 1990s to depict the destruction of the towers in disaster films, in the post-2001 period, the tendency now is to recreate the towers using CGI in order to represent it as visually and materially intact. In this context, the towers do not come under threat, yet the towers are once again represented as a neoliberal monument, and are treated as symbolic of the wider struggles of individuals represented within the corpus of considered films herein. These are individuals who fail to live up to their hopes and aspirations, and stumble within the turbulent rapids of global transnational capitalism. Chapter two then moves to argue that the retrospective re-visiting of films released prior to 2001, and which represent the towers, acquire new meanings. Aside from preserving some of the final visual and material vestiges of the structure, the sight of the towers is likely to stir the memory of its absence, in which the images of the towers puncture the flow of a given film. This phenomenon is enhanced by the specific formal and stylistic qualities of moving images of the WTC - primarily shot duration, or the protracted presence of the monument on screen. This is to emphasize that moving images of the WTC, while fragmentary and fleeting, possess a strong afterlife and are temporally layered. Post-2001, the towers remain a spectral phantom which haunt the frame and landscape.

Chapter 1: The Presence of the WTC in Film Prior to 2001

Following their inauguration in 1973, the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center (WTC), quickly became fundamental to New York City, as they obtained a picturesque position of grandeur and ornamental splendour on the skyline, akin to landmarks like the Empire State Building, or the Stature of Liberty. The towers induced awe and prompted wonderstruck for many a tourist navigating the streets with their polaroids, and who made the elevator hike up to the public observation decks on the 107th and 110th floors of this structure. As a financial monument to an integrated, and open world market, the WTC functioned to further consolidate New York City as a major global economic hub, while also announcing and strengthening the United States' position as an empire. The towers were initially conceived as a beacon of hope, and were founded on a utopic belief that through market cooperation, nations would cease to enter into conflict with one another, though, during its construction, the WTC was met with strong dissent.

Through cinema, the buildings became separated from their romantic iconography, and were treated as a symbol of the homogenizing and problematic attributes of capitalism and American imperial culture. Thus, this chapter begins by briefly tracing the romantic configuration of this monument in film prior to 2001, only to then consider the appearance of the towers in neo-noir.[1] This is done with the intention of demonstrating how the towers became representative of the uneven distribution and circulation of wealth, and were seen as emblematic of a wider state of precarity that was gripping both New York City, and the United States, especially throughout the 1970s and 1980s. Subsequently, this chapter examines the uncanny, and recurring destructions of the Twin Towers in a cycle of disaster films from the 1990s. This aesthetic of destruction foreshadows the absence and removal of the towers from the skyline in the pre-2001 period and, likewise, contemplates the effect their destruction would have on an integrated market economy. Finally, this chapter concludes by examining futuristic renditions of the towers, as the towers are

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[1] Popular in the 1940s and 1950s, film noir continues to be a debated topic in academia, with scholars and critics unable to agree upon whether it is a genre, style, theme, mood, form, texture, or a cycle. Neo-noir emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s when Hollywood, in financial crisis, turned to the possibilities of genre. Neo-noir is made by people familiar with the tropes and concepts of noir, however, neo-noir often tends to be subversive of classical noir. Neo-noir knows its working in the narrative tradition of noir, consciously making use of the latter's hyper-stylized formal elements, for instance, its expressive use of lighting and the mise-en-scène. See Mark Bould, Kathrina Glitre, and Greg Tuck "Parallax Views: An Introduction," in *Neo-Noir*, (London: Wallflower Press, 2009), 1-11.

depicted in a state of ruination in a world that has succumbed to totalitarian regimentation. While a focus is placed on the fragmentary and fleeting life of the WTC in the moving image, this chapter aims to read the representation of the towers in film in a context divorced from the events of September 11th. Thus, it eschews grand narratives which romanticize the existence of the towers in the urban fabric of New York by constituting them strictly romantic and, instead, recognizes the various facets of their controversy.

Romantic Wonderstruck

During the period of 1973-2001, the WTC was often captured on the New York City skyline in the form of long background shots that served to orient the viewer, effectively establishing the urban landscape of the film. The city operates as a centrifugal node in space, drawing people towards it, and the WTC becomes a focal point of awesomeness and wonder in film, adding to its iconicity. This is exemplified in the film *The Dream Team* (1989). Characters are drawn specifically to its presence and gaze upon it in awe. In the film, four psychiatric mental patients, accompanied by their chaperone, travel to New York on a field trip. They sing: "Hit the Road Jack" much to the displeasure of Billy Caufield (Michael Keaton). Their rendition of the Ray Charles classic is suddenly interrupted by their entrance into New York City. At the point where the skyline becomes visible via the highway, the five travelers in the car turn their heads to gape upon the city. Billy, a pathological liar, claims to have been an architect involved in the WTC project and jokingly recounts his decision to build two identical towers. He says: "First they just wanted to put up one. I said hey fellas! We're here. What the hell? Throw the other one up. Turned out pretty good." The Twin Towers appear in the left side of the frame, narrowly obscured by the highway rail barrier but visible underneath a clear blue sky.

The eye line of the characters matches the point of the WTC on the skyline, guided by both Billy's pointing gesture and his accompanying delusional commentary. For a fleeting period of time, the WTC becomes the central point of focus, signaling the caravan's arrival in the city. They are in awe; the Twin Towers are the most immediately recognizable structure. In scale, the other urban structures huddle below, dwarfed in comparison. Nothing comes close to surpassing the WTC in terms of physical size in New York; it is seemingly separate from the city and hijacks

the gaze of the traveler. Here, the presence of the WTC is less sinister than in other films. The towers' presence and composition in *The Dream Team* allows one to contemplate their potential to evoke awe and prompt wonderment in characters, momentarily, and with gleeful sincerity This effect is pervasive in many New York City films. The WTC's formal conception is rich and unique; it is a triumphant excess of modernist architectural design. It is as much a symbol of America's financial might as it is a touristic attraction of pseudo-Gothic design.[2]

Figure 2: Kevin McCallister (Macaulay Culkin) in *Home Alone 2: Lost in New York* (1992), dir. Chris Columbus

In *Home Alone 2: Lost in New York* (1992), Kevin McCallister (Macaulay Culkin) is once again separated from his family whilst vacationing during Christmas in the city. Kevin finds himself alone with his father's wallet in the Big Apple after boarding the wrong plane. Despite being a mere child of eight, the prospect of being alone does not at first discourage him from enjoying the attractions of the city. Charlotte Brunsdon stipulates a city 'arrival' trope, by describing a shot of the speechless wonder in Oliver (Mark Lester), from Carol Reed's 1968 adaption of Charles

[2] David L. Salomon, "Divided Responsibilities: Minoru Yamasaki, Architectural Authorship, and the World Trade Center," *Grey Room* 7 (2002): 90, accessed November 22, 2017.

Dickens' "Oliver Twist," as being fundamental to establishing the scale of the city in "absolute contrast" to the other rural spaces that he has previously experienced.[3] This modality of entering into an urban landscape for the first time is on display in *Home Alone.* Kevin hails a cab from the airport, and an aerial shot reveals the Manhattan Bridge. The camera subsequently pulls from an extreme long shot to a medium shot of the suburban child with his head outside the window. Kevin's jaw drops and his eyes widen, and a relatively rapid montage sequence showcasing the city follows. He roams the streets with his Polaroid capturing the street life and its various landmarks, while "All Alone on Christmas" roars non-diegetically in the background. Moving from Chinatown, where he buys fireworks, Kevin locates a pair of fixed binoculars with a view of the Statue of Liberty. A flock of seagulls fly up in front of the lenses, and the Statue of Liberty is then seen from Kevin's POV. A cut to a medium shot of Kevin with the binoculars obstructing his face follows and, from here, a cut to a low-angle close-up of the WTC seen from its concourse.

Figure 3: Kevin McCallister (Macaulay Culkin) in *Home Alone 2: Lost in New York* (1992), dir. Chris Columbus

[3] Charlotte Brunsdon, "The Attractions of the Cinematic City," *Screen* 53.3 (2012): 210-212, accessed January 29, 2019.

Panning from left to right, the camera tilts down, revealing Kevin walking towards the towers. As he goes up the steps leading towards the entrance, he is momentarily transfixed. The camera slowly zooms in on his face, resting on a bewildered expression, for he is awestruck by the structure's grandeur and scale. Kevin is seen taking photos from one of the tower's rooftops. Slowly, the camera pulls aerially away from the rooftop, and Kevin's body shrinks slowly out of sight amidst the clouds. The rooftop of the adjacent tower emerges into the frame, and the tips of both the towers come to dominate the frame via the moving camera. The wave of vertical structures resides far below, and neither tower challenges the other in height. The towers are isolated in their ascent to the clouds. Overwhelmed and alienated, thus ends an early montage sequence of Kevin's first experience in the city, as themes of loneliness subsequently seep in.

The WTC appears fundamental to the urban geography and identity of New York City in films prior to 2001 in which the gaze of characters is very much drawn to its dominating presence. When Craig Schwartz (John Cusack) first exits John Malkovich's mind in *Being John Malkovich* (1989), he finds himself in a ditch just off the New Jersey turnpike. Rising from the ditch, Craig observes the WTC in the distance, giving him a weak understanding of the spatial and temporal distance he has traveled and defied. In this instance, the WTC operates as a visual cue for the character, prompting him to assess his relationship and geospatial position in accordance with the structure. The Twin Towers are a context for place, but they also serve to remind Craig that he has returned to the monotony and precariousness of his everyday existence in the physical world. There is, however, a similarity in these recurring shots of the WTC in spite of the structure's various narrative roles, for the WTC often appears in the moving image as a node wherein the composition consists of lines converging upon it. The Twin Towers need not solely reside in the centre of the frame, as its centrifugal presence is reinforced by its sheer stature. In the abstract formal space of New York City, where endless horizontal and vertical lines intersect and come into proportional conflict, the WTC rises above everything else, separated from the cacophony of the urban asphalt jungle below. While varying in form, the monotonous palette of the city renders it labyrinth-like, permitting only a few recognizable structures to stand out.

Towering Precarity in Neo-Noir

The WTC and its socio-politico economic symbolism are often rendered explicit in film during its material existence in the final quarter of the twentieth century. Characters gaze upon its oppressive and commandeering presence, in which they observe its entrenched hierarchical dynamics. And yet the WTC did not need to be represented in its full stature in film as its presence in the city was already felt and known. Even when they are not present, the towers manage to exert influence. This is made apparent when considering appearances of the monument that are subtle and inadvertent in design, where residual traces of the structure linger out of focus in the frame. An instance of this occurs in *Taxi Driver* (1976). The towers are never fully present in the frame; rather, they appear out of focus in the center of windowpanes when Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) first acquires a firearm. Inevitably, retrospective viewings of New York City films are marked by the events of 2001, and the eye is led to wander the frame in search of its presence, seeking to discover the material vestiges found in its filmic record. The towers carry material weight in films made prior to their destruction, evident in the afterlife of moving images of the WTC. Viewers come to see new things upon seeing the film again.

Observing New York City's grid from atop the WTC, Michel De Certeau postulates the "modalities of pedestrian enunciation."[4] He argues that the trajectory of an individual speaks, as it details the manner in which one operates in the urban landscape.[5] De Certeau suggests further that the "long poem of walking manipulates spatial organizations, no matter how panoptic they may be."[6] However, Travis Bickle's spatial practices structure the determining conditions of his social life, and form his outlook of the world. Travis is a man who drives and walks the streets living a precarious existence. His position is slightly fixed and relegated by society. He resides within the strict perimeters of his neighbourhood, rarely deviating from his trajectory and routine. Travis is at once an outsider and, should one trust him, in spite of his madness, a veteran of the Vietnam War. The extent of his delusion is never fully revealed. Travis' reliability is denied in its

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[4] Michel De Certeau, "Walking in the City," in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans Steven Rendall. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, 91-110), 99.

[5] Michel De Certeau, "Walking in the City," 99.

[6] *Ibid*., 101.

own measure. His role in Vietnam is never elaborated upon or explained. One must simply take him at his word. Indeed, his relationship to the nation state is complex. At first Travis exhibits warmth to presidential hopeful, Charles Palantine (Leonard Harris). He agrees to side with him in a political race, provided that the senator help him flush the mess of New York City "down a fucking toilet." Travis' relationship and temporary pledge to Palantine is, however, directly influenced by his emotional and physical attraction to Betsy (Cybill Shepherd).

Travis identifies with Betsy, recognizing in her a similar loneliness. He voyeuristically observes her toiling alone behind her desk in the campaign office. In Travis, Betsy sees a walking set of contradictions. Despite her reservations, she agrees to go out with him, only to be taken to a pornographic film. Their relations quickly end at Betsy's request. In his loneliness, Travis is out of touch with society, alienated from its customs and people. He refers to himself as "god's lonely man." Formally the film's camera aesthetic helps to articulate this. When Betsy informs Travis over a payphone that she will no longer see him, the camera dollies laterally to the right, away from him, settling on an empty hallway. The shot reveals both his disconnection and isolation, as Roger Ebert once noted.[7] Long telephoto shots of Travis appear frequently throughout the film, showing him as he wanders the streets in anonymity. He is a face in the crowd, isolated only through soft focus. Travis is in an endless state of maddening, melancholic transition.

In "A Cinema of Loneliness," Robert Kolker cites *Taxi Driver* as a street film, observing that the alienated Travis is one of Martin Scorsese's many characters who do not have a "home that reflects security and comfort." The space of Manhattan is a "place of transition, of momentary situation."[8] Manhattan is represented as a hazardous place. Indeed, Travis is a witness to the atrocities characteristic of New York City's underbelly and consistently refers to a rain that will wash away the scum. He frequents a late night cafe that attracts drug addicts, pimps, and gangsters. Kolker argues that *Taxi Driver* is "not a documentary of the squalor of New York City but the documentation of a squalid mind driven mad by its perception."[9] There is an accepted correlation between poverty and crime, which is to say that Travis' excessive frequenting of Manhattan's

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[7] Roger Ebert, *Scorsese*, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2008), 40.

[8] Robert Kolker, *A Cinema of Loneliness*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), 180.

[9] Robert Kolker, *A Cinema of Loneliness,* 227.

late night strip and underbelly is depicted as having a socially formative bearing on him. His confinement to a set social space that is occupied by the city's neglect weighs upon him. Travis lives in a space of endless transition and instability - consequences of neoliberalization.

Figure 4: Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) in *Taxi Driver* (1976), dir. Martin Scorsese

The presence of the WTC is ever so subtle in *Taxi Driver,* and it is liable to evade even the most astute gaze. The existence of the towers, however, haunt the background, lurking in the window's frames while Travis ponders the selection of guns lain before him on the bed. The salesman lists off the qualities of each weapon, and Travis picks one up. The camera assumes his point of view, foretelling the style of first person shooters found in video games. Panning right, the camera traces Travis' line of vision; he takes aim at the unsuspecting streets below, listening, while the salesman explains the weapon's heightened accuracy features. The towers return to the frame, lingering in the centre. Satisfied, Travis decides to buy four guns. His meeting with the guns' salesman is preceded by what he sees as a moment of clarity in his life; he needs a "change," and the purchase of firepower appears as the solution to him, but foreshadows only violence. Amidst his squalor, armament gives Travis a sense of relevancy. And then, there, the structure haunts, but form, obscured from afar, suggesting a deeper source for the woes of Travis

and those in his world. The presence of the towers casts a large shadow upon the individuals in the crowd below, and *Taxi Driver* is situated in an increasingly globalizing world, within an economic structure that is pivoting rapidly towards a full embrace of neoliberalism. Travis is a New Yorker who exists in the margins of this order, rendering the film a time capsule that depicts the consequences of state and municipal neglect. The film accomplishes this not only through its treatment of the disenfranchised, but also through its portrayal of urban decline. Like the discarded Battery Field Park lot described by Shanks, the urban structures inhabited by Travis in *Taxi Driver* have been neglected in favour of big money investments into verticals that will house the *nouveau riche* of the neoliberal class, as cutbacks to social and public spending set in.

With Executive Order 10, signed in 1966, New York Mayor John V. Lindsay ignited the city's cinema arts industry by creating a standard permitting document that made on location shooting financially accessible and more attractive for Hollywood filmmakers.[10] Film production levels in New York "rose to an all-time high, adding 20 million dollars to the city's economy."[11] Part of Lindsay's embrace of the cinema was informed by his belief that filmmakers would be inclined to paint an attractive portrait of New York, and that such a portrait would bolster the city's population following what had been an exodus of urbanites to the suburbs. Lindsay's lenient policies, as McLain Clutter argues, opened the doors for filmmakers like Martin Scorsese and Francis Ford Coppola, and were paramount in galvanizing the Hollywood New Wave.[12] Yet, Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*, and films such as *Midnight Cowboy* (1969) *The French Connection* (1971), and *Serpico* (1973) were inclined to depict a city in the "the grips of physical blight, rampant crime, social tensions, and fiscal insolvency," and what Clutter refers to as the malignancies of urbanity.[13] Clutter situates these films as quintessential indexations of New York, and stresses the verisimilitude and visual similarities to the depicted urban environments of each of these films. Clutter's concern rests with the material and texture of decay, and with how forcefully a

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[10] McLain Clutter, *Imaginary Apparatus: New York City and Its Mediated Representation*, (Zurich: Park Books, 2015), 40.

[11] McLain Clutter, *Imaginary Apparatus: New York City and Its Mediated Representation*, 42.

[12] *Ibid*., 43.

[13] *Ibid*., 149.

film like *Taxi Driver* indexes the blight of the city. He observes the sheen of patina that forms on the surfaces of railings and fences amid sequestered and discarded urban spaces, noting further the tendency in urban planning to demolish rather than to preserve. The historian, Max Page, who was influenced by Henry James, describes New York as a "provisional city," defined by a constant "chill of change."[14] Insistent demolition and rebuilding results in a loss of cultural heritage according to Page, so while low-income buildings were aging and succumbing to detritus, a grass roots movement erupted in New York, during the 1960s and 1970s, and was aimed at preserving the identity and visual texture of the city's unique and various burrows, rather than to allow a rich architectural history and culture to be erased through the codes of modernism. Thus, there was strong debate as to the direction of the built environment. A strong disconnect existed between municipal and national political officials, as well as wealthy social actors, such as the Rockefellers, with protests at the local level. The Twin Towers are, in many ways, a type of crescendo within this debate of preservation versus modernization. With their construction, the fabric of New York's gridiron changed in a manner that a significant portion of the city's population was adamant about. The city's assertion of its global economic position came at the expense of its population, as capital was not equitably distributed.

Spatial contrast is specifically foregrounded in Wim Wenders' German New Wave film, *The American Friend* (1977)—a neo-noir. In the city of New York, the buildings are drained of colour despite the warm rays of sunlight that fall upon the landscape. In Hamburg, Germany, the buildings are lathered in colour, providing the city with a vibrancy that is compared to a grimy and gray New York. As the title cards for *The American Friend* fade onto a New York City avenue, accompanied by the sounds of sirens wailing in the background, the camera subtly pans and tilts down to reframe a taxi cab pulling in to the sidewalk curb on the right side of the frame. Exiting from the cab wearing his Stetson cowboy hat is Tom Ripley (Dennis Hopper), an amoral American art dealer involved with forgeries. He turns to enter an apartment and, ever so briefly, his head turns in the opposite direction, catching a fleeting glimpse of the WTC. The twin verticals are noticeable from the commencement of the shot and, perhaps, the first thing the post-2001 viewer's eye sees. Nonetheless, it appears as a phantom silhouette, out of focus, and as a vanish-

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[14] *Ibid*., 136.

ing point in the moving image, already obscured by an unhealthy haze of pollution. Inside the apartment, the audience is introduced to Tom Ripley's accomplice, Derwatt (Nicholas Ray), a one-eyed artist who copies the works of others and gives them to Ripley to sell in Europe. Similar to *Taxi Driver,* the trace of the WTC is faintly visible through the window.

Much of *The American Friend* is about networks of transnational trade, both legal and illegal, along with the networks of transportation that allow for mobility and anonymity. Ripley's piratical art dealing scheme takes him from the United States to Hamburg, Germany, where he sells off the paintings at inflated rates to unsuspecting bourgeois and aristocratic patrons and buyers. Johnathan Zimmerman (Bruno Ganz), a renowned picture framer and art restorer, sees through Ripley's veil of deceit and questions the dealer's authenticity on account of the inconsistent shades of blue that have been applied to the canvas by Derwatt. A rare blood disease has prevented Zimmerman from restoring art, much to his frustration and grief. The renowned restorer's life could end at any moment. Learning of Zimmerman's precarious position, Ripley suggests him as a potential assassin to Raoul Minot (Gérard Blain), a duplicitous gangster. Reluctantly, a desperate Zimmerman accepts the contract, expecting to secure sufficient funds to support his family in light of his soon, and inevitable demise. Zimmerman then flies to Paris where he is provided with instructions on how to carry out the assassination.

Zimmerman is to murder a Jewish-American gangster amidst Paris' network of metro stations. He is then subtly to merge back into the anonymous crowd after having succeeded in his mission. Minot emphasizes the need for him to be calm and not to run, so as not to distinguish himself to the panoptic apparatus of control and discipline - the endless number of surveillance cameras hawkishly monitoring the metro tunnels. The frantic and exasperated Zimmerman fails to be discreet, killing his target atop an escalator and boisterously running down in reverse. Security cameras capture the lone figure rushing about the underground. Indeed, criminal acts, whether it be trading in fakes, or committing murder, as in *The American Friend*, stem from the mobility of the agent and their ability to competently navigate the networks of a globalizing world. This space tends to be represented abstractly, as when Zimmerman is navigating the underground. Escalators appear ubiquitously during his attack on the Jewish-American gangster, and they give the space a type of formlessness. Transplanetary connections are depicted at length,

Figure 5: Ripley (Denis Hopper) in *The American Friend* (1977), dir. Wim Wenders

illustrating how the individual can be either confident or naive in navigating the new zones of modernity. Ripley has his mansion, a dilapidated structure falling to ruin in Hamburg. He returns to New York frequently to meet and conspire with his forger, Derwatt.

The WTC serves to structure *The American Friend*, as the film is bookended by the structure's presence, and marked by its composition halfway through. Proceeding Zimmerman's first act of murder, a transition from the darkened streets of Paris and its bustling train terminals to a midday New York City, port side, occurs. The camera pulls from an extreme close up to a medium two shot of Ripley and Derwatt. Ripley claims to be confused, and Derwatt, sensing his partner's existential angst, informs him that he does not have to be a nice guy. Ripley says he wants to go home, equating home with his residence in Hamburg. Ironically, Derwatt replies: "Let me love you for your money." Ripley explodes into anger, reminding the viewer of his sense of confusion and emptiness. As Ripley walks away, the camera tilts up, capturing him in the act of climbing onto a flat railing. The shot is rich in formal and symbolic design, as the railing divides

the image into two. To the left of the frame is a steep drop to a road with oncoming traffic; to the right is a barren section of New York, close to the Hudson River.

Ripley precariously walks the railing in anger and conflict, with the semblance of an alienated drifter. The camera pans up, revealing the height of the Twin Towers. Ripley and the towers are composed in the centre of the frame, and once again, the lines converge towards it in depth. The composition is striking, and the split in the frame suggests a liminality. Ripley is caught between two conflicting worlds, oscillating between the desire to live a moral life and the desire to increase his profit margin. He is, of course, outside the so-called legitimate financial world of the WTC, but in many ways he operates according to its credo and culture, aspiring to financial and material excess. Despite his material wealth, he is lost, and seemingly overwhelmed by the structure and its culture. In her introductory piece to the Criterion edition of the film, Francine Prose writes:

> Throughout his career, Wim Wenders has been fascinated, even obsessed by America: its landscapes, its citizens' faces, the way the country sees itself and is seen by the world, its reality, its myth. Ripley's Stetson identifies him as mythically American, so it's ironic, odd and funny that America—in theory, a beacon of democracy and culture—appears here as a rather dim beacon: a not very intelligent psycho, with a calculating nature and a gift for intimidation that may remind us of the crazed, gas-sucking bully Hopper would play in David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* (1986).[15]

Prose goes on to emphasize how Ripley acts as a corrupting influence in the European milieu of Hamberg, polluting the innocent Zimmerman and seizing upon him during his moment of greatest vulnerability. Other scholars, like Jurgen E. Schlunk, have noted how the friendship between Zimmerman and Ripley is emblematic of Germany's dependence on the United States following the Second World War. Schlunk argues: "The material wealth that was poured into Germany's then non-existent economy has long begun to boomerang and has created among Germans precisely those kinds of materialistic attitudes for which previously only America had been blamed…Tom Ripley is the symbol of this warning."[16] Schlunk believes that Germany must

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[15] Francine Prose, "*The American Friend*: Little Lies and Big Disasters," Essay in *The American Friend, Criterion Collection* (2016).

[16] Jurgen E. Schlunk, "The Image of America in German Literature and in the New German Cinema Wim Wenders *The American Friend*," *Literature Film Quarterly* 7.2 (1979): 218, accessed June 3, 2018.

emancipate itself and reassert its own values; he notes further how quickly Zimmerman succumbs to the temptation of money at the expense of his character and integrity.

The towers appear as burnt out beacons in *The American Friend* - the symbol of a culture that fancies itself exceptional, but always exceeds and corrupts itself through material excess. Ripley can be rich by way of his illegal acts, only to find himself oppressed and diminished by the imperial order that propels a culture of endless consumption; he is dwarfed by the towers. His walk along the railing is simultaneously a flirtation with death as much as it is an evocation of precarity in the modern world. The centrifugal composition of the towers is by no means random, as it asks the audience to reconcile Ripley's inability to carve out a niche for himself. His turn to criminality may be his short term solution, yet it nonetheless leads him to a state of vagrancy and rootlessness - a life of transience. The WTC perpetuates a bifurcation of class and racial power that leaves many on its outside, fighting and struggling to gain access. Thus, in *The American Friend*, the towers become a type of allegory, revelatory of how the newly created wealth in the post-war years was enjoyed only by a privileged few, while others, like Ripley, were left to their own. The towers promote a monolithic culture, one that actively attempts to mould heterogeneity. Ripley is caught in a liminal state; he is at once alienated from mainstream society, yet is nonetheless treated as its figurehead - a self-made man disseminating American culture and ideology wherever he roams, corrupting the morals of those he encounters by tempting them with wealth in the process. After Zimmerman succumbs to his blood disease, the film returns to New York City. As the sun sets, Derwatt is seen siting alone on the same railing portrayed earlier. He gets up and walks on the far right of the frame towards the WTC. The credits begin to roll in stark red, and the base of the towers slowly fades to black as the light of day disappears. An eerie wind echoing against the vertical landscape emerges from the Hudson River; it is all that is audible.

The city is central to the discourse of neo-noir. Much of noir is about the underbelly of society, the hidden spaces of the city, and the precariousness of life. Representations of the WTC in noir invite critique, forcing audiences to evaluate the asymmetrical power relations perpetuated by the structure's presence. A series of aerial shots open *Léon: The Professional* (1994), which serve to showcase the city and its street life. The sequence begins off the waters of the Atlantic and then moves over Central Park. An aerial shot, with the formal arrangements of a phantom

ride, captures the tops of the towers in the distance after surveying the avenues of the city. Any number of shots without the WTC could have been utilized for this early montage sequence, yet the decision was made to include an aerial shot of the WTC with perspective converging upon it. The structure appears ominous and uncanny. Indeed, the economic, social, and political signification of the WTC helps to set the tone for a film that deals with corruption and, once again, the marginal agents who fight to restore order. The corrupt, drug addicted, and psychopathic D.E.A. agent Stansfield (Gary Oldman) uses his official and therefore legitimized position of power to profit and murder when he is challenged. The heroes, or anti-heroes, Léon (Jean Reno) and Mathilda (Natalie Portman), are marginalized figures who operate in the shadows. Mathilda loses her family after a ruthless drug raid ordered by the crazed Stansfield takes place due to a falling out he has with her father. Parallels to the relationship between Travis Bickle and Iris (Jodie Foster) in *Taxi Driver* can be made, as Leon takes in the vulnerable and abandoned Mathilda and trains her to be an assassin, with revenge as the motive. The WTC, as neoliberal symbol, consolidates class power, by privatizing and isolating wealth in the hands of a select few. *Leon* is not about the building in itself, although it is present in the background. The film is about characters living on the margins of capitalism and the corrupt characters who threaten their existence and exploit them for their own purposes.The appearance of the towers at the start of the film announces these themes.

The Recurring Destruction of the WTC

Acts of resistance against the neoliberal order are depicted at length in *Fight Club* (1999). In this film, a group of anarchists, operating under the name "Project Mayhem," seek to subvert mainstream consumer society by advancing an anti-material and anti-capitalist mandate by destroying private property. In the middle of the film, a sequence opens with Tyler Durden (Brad Pitt) assigning instructions to his loyal followers, who are now bound to the club's manifesto after being initiated through physical violence with one another, a bloody and violent assertion of their masculine identity. After their leader's militant address, the anarchists are filmed by the cover of darkness ripping antennas from rooftops. Composed in depth and tilting up, the camera reveals a number of the group's members committing similar acts of destruction as they smash

satellite dishes and antennas with bats well into the night. Chaos continues, as the group hijacks a billboard and places a banner with the words: “Did you Know? You Can Use Old Motor Oil To Fertilize Your Lawn?” and signed the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Inside a closed Blockbuster Video Store, the militants manage to demagnetize all of the VHS tapes. These attacks are random and seek to lash out at the system from a number of directions and angles, as opposed to one coordinated attack against a centralized node of power within the system.

Tyler and the Narrator (Edward Norton) are subsequently seen inside a display window of an electronic boutique. They pour gasoline through a funnel into the shelving units for a makeshift bomb. A multi-coloured Apple logo can be seen below blue neon lights. The montage sequence comes to a standstill, and Tyler and the Narrator are seen walking quietly towards a corner store. Tyler tells his hesitant partner to wait out back. Emerging from inside the building, Tyler now is holding a frantic store clerk at gunpoint. He looks through the clerk’s wallet and notices an expired student card. Curious, he demands to know what he, Raymond, studied, and what he wanted to be in life. With hesitation, Raymond tells Tyler that he wanted to be a veterinarian, but that he gave the dream up because it required too much schooling. Tyler responds by threatening to kill Raymond if he does not return to school in six weeks. Raymond is permitted to go free, and the action returns to the electronics boutique, now consumed by flames. Tyler and the Narrator’s bomb has done its work. This montage of anarchist acts and events, like most scenes in this adaptation of the Chuck Palahniuk novel, is a protest against mainstream consumer society and its repressive and alienating elements. It tries to locate an identity for the individual, or a group of men within the neoliberal state, but the outcome in this case is violence. Nihilistically, this suggests violence as a functional form of expression. The Narrator’s protests to Tyler’s acts are futile, and portray his passive nature, along with his lack of individual will.

When the Narrator is first introduced to the audience, he is portrayed as a disheveled manic-depressive type. His eyes appear hollow, as large shadows emanating from his bags loom on his face. The Narrator is represented as a sleep-deprived, malnourished individual who is sentenced to an empty and unfulfilled life behind a desk. He, like Raymond, and so many souls living in the late stages of capitalism, has forsaken his dreams and ambitions for a dead-end job that will barely serve to help make ends meet. Here, the plausible risk of outsourcing is present, along

with the lurking possibility of replacing the traditional worker with machine in order to maximize cost efficiency; these are but two threats to the worker in the neoliberal market, as theirs is a station beset by precarity and uncertainty. The Narrator appears ghost-like and unfulfilled; he is in the process of allowing his body to succumb to its wasted potential. Indeed, *Fight Club* represents a challenge to a system that wills one to passively and excessively consume and to passively exist without drive, devoid of a *raison d'être*. Tyler is the antithesis of the Narrator, the eruption and manifestation of the Narrator's suppressed mind, his unconscious self. This is to be taken in the literal sense, for Tyler and the Narrator are ultimately one and the same, yet polar opposites who inhabit the same space. After more violence, the duo's subversion of capitalism and its mainstream acceptance reaches its heights, as a relentless and out of control Tyler climactically plans to level New York's financial district, and this leads up to the final images of the film.

After freeing himself from captivity, the Narrator fails to foil the plans of his alter ego, Tyler. The buildings in front of their high-rise perch apocalyptically erupt and collapse in flames.

Figure 6: The Narrator (Edward Norton) and Marla Singer (Helena Bonham Carter) in *Fight Club* (1999), dir. David Fincher

In the centre of the frame, a structure resembling the WTC is seen. It is the final financial building to be destroyed in the district. In this instance, the destruction of the WTC in *Fight Club* represents the strong sentiments towards its material existence and symbolic identity in the urban fabric of New York City, as the film deliberately situates the Twin Towers within neoliberal con-

sumer culture, seeking to demonstrate the order's repressive and alienating configurations. As the film progresses, the anarchists, led by Tyler and the Narrator, attempt to lash out at the system and the formative mainstream consumer culture it promotes. The image of the WTC, exploding last, and composed in the center of the frame, advances the notion that capitalism does have a centralized symbolic source and, more importantly, that this system can be unhinged and dismantled once its centre is taken down. The towers are treated as a point of vulnerability.

Fight Club is not the sole film to depict the demise of the towers, as a cycle of disaster films in the 1990s showcase the destruction of the WTC, which becomes in many ways emblematic of society's resistance to capitalism. An aesthetic of destruction is tied to the WTC prior to 2001. In the star-studded disaster spectacle, *Deep Impact* (1998), a number of US citizens attempt to prevent a cataclysmic event that will end the world. A comet is on a collision course with the earth. To ensure the future existence of humanity, the US government intends to save portions of the population under the age of fifty by having them wait out the apocalypse in the limestone caves of Missouri. Names are drawn by lot. Here, tropes of the disaster genre are openly on display. As Despina Kakoudaki argues: "In the 1990s, natural disaster films focus on the quality of the human response, and highlight methods of warning or alerting those in danger, the characters' abilities to collaborate effectively, and the coordination of agencies with overlapping or competing powers and jurisdictions."[17] Disaster films depict "multiculturalism, globalization and the professionalization and privatization of response scenarios," and they invent and debate the kinds of responsibilities that will arise through the emergency response.[18] In disaster films, this can operate as a zone of privilege, as when actors in government are represented as possessing knowledge of a given threat, yet fail to disclose the information to the public in an attempt to avoid widespread panic. Disaster films are designed to tap into the viewer's hopes of a resolution by providing a satisfying *deus ex machina*, or a realization of humanity's defeat. The latter tends to be rendered through spectacle and crafted by way of the time's most convincing technology and special effects, which are characteristics of the blockbuster.

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[17] Despina Kakoudaki, "Representing Politics in Disaster Films," *International Journal of Cultural and Media Politics* 7.3 (2011): 351, accessed February 19, 2018.

[18] Despina Kakoudaki, "Representing Politics in Disaster Films," 351.

On the disaster element present in the science fiction genre, Susan Sontag writes: "Certainly, compared with the science fiction novels, their film counterparts have unique strengths, one of which is the immediate representation of the extraordinary: physical deformity and mutation, missile and rocket combat, toppling skyscrapers."[19] Building on an aesthetics of destruction, Sontag continues: "In the films it is by means of images and sounds, not words that have to be translated by the imagination, that one can participate in the fantasy of living through one's death and more, the death of cities, the destruction of humanity itself. Science fiction films are not about science. They are about disaster, which is one of the the oldest subjects of art."[20] Disaster is often imagined and anticipated. This is to emphasize the cathartic potential and appeal of science fiction, and disaster films. Fantastical renditions of apocalyptic horror are, however, bound to the material world, exerting influence via their attempt to anticipate the future and the unknown horrors that could come to be.

Figure 7: *Armageddon* (1998), dir. Michael Bay

The aesthetics of destruction often involve the destruction of particular monuments and landmarks. Examining the use of monuments and landmarks in film, Gwyneth Shanks notes how "the Statue of Liberty has long stood as a visual icon of freedom—or its demise—in the US cultural imaginary;" she points to the image of "the fallen Lady Liberty, buried in sand and eroded by the

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[19] Susan Sontag, "The Imagination of Disaster," C*ommentary* (1965): 43-44, accessed February 19, 2018.

[20] Susan Sontag, "The Imagination of Disaster," 44.

tides, in the final scene of the 1968 version of the Planet of the Apes…"[21] The destruction of the towers in the 1990s likewise signals the demise of order, and the plunge into chaos. *Deep Impact* ends in horror, as attempts to completely thwart the disaster fail, and a portion of the comet crashes into the Atlantic Ocean. A tsunami soon approaches New York City. The landscape is cap-

Figure 8: *Deep Impact* (1998), dir. Mimi Leder

tured from various angles indicating the proximity of the inbound collision. Here, the Statue of Liberty is prominently featured in conjunction with the WTC. Both landmarks appear pronounced on the skyline. These monuments are slightly divorced and separated from the urban landscape below. There is no miraculous *deus ex machina,* and so the wave consumes and submerges New York City. The concrete and steel landscape ceases to be, and the material vestiges of the city can be located only by glimpsing the tips of the Twin Towers which protrude above the

Figure 9: *Deep Impact* (1998), dir. Mimi Leder

newly formed stretch of water. The recurring destruction of the WTC in films during the 1990s becomes particularly haunting in the post-2001 context. *Deep Impact* is but one representation. The existence of such images of destruction amplifies the symbolic role of the towers. The towers become a point of vulnerability in the city - an appendage with a major artery Their destruction points to the perception of their virtual, and centrifugal position in the transnational market. It has been well documented that preceding the attacks of September 11th, that the stock market dropped significantly, spiralling the economies of many nations with ties to the United States downwards. This emphasizes that imagining the destruction of the WTC in film during the 1990s was to also contemplate how the monument's destruction could reap physical havoc on both the nation, and the globe, while functioning as a representational challenge to the mainstream.

Figure 10: *Super Maria Bros.* (1993), dir. Rocky Morton

Much like *Deep Impact,* the manifestation of natural disaster in *Armageddon* (1998) spells the destruction of the WTC. Gradually breaking up as it enters the earth's atmosphere, shards of a doomsday asteroid fly into New York City, smashing into the vertical towers and sending heavy debris and shrapnel onto the pedestrians below. Attempts at flight are rendered futile in the face of such unrelenting chaos. In *Super Mario Bros.* (1993), the adaptation of the iconic Nintendo

franchise, the evil King Koopa (Denis Hopper) begins his invasion of New York City by attacking the WTC. The villain's otherworldly weapons cause the towers to be obliterated completely. The towers disappear entirely from the skyline without any physical trace. There are no ruins to observe, as the WTC's presence has simply been erased. Witnessing the event, a character exclaims: "Anything for publicity!" The destruction of the WTC, is treated as a spectacle. The fact that the towers are the first objects to be destroyed is to emphasize how the destruction of the towers can be used as a strategic attempt by terrorists to cripple the flow of capital in the pre-2001 context, placing further strain on an already vulnerable and volatile economic structure.

Director Roland Emerich's *Godzilla* (1998) does not depict the destruction of the WTC, but the towers are seen being struck by lightning prior to the Kaiju's attack on New York City. Once Godzilla begins to roam New York, and we watch the spectacular destruction of the city, the assault on the WTC is at least implied. Not much of New York remains after the disaster, and *Godzilla* could readily be described as a rubble film, the type that directors like Roberto Rossellini and Rainer Werner Fassbinder made in post-war Germany. At any rate, as one of the largest metropolises in the United States, representations of urban destruction in New York City are plentiful. This city is singled out not only because of its scale, but also because of its financial position of dominance, both nationally and globally.

Future States of Ruination

The WTC appears in many more films prior to 2001. In some instances, the towers are specifically foregrounded, coming to the direct attention of the audience. At other times, the structure resides in the background, where its presence is fleeting and hardly visible. The WTC however casts a shadow upon the city, defining the material design of the real city, while symbolically strengthening and enhancing economic, social, and political institutions. Representations of the WTC, however, are not specific to the temporal period of 1973-200l, as it is also represented in films that take place in an imagined future.

Futuristic representations of the WTC in film occur prior to September 11th, 2001. In John Carpenter's futuristic and dystopic *Escape from New York* (1981), the city has been converted into a giant maximum security prison. The WTC is present in a number of shots, if not om-

nipresent. Early on in the film, Airforce One is hijacked by resistance fighters who take the President of the United States as a hostage in order to use him as leverage to free the prison population of Manhattan Island. Communicating with the prison's "warden," Hauk (Lee Van Cleef), the fighters describe the prison as imperialistic and they claim to act as resistance to the U.S.' exceedingly neoliberal nature. They are challenging the US' oppression of workers. Those who do not abide by the economic, political, and social structure become both marginalized and neglected. Criminals, in broad terms, come to operate outside of the legitimized and acceptable realm of the nation state after being systematically deprived of social and economic opportunity. In *Escape from New York,* the prisoners have been discarded and tossed away to live in a decrepit city, left to use their own violent tools as a means of survival. Restorative and rehabilitative forms of justice are legal practices of the past. Carpenter's vision of the future stipulates the end of any meaningful level of reform and a future where there is little human compassion. While it is hyperbolized, *Escape from New York* nonetheless draws from the stark realities of the neoliberal order to develop its critique of the American state at the end of the 20th century.

Figure 11: *Escape from New York* (1981), dir. John Carpenter

Snake Plissken (Kurt Russell), a former military man and a newly convicted individual, after having robbed the federal reserve deposit, is given an ultimatum: free the President in less

than 24 hours or face execution. Snake is disenfranchised from the American state and cares little for the future survival of humanity. Forced into his mission, Snake belligerently enters into the prison city, unnerved and armed for the madness that inevitably awaits him there. Snake lands atop of the WTC with his plane, using the rooftop of one of the towers as a runway. The Twin Towers are captured using an archaic graphic technology, as aerial views of the city help to digitally map the urban space, whereby strengthening the panoptic modalities of discipline and control, thus making it nearly impossible for escape. Early shots in the film depict a failed prison escape. A group attempts to flee the city by boat, using the cover of the night. They are, however, unsuccessful and quickly shot. Along with the massive concrete barricade that surrounds the length of the prison, mines have been strategically placed on the bridges, making any escape via this route impossible. Entering the prison complex is relatively easy for Snake who, despite his principles, has chosen to serve and work for the system. Inside the prison, he hardwires the elevator atop of the WTC and descends. The interior of the WTC appears dilapidated, deprived of its former glory. Graffiti lines the walls, while discarded and illegible documents occupy the floors of the abandoned office space. The towers are central to Carpenter's rendition of New York City, as they represent a gateway in the film, serving as both entrance to and escape from the prison. Upon rescuing the President, Snake attempts to leave via his parked plane on the makeshift WTC runway. A gunfight ensues atop the towers, and the plane is thrown off the structure, forcing Snake and his crew to pursue another means of escape. Using Brain's (Harry Dean Stanton) mine map of the bridge, Snake leads his team and the President across the bridge, but this is not without casualties, as Snake and the President are the only two men to survive the escape.

This prompts Snake to ask the President what his thoughts regarding the lives lost for his sake are, to which he replies that the nation appreciates their sacrifice. Had he failed to save the President, Snake would have lost his life, but more is at stake. The President was en route to a summit with other countries including Russia and China prior to being apprehended. The President possesses a tape that will help to bring about world peace, and the failure to appear at the summit and play the tape will result in military conflict. Thus, Carpenter's cult film situates its events within the international conflict characteristic of global transnational capitalism and represents the domestic conflict that results from both this economic order, as well as neoliberaliza-

tion. The ruin of the WTC in *Escape from New York* signifies the instability of dematerialized capital and its problematic flow. Its ruin is front and centre in the collapsed democratic state and the subsequent rise of the totalitarian police state.

In *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001), as David (Haley Joel Osment) and Joe (Jude Law) flee the neon clad futuristic Rogue City, the WTC structure becomes visible in the right side of the frame. Taking place in a fictional rendition of the 22nd century, the globe is portrayed in a fallen state due to global warming and rising sea levels. Coastal cities, including New York City, lie in ruin, submerged beneath the water. New York is a restricted area to the general population and is accessible only by air. In the city, the torch of the Statue of Liberty is seen protruding above the water and other neighbouring structures can be seen on the verge of collapse. Still, the Twin Towers rise high above all else, detached in their state of ruin. With the passage of time, urban and architectural structures fall to ruin, especially once they become neglected, losing their grandeur and idealism. Describing ruination and decay in her Victorian novel, *Middlemarch*, George Eliot writes:

> Ruins and basilicas, palaces and colossi, set in the midst of a sordid present, where all that was living and warm-blooded seemed sunk in deep degeneracy of superstition divorced from reverence; the dimmer but yet eager Titanic life gazing and struggling on walls and ceilings; the long vistas of white forms whose marble eyes seemed to hold the monotonous light of an alien world: all the vast wreck of ambitious ideals, sensuous and spiritual, mixed confusedly with the signs of breathing forgetfulness and degradation…[22]

Eliot's description of the young Dorothea's impressions of Rome in its failed splendour, and her observations of the city's images and structures of antiquity, as divorced from their romanticization, attest to the ruination and decay of structures across time. The structure of the WTC was pristine when it was first inaugurated; however Spielberg represents the WTC monument in a state of ruin, as neglected, and as gradually succumbing to a state of environmental decay. Futuristic renditions of the WTC tend to depict the structure as divorced from its reverence. In *A.I.* the towers are not a beacon of hope, nor are they emblematic of a future ripe with promise and possibility; rather, they represent an encounter with the past that is beyond both protagonists' scope of understanding. The WTC becomes a historical ruin through its passage in the moving image, as

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[22] George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, (New York: Book of the Month Club, 1871-1872),188.

its material ruination in the physical world was stripped following its destruction. It has left no trace like the Roman Colosseum to become part of a romanticized past.

Figure 12: David (Haley Joel Osment) and Gigolo Joe (Jude Law) in *A. I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001), dir. Steven Spielberg

Released as it was in June of 2001, the shot of the WTC in *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* occurs at the end of a cycle of films that represented the financial monument in an apocalyptic light. Images featuring the WTC either in ruin or being destroyed were to be self-censored, while patriotic and nationalistic narratives were encouraged, promoted and developed by the state in the wake of the September 11th, 2001 terrorist attacks. In the period of 1973-2002, the period of the towers' actual existence, they were fair game, and the towers could be represented in any light. Images could be constructed so as to reinforce the structure's embedded asymmetrical power relations. Films like *Taxi Driver* and *Fight Club* could subversively undermine the power of the state, and question the alienating configurations of modern consumer culture. Filmmakers tended to use the towers as a means of pointing to the uneven economic, social, and political development in the US during the final quarter of the 20th century. Films were not apt to celebrate the existence of the WTC prior to its destruction, as it was viewed symbolically as a monument that promoted superiority and represented oppression.

Chapter Two: The Appearance of the WTC After 2001

The treatment and representation of New York City in film were radically affected by the events of September 11, 2001. Films set in New York during the period of 1973 to 2001 tended to capture the divisive and precarious qualities of the city, offering critiques of urban society and contributing to a discourse on global transnational capitalism and neoliberalization. In the immediate aftermath of the terrorist attacks, films began to include imagery that served to inspire patriotism and promote unity, which was in contrast to the moving images that had previously challenged and questioned the economic, political and social practices of the nation state in the final quarter of the 20th century. The physical destruction of the Twin Towers posed a number of problems for filmmakers, especially for films in the late stages of production and post-production, and thus scheduled for a late 2001, or early 2002 release. The towers were fundamental to the visual fabric of many films and, in some instances, an integral part of their narratives. The destruction of the towers temporarily resulted in their exclusion from these films - a scrubbing of their presence, not that this was ever made explicitly official, or enforced on consequence of a reprimand; rather, the appearance of the WTC, along with representations of New York City, were carefully treated in film, often represented in narratives that were meant to encourage patriotic fervour and promote national unity. While never embraced fully, there appears to have been a consensus to treat the city more sympathetically following the tragedy. This approach resulted in part from the lobbying of Hollywood executives by government, ensuring that the nation state had a hand in constructing and directing the choice of moving images following the attacks.[1] No doubt the decision to scrub the WTC from certain films was made from a pragmatic need to accept and stay true to historical reality, but this decision, or consensus if you will, also importantly derived from a genuine desire to respect a nation whose citizens were in a state of mourning and were attempting to cope with the trauma. It seems that in the immediate post-2001 context, there was a belief that the appearance of the Twin Towers onscreen would be difficult for audiences to experience, as it could potentially revive unpleasant memories of the event. As a result, there are a number of unwritten rules for where, when, and how the towers can be represented within a film. This was not,

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[1] Guy Westwall, *Parallel Lines: Post 9/11 American Cinema*, (Colombia: Colombia University Press, 2014), 8.

however, permanent, as the portrayal of the Twin Towers on screen gradually evolved as the century unfolded. Certain images of the WTC released in film post-2001 therefore serve to validate the nation, while others evoke the criticism that was characteristic of their former material presence in the city, thus recalling the structure's perceived neoliberal symbolism.

A First Haunting - The Ruins at Ground Zero

Similar to how the WTC's material and physical presence in films pre-2001 could be felt, the absence of the towers in the city influences films in the post-2001 era, exerting force on the characters and endowing the city with a resonant, melancholic ambience. Spike Lee's *The 25th Hour* (2002), is a good example of this. The film opens with a night cityscape featuring the "Tribute in Light" art installation. This tribute consisted of two vertical pillars of light formed by 88 xenon searchlights located six blocks south of the WTC. They stood in for the absent WTC at Ground Zero, and were present for a number of weeks following the attacks of September 11th. These lights ran for twenty-four hours from March 11th to April 14th, 2002 and, while it was initially a temporary installation, the Tribute has reappeared annually throughout the 21st century to commemorate the anniversary of the attacks. One of the designers of the tribute, Gustavo Bonevardi, is quoted as having said: "We set out to 'repair' and 'rebuild' the skyline - but not in a way that would attempt to undo or disguise the damage. Those buildings are gone now, and they will never be rebuilt. Instead we would create a link between ourselves and what was lost. In so doing, we believed, we could also repair, in part, our city's identity and ourselves."[2] Guy Westwall elaborates on Bonevardi's comments by suggesting the "Tribute in Light" as "a tangible desire to replace the loss, to fill the gap and to turn a negative, traumatic experience into a redemptive, affirmative experience," yet he also sees the lights as "ephemeral" and "fleeting," consequently signaling a desire to move on and a difficulty of doing so."[3] *The 25th Hour* was in production during the events of September 11th, and Lee, unlike other filmmakers, deliberately chose to incorporate the experience of physical mourning into the film rather than to omit and ignore it, to treat the sight of the Twin Towers' absence on screen in such a way to allow for a

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[2] Guy Westwall, *Parallel Lines: Post 9/11 American Cinema*, 31-32.

[3] *Ibid*., 31.

"critical" rather than a "belligerent" response.[4] The two columns of light are captured from a number of perspectives during *The 25th Hour*'s opening credit sequence and are accompanied by Terrence Blanchard's score, which is described by Westwall as being a "classical rendition of Irish and Arabic folk music that lends a powerful cry of pain and suffering…"[5] New York City is not identifiable at first, as the position of the camera at an extremely low angle blurs the image.

Figure 13: The "Tribute in Light" in *The 25th Hour* (2002), dir. Spike Lee

Initially, the camera points up to the night sky. The image is subsumed in the light from above. Only gradually do the symbolic purpose of the light and the identity of the city become clear, which is achieved through a steady process of distancing the viewer from the interior of the city. The tower-like forms that the light evokes are made explicit only once the skyline comes into full view from the water. Here, the columns appear to stretch to the heavens and, like their material predecessor, they communicate a sense of endlessness by way of their *Icarian* reach, to borrow from De Certeau.[6] As this solemn opening credit sequence concludes, the two pillars of light vanish subtly from the image just before the termination of the shot. The absence of the WTC brings about a radical change in the urban design of the city, leading the city to shift and

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[4] *Ibid*., 31.

[5] *Ibid*., 31.

[6] Michel De Certeau, "Walking in the City," in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans Steven Rendall. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984, 91-110), 92.

acquire new meanings, which in turn generates new experiences. In *The 25th Hour*, there is a complex play of emotions at work, framed first by the metaphorical presence of the Twin Towers at the beginning of the film, and then by the absence that will in turn haunt the remainder of the film. Anger is directed both inwards and outwards, as the city and its people are depicted in a state of mourning.

Most of the film centers on Montgomery Brogan's (Edward Norton) final 24 hours of freedom. Monty faces seven years of imprisonment for drug dealing - the source of his recent fears and struggles. However, it is as if Lee intends the audience to read Monty's character arc over the course of the film on a metaphorical basis; it possesses a double meaning. His feelings of intensified anger and remorse are seemingly archetypical of the xenophobic and muddled national and, more specifically, local response to the events of September 11th. In a furious venting episode, Monty stands in front of a bathroom bar mirror and proceeds to denounce every racial and ethnic culture that he can think of, including both himself and other white Americans. He concludes his soliloquy by recognizing his own guilt at having been greedy and unable to put a stop to his illegal acts. Yet this sequence seems to be more a call for unity - a cautionary map to those navigating their emotion in the wake of the attacks. Lee is inviting the viewer to end the divisiveness between the people in the city and to use the events of September 11th as an opportunity to encourage a greater acceptance and a celebration of heterogeneity. There is a hint at the need for broader reconciliation, for mutual support and empathy, for a ground level response that is devoid of economic, political, and social self-interest. Westwall argues that Monty's father's decision to take him down a western road towards the prison at the end of the film and away from freedom indicates how "if the US is to build a fair, egalitarian, socially democratic society, individual Americans must refuse the myths of self and nation proffered by the mainstream media in the period following 9/11, and instead take responsibility for themselves and their actions."[7] Thus, Lee denies the "eschewal of personal responsibility," which the film "has shown to be the root cause of a wider social and cultural malaise and, by extension, a casual factor in the terrorist attacks themselves."[8] Many scenes in the film represent this kind of dynamic.

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[7] Guy Westwall, *Parallel Lines: Post 9/11 American Cinema*, 34.

[8] *Ibid*., 34.

Monty, his girlfriend, Naturelle Riviera (Rosario Dawson), and his two childhood friends, Jacob Elinsky (Philip Seymour Hoffman), a high school teacher, and Frank Slaughtery (Barry Pepper), a Wall Street trader, prepare to attend a club together on the final night of Monty's freedom. They first gather for a drink in Frank's state of the art, sleek, high-rise loft. However, the pristine view has been destroyed. The building is within view of Ground Zero - a now empty and vacant space. The ruins of the towers dominate the scene and, as Jean Baudrillard notes, even in their destroyed state the towers have left behind an "intense awareness of their presence. No one who knew them can cease imagining them and the imprint they made on the skyline from all points of the city. Their end in material space has born them off into a definitive imaginary space."[9] Indeed, the group of friends appears distraught at first, partly due to Monty's impending

Figure 14: Jacob Elinsky (Philip Seymour Hoffman), right, and Frank Slaughtery (Barry Pepper), left, in *The 25th Hour* (2002), dir. Spike Lee

sentence, but their distress is also, allegorical, insofar as the *mise en scene* alludes to the traumatic fallout with September 11th. While the event repeatedly lingers in the background of the film, here in this early cocktail sequence atop Ground Zero, the terrorist attacks are specifically foreground by the ruins and remnants of the Twin Towers. Physical reality is unavoidable as it penetrates the images of *The 25th Hour.* Looking down at the destruction, Frank and Jack contemplate how real estate values will be damaged by the attacks. On cue, the music from the film's opening

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[9] Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Requiem for the Twin Towers,* (New York: Verso, 2002), 52.

credit sequence returns. Westwall observes how a zoom is employed to take the viewers outside the high-rise window in order to allow them to "gaze on the remains of the foundations of the Twin Towers."[10] Drawing from the work of Walter Benjamin, Susan Buck-Morss writes: "The crumbling of the monuments that were built to signify the immortality of civilization becomes proof, rather, of its transiency."[11] Influenced by the Baroque, Benjamin is concerned with the manner in which "pyramids, pillars, and statues of all kinds of material become damaged with time or destroyed by violence or simply decay…that indeed whole cities have sunk, disappeared, and are covered over by water…"[12] In contrast to the abstract image of New York during the opening credit sequence, Ground Zero is "shown here in documentary style, lit by the floodlights of the men working there."[13] Retrospectively returning to *The 25th Hour*, one can see its affinity to actuality through its careful treatment of the emotional burden and response to the events of September 11th as they unfolded at the local level.

The discussion of real estate values by Frank and Jacob becomes particularly haunting when weighed against the 2008 financial crisis - a significant rupture to the capitalist order. An introductory scene has Frank swivelling in his chair as he bets on unemployment rates, ignoring the directions of his patron, who seems to indirectly approve and encourage Frank's financial decisions. The sequence is fiercely rendered. Frank is surrounded by computers and enters into spouts of chauvinist banter with his colleagues, as he sips at his Red Bull. Frank's work environment is portrayed as one of high-octane stress. His exhausted, ghost-like paleness resembles that of the Narrator from *Fight Club*. Formally, the camera works to frame Frank within the contours of the screen's monitors, as the rows of desks and computers vanish behind and out of focus. The mise-en-scène recalls the Kafkaesque portrayals of bureaucratic space that were realized by Orson Welles in films such as *The Trial* (1962). It is a seemingly virtual world, as Frank bets on shifting numbers and works to minimize office contact with colleagues. His life behind the desk

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[10] Guy Westwall, *Parallel Lines: Post 9/11 American Cinema*, 36.

[11] Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 1989), 170.

[12] Susan Buck-Morss, *The Dialectics of Seeing: Walter Benjamin and the Arcades Project*, 164.

[13] Guy Westwall, *Parallel Lines: Post 9/11 American Cinema*, 36.

is represented as both dehumanizing and grim, making Frank more and more alienated from the real world. Frank is depicted as the prototypical Wall Street man, and it will be the events of the night that will spur a change in his attitude and character. Frank's last moment with Monty, prior to his departure for prison, will help re-humanize him.

The National Response: Creating a Sympathetic Context

Walking in New York City in the aftermath of the attacks, E. Ann Kaplan was impressed by the volume of flags lining the streets. She writes: "Certainly, on one level the flags represented a newly engaged patriotism, echoing sentiments written on memorials in the park and on the walls around fire stations and police precincts... the flags were also a way to indicate empathy for those who had lost relatives and friends, and a shared trauma about the shock to the United States."[14] For Kaplan it had also become "clear that national ideology was hard at work shaping how the traumatic event was to be perceived."[15] She contends an absence of a much needed and meaningful public discussion on trauma, post-traumatic stress disorder, and vicarious traumatization.[16] The national rhetoric was reactionary, and signalled a call to arms as a means of reasserting the empire and hegemony of the United States. Many European cultural critics were uneasy with the nationalist response to September 11th, as they felt that the international policies of the United States had indirectly led "to hatred intense enough to bring about such terrorism," while American scholars, on the other hand, "saw a need to deal with the horror of the attacks as a specific set of events."[17] Slovaj Žižek's criticism was to this point; he argued:

> In the aftermath of September 11th the American en masse rediscovered their American pride, displaying flags and singing together in public, but I should emphasize more than ever that there is nothing 'innocent' about this rediscovery of American innocence, about getting rid of the sense of historical guilt or irony which prevented many Americans from fully assuming their national identity. What this gesture amounted to was 'objectively' assuming the burden of all that being 'American' stood for in the past - an exemplary

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[14] E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*, (New York: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 9.

[15] E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*, 13

[16] *Ibid*., 16.

[17] *Ibid*., 16.

> case of ideological interpellation, of fully assuming one's symbolic mandate, which comes on the scene after the perplexity caused by some historical trauma.[18]

A nationalistic fervour gripped the country, as citizens rushed out to buy flags in order to stand together and display for all to see their solidarity with the nation. George W. Bush encouraged Americans to shop following the attacks in order to avoid any domestic economic stagnation or hardship. His well-known black and white rhetoric promoted an "us vs. them" mentality, which attempted to demarcate friend from foe in an attempt to galvanize and unite the nation in the war on terror. In the preceding chapter, the towers were discussed as a type of centrifugal node in the global transnational market from their inauguration until their destruction and subsequent transcendence into the imaginary. The attacks on the towers, as well as the Pentagon, were by no means random, as they were coordinated strikes meant to cripple the United States in both a symbolic and strategic sense, affecting other countries with vested financial ties.

A bombing of the WTC occurred previously in 1993 and was partially successful. The objective had been to cause the North Tower to crash over into the South Tower by detonating a bomb hidden in a truck in the underground parking garage. While the bomb did go off, killing a dozen individuals and injuring approximately a thousand people in the evacuation, the bombing itself did not result in the complete destruction of the towers. The 1993 bombing does, however, reinforce the notion that the WTC was already perceived as a symbol of American global dominance and imperialism. This particular incident was the result of anger towards the American support of Israel in the Israel-Palestine conflict. Much like the events of September 11th, it stemmed from American meddling in the affairs of other nations via its international policy.

The US government quickly recognized how the media could be used to their advantage in developing a unified domestic response to the attacks of September 11th. The US did not want its people to question their decision to invade Afghanistan, and later Iraq, as they had previously done with regards to Vietnam and previous wars, where the result was prolonged foreign occupancy. Arguably, the military's prolonged foreign presence in the Middle East has been meant to secure a stake in the oil repositories of the region. Westwall is rightly concerned with the active

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[18] Slovaj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates*, (London: Verso, 2012), 56.

role the Unites States government played in shaping the imagery of America in film following September 11th, not only in terms of its patriotic and nationalistic imagery, but also with how a number of films present a making, an unmaking, and a remaking of US national identity following the terrorist attacks.[19] He informs us that in October 2001, forty Hollywood executives were invited to attend a two-hour long session at the White House with Chris Henick, then deputy assistant to George W. Bush. The objective was to create a sympathetic cultural context for a specific policy agenda.[20] It was stated:

> That the war is against terrorism, not Islam; that Americans must be called to national service; that Americans should support the troops; that this is a global threat that needs a global response; that this is a war against evil; that American children need to be reassured; and that instead of propaganda, the war effort needs a narrative that should be told with accuracy and honesty.[21]

However, in the years following the attacks, the war against terror became a war against Islam, creating a fear of visible minorities and immigrants. This view became widely represented in American cinema, as well as in television. America's national narrative quickly became characterized by xenophobia, and by a search for retributive justice. The nationalistic response and the government's influence on Hollywood encouraged the popularization of films with a patriotic narrative, which work to actively revitalize the nation in the eyes of the viewer.

Both *American Sniper* (2014) and *Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit* (2014) depict idealized male American soldiers who experience the attack on the WTC on television screens while in waiting rooms or in locations that operate as way points at important junctures in their lives. *American Sniper* dramatizes the life of Chris Kyle (Bradley Cooper) by depicting his four tours in Iraq. Kyle was an esteemed and decorated real-life US Navy Seal sniper. On the other hand, *Shadow Recruit* follows Tom Clancy's fictional, Jack Ryan (Chris Pine), as he attempts to prevent suspicious financial transactions on Wall Street, believed to be indicative of terrorist activity. In both films, the protagonists' encounter with the smouldering WTC, as mediated by the television

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[19] Guy Westwall, *Parallel Lines: Post 9/11 American Cinema*, 3.

[20] *Ibid*., 8.

[21] *Ibid*., 8.

screen, is represented as a moment of trauma. Cathy Caruth describes trauma as an "overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrollable repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena."[22] The image of the smouldering WTC, like the images of John F. Kennedy's assassination, were replayed *ad nauseam*, and through their endless repetition on screen, were burned into the

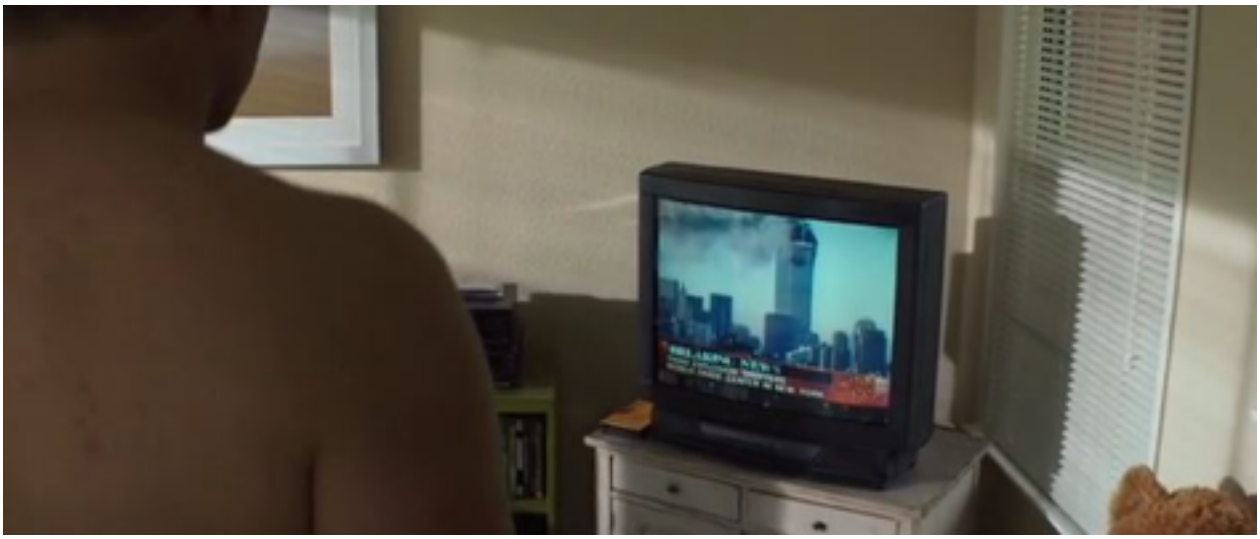

Figure 15: Chris Kyle (Bradley Cooper) in *American Sniper* (2014), dir. Clint Eastwood

cortex of public memory. "Unlike the body," according to Caruth, "the barrier of consciousness is a barrier of sensation and knowledge that protects the organisms by placing stimulation within an ordered experience of time. What causes trauma, then, is a shock that appears to work very much like a bodily threat but is in fact a break in the mind's experience of time."[23] Both Kyle and Ryan appear to be formed by the attack, and by the image of their homeland ablaze, which seems to be beyond their initial scope of understanding. These soldiers become emblematic of the type of individual response and initiative the nation hoped for in its citizens after the attacks. Kaplan argues that "subjects are formed through the shocks of modernity and colonialism - a process com-

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[22] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 11.

[23] Cathy Caruth, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, 61.

plicated by the fact that trauma conflates or blurs the boundaries between the individual and the collective."[24] Such a paradox was on display after the attacks.

Figure 16: *Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit* (2014), dir. Kenneth Branagh

With respect to the rendering of Chris Kyle and Jack Ryan, the motivation to fight for their country is portrayed as coming to fruition once they experience the image of the burning WTC. It is treated as an intense moment of private trauma in Chris Kyle's domestic setting, while Jack Ryan's experience of it takes place in the bustling halls of a university, as students are transitioning from class to class. Kyle stares in shock at the screen in his bedroom, and Ryan navigates a labyrinth of people to decipher the object of their gaze. The lives of these characters comes to a standstill. The smouldering WTC operates as a call to arms for Kyle and Ryan. As Virilio notes, the Manhattan skyline became "the front" for a "new war," galvanizing Americans into military action.[25] War was brought to their doorstep. Žižek writes:

> It was before the World Trade Centre collapse that we lived in our reality, perceiving Third World horrors as something which was not actually part of our social reality, as something which existed (for us) as a spectral apparition on the (TV) screen - and what

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[24] E. Ann Kaplan, *Trauma Culture: The Politics of Terror and Loss in Media and Literature*, 19.

[25] Paul Virilio, *Ground Zero*, (New York: Verso, 2002), 82.

> happened on September 11 was that this fantastic screen apparition entered our reality. It is not that reality entered our image: the image entered and shattered our reality.[26]

An attack on American soil of the magnitude of September 11th was hard for many Americans to accept and comprehend. Baudrillard argues: "When it comes to symbolic events on a world scale -that is to say not just events that gain worldwide coverage, but events that represent a setback for globalization itself - we had had none."[27] He continues his discourse, by claiming that "the whole play of history and power" was disrupted by this event, but so, too, were the "conditions of analysis," and this was given the rampant speed at which events and decisions were played out before the public's eyes in the wake of the attacks.[28] Meanwhile, Virilio claimed that many people who witnessed the events of September 11th on television thought they were watching a disaster movie.[29] Baudrillard and Žižek likewise posit an uncanny similarity to the cycle of disaster movies which had been popular in the 1990s and had depicted the destruction of WTC.[30]

To retrospectively return to disaster films like *Super Mario Bros.* (1993), *Deep Impact* (1998), and *Armageddon* (1998), which depict the destruction of the WTC, is to consider how the imagination of its destruction was made real, for the image of the burning towers caused by flying planes into them became the image that shattered America's dream of itself. The material destruction and collapse of the vertical city was made tangible. When experienced retrospectively, films like *Die Hard* (1988), which imagines a terrorist and hostage situation in the high-rise Nakotomi Tower, or real-life Fox Plaza, take on new meaning. Explosions and urban collapse, either becomes an aesthetic that recalls the destruction of the WTC, or an aesthetic that is developed so as to consciously evoke the destruction that took place on September 11th. Baudrillard emphasizes a need to slow down, to critically situate, contemplate, and evaluate the ubiquitous

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[26] Slovaj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates*, 19.

[27] Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Requiem for the Twin Towers*, 3.

[28] *Ibid*., 4.

[29] Paul Virilio, *Ground Zero*, 68.

[30] See Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Requiem for the Twin Towers*, 7; Slovaj Žižek, *Welcome to the Desert: Five Essays on September 11 and Related Dates*, 19

socio-politico stances advanced, and the actions immediately committed.[31] This is precisely because the events of September 11th are not separate in and of themselves; instead, they are moments intertwined in America's history of oppression through dispossession.

Scrubbing the Towers from Film

In line with the black and white logic peddled by the White House, American films like *American Sniper* and *Jack Ryan* situate America as a haven that must be protected from outside threats. America is represented as a country devoid of any moral responsibility, nor in any way complicit in the instability of regions like the Middle East. These two films are but two in an extensive cycle which exemplify the righteousness of its main character in the face of the visible threat. Such post-2001 narratives tend to refer to the towers themselves only in passing, or as mediated on a television screen in its popularized image of smouldering destruction. The aforementioned session at the White House with Chris Henick, described by Westwall, had a significant impact on American films in the wake of September 11th. In an effort to achieve unity through a sympathetic treatment of New York City, a number of studios opted to scrub the images of the WTC entirely from their films. An example of a controversial scrubbing of the towers can be seen in *Spider-Man* (2002). The towers were featured in the film's trailers and promotional material, but were later removed from theatrical release following the attacks. The sequence had Spider-Man thwart a robbery at the WTC, which was to be his first major heroic act as a costumed vigilante. The robbery cumulated with a shot of a helicopter caught and suspended in a web between the North and South towers. It was an expensive sequence to omit from theatrical release.

Television's response to the appearance of the towers in the diegesis of their products was similar to film. Decisions were made to omit the image of the buildings in series like *The Sopranos* (1999-2007) and *Sex and the City* (1998-2004). Initially, during the first seasons of HBO's iconic gangster drama*,* the monument was visible on the skyline as Tony Soprano (James Gandolfini) emerges onto the New Jersey turnpike. The show was trying to be historically accurate. The decision to scrub the WTC was made primarily out of a need to respect current reality. There was no desire to preserve the monument on screen, as the world of *The Sopranos* aspired to actu-

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[31] Jean Baudrillard, *The Spirit of Terrorism and Requiem for the Twin Towers*, 4.

ality, or at least in maintaining a contemporaneous representation of its urban setting. The appearance of the WTC would threaten the sanctity of the show's illusion.

Figure 17: HBO's *The Sopranos* (1999-2007)

Likewise, *Sex and the City* scrubbed the towers from its opening credit sequence following the attacks of September 11th. Similar to *Being John Malkovich* (1989), and *Home Alone 2: Lost in New York* (1992), the original WTC image in the opening scenes of both *The Sopranos* and *Sex and the City* was employed to help orient and direct the viewer, as well as to add credence to the grandeur and spectacle of the city. Only gradually have the towers reappeared in film and television. One notable and audacious instance occurs at the end of the short-lived *Fringe* (2008-2013). In the season one finale, F.B.I. agent Olivia Dunham (Anna Torv) travels to an alternate, or parallel universe, where the WTC is depicted as being materially intact. *Fringe* developed a timeline where the September 11th attacks never occurred. The centrally composed towers were represented as the most immediate and distinctive landmark on the alternate Manhattan skyline. Online message boards in 2008 were quick to acknowledge their reimagined appearance in *Fringe*. Yet, the decision to scrub the towers from *Spider-Man* - Sam Rami's take on the popular web slinger, is curious, as it is ultimately one of the last films to represent and index the towers as materially intact, without relying upon CGI. Unlike *The Sopranos*, or *Sex and the City*, *Spider-*

Man is not interested in convincing its viewers of the authenticity of its world, as it is a work of science fiction; it need not necessarily respect historical reality.

Figure 18: *Spider-Man* (2002), dir Sam Rami

One could presume that the scrubbing of the towers from *Spider-Man* was necessitated by the narrative, as the robbery poses a violent threat to the structure, and jeopardizes the sanctity of the capitalist order. In a retrospective piece on *Spider-Man*, Drew Grant claims that Sony Pictures never intended the WTC robbery to be a part of the film; rather, it was a standalone story meant to drum up excitement for the release of the film.[32] However, after the attacks Sony scrambled to pull all the promotional material for *Spider-Man* which featured the towers. The towers were removed from the trailer, and they were also scrubbed from the reflection in Spider-Man's eyes in one of the film's posters. Grant notes further how the towers were cut from *Men in Black II* (2002), and digitally scrubbed by using CGI in *Zoolander* (2001).[33] While Grant sees the erasure of the towers from the skyline in hindsight as both "excessive" and "overcautious," he believes that Sony's heart, with regards to *Spider-Man*, was in the "right place," as it was a "scary" and

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[32] Drew Grant, "10 Year Time Capsule: "Spider-Man" and the Erasing of the World Trade Centers," *Salon*, March 10, 2011, accessed June 13, 2018, https://www.salon.com/2011/05/10/10_year_time_capsule_spiderman_wtc/.

[33] Drew Grant, "10 Year Time Capsule: "Spider-Man" and the Erasing of the World Trade Centers."

"uncertain" time, where "destroying all the evidence of the nightmare seemed like a safer idea than showing people what they had just lost."[34] Daniel Robson observes how, "the film's redrawn marketing posters showed a gilded New York skyline before a Manhattan sunset, convey[ing] an image of indestructibility and optimism, and utilis[ed] architectural icons to represent solidity and permanency," and thus, *Spider-Man* "activated and emphasized" an "indirect, but overt patriotism" that took on an "unanticipated political dimension."[35] Lily Rothman of *Time Magazine* argues that after the tragedy of 2001 it took awhile for Americans to feel okay about entertainment, and thus the entertainment industry tried to respond with "reticence" and "sensitivity."[36] As long as the terrorist attacks were fresh in the minds of Americans immediate post-2001 filmic threats against the towers were consensually outlawed, as they were deemed too difficult for the American psyche to handle.

An Allegory: Recreating the WTC for the Skyline

When it is reintroduced into the fabric of the landscape, the WTC tends to attract the gaze of the viewer, for the towers can no longer be simply in the background. Its symbolism is heightened and transformed. In the post-2001 period, the Twin Towers puncture the flow of a given film's images, disrupting the viewer's experience. Spielberg's *Munich* (2005) dramatizes Israel's "Wrath of God" response to the Palestinian terrorist group Black September's murder of eleven Israeli athletes at the 1972 Summer Olympics in Munich. Avner Kaufman (Eric Bana) is based on Yuval Aviv, who was one of five covert members of Mossad, Israel's national intelligence agency. This faction of Mossad operates without ties to Israel and seeks retributive justice against the Black September perpetrators. After successfully eliminating a number of the terrorists, Avner Kaufman returns to his home in Israel, only to feel guilt for what he did, while relentlessly questioning the morality and purpose behind his actions. He leaves Israel and takes up residence in New York, where he suffers from post-traumatic stress. Andrew Anthony observes how it is "no

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[34] *Ibid*.

[35] Guy Westwall, *Parallel Lines: Post 9/11 American Cinema*, 41.

[36] Lily Rothman, "Art Imitates Life: 10 Movies Altered Due to Real-Life Events," *Time Magazine,* July 24, 2012, accessed June 13, 2018, http://entertainment.time.com/2012/07/27/art-imitates-life-10-movies-altered-due-to-real-life-events/slide/spider-man/.

coincidence that the final scene sees the Twin Towers dominating the screen like a ghostly warning of the altogether more potent terror to come."[37] Indeed, as Ephraim (Geoffrey Rush) attempts to convince Avner to return to his homeland, the towers become visible from their meeting point in an empty lot on the fringes of the city. The camera pans slowly to the left to reveal them. The two ideologically opposed men part ways, and a steady and subtle tilt is employed to further direct the audience's gaze to the spectre of the towers in the distance, but which nonetheless still command the off centre of the frame. The film comes to an end.

Figure 19: Avner Kaufman (Eric Bana) in *Munich* (2005), dir Steven Spielberg

On the presence of the WTC at the end of *Munich* Spielberg is quoted as having said: "I don't think you can look at the Palestinian desire for a homeland in the same way you can look at [al-Qaeda's] desire for an Islamic world and their attack on the Twin Towers. You can't speak of them in the same breath. But terrorism informs terrorism, and certainly the planners of the 9/11 attacks had to be aware of Munich when they plotted their arrival on the world stage. So if there's

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[37] Andrew Anthony, "The Eye of the Storm," *The Guardian*, January 22, 2006, accessed April, 16, 2018, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2006/jan/22/awardsandprizes.oscars2006.

any linkage at all it's the way terrorism is demonstrated before the cameras."[38] The controversy around *Munich* originates partially as a result of the film's ambivalence to Mossad's assassination of Black September's members. Anthony acknowledges how "members of the Israeli government have accused Spielberg of 'moral equivalence' in drawing comparison between the terrorists and counterterrorists. Palestinians such as Abu Daoud, one of the surviving members of Black September, have lambasted the film for focusing on the "Zionist side alone."[39] Part of Avner Kaufman's struggle ties directly to what he perceives as the futility of his actions, for in his final confrontation with Ephraim, where the towers appear, Kaufman demands to know what he accomplished, believing the Palestinian leadership will simply be replaced, and the war will continue. Ephraim sardonically asks why one should cut their fingernails when they will grow back. The Munich attacks are condemned throughout the film, but the final scene hints at a vicious circle of violence that will continue to be perpetuated so long as violence and revenge remain the default responses to terrorism, where many innocent people will ultimately suffer.

Spielberg was very much concerned with developing a response to the September 11th attacks, as was evident in his earlier adaptation of H.G. Welles' *War of the Worlds* (2005), in particular the manner in which people discuss and explain the terror attacks to their children. Westwall analyzes a sequence depicting Ray Ferrier's (Tom Cruise) first encounter with the alien invaders in New York City. The "Tripod" alien war machines quickly lash out at the unsuspecting crowd which has formed in the streets in order to make first contact. Many of the witnesses are disintegrated once the attacks commence. Ray survives, returning to his home in New Jersey. He is covered in ash. He stares at his bedraggled reflection in the mirror, traumatized and unsure as to how he should proceed to explain the events to his two children. Westwall argues that Ray's state actively recalls the number of New Yorkers who were covered in ash following the collapse of the WTC and the ballooning clouds of black smoke that enveloped the adjacent blocks.[40] Ray's initial inability to process and relay the events to his kids metaphorically recalls the struggle parents had in explaining the attacks of September 11th to their children. Indeed, the process of mak-

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[38] Andrew Anthony, "The Eye of the Storm," *The Guardian.*

[39] *Ibid.*

[40] Guy Westwall, *Parallel Lines: Post 9/11 American Cinema*, 101-102.

ing, unmaking, and remaking the US' national identity following the attacks can further be traced through changes made to the American education curriculum, where September 11th has emerged as a central subject not only in American history, but also in global history. The Twin Towers now have a strong afterlife in the 21st century, as they have become the icon of the tragedy.

Given the material destruction of the WTC, films set in pre-2001 New York City had to compensate for the absence of the structure. There are a number of films that illustrate this; *Munich* is among them. Films that recreate and rebuild the towers for their skylines rely on a number of techniques and methods. The use of archival, or found, footage of the WTC is one approach; however, in films with significant budgets, the inclination tends toward recreation through the use of CGI. The tendency, therefore, is not, as it was in the 1990s, to destroy the towers through special effects, but rather it is to now recreate them, in order to ensure their visual form is once again present and intact, to compensate for its absence, at least, in the moving image.

In the post-2001 period, *A Most Violent Year* (2014) stands audaciously in its periodization of a dreary and precarious New York City in 1981, of which the urban space is defined at numerous junctures by the appearance of the WTC in its landscape. New York is portrayed on the cusp of a full neoliberal turn. Crime is on the rise in what amounts to one of the most violent years in the city's history. Radio broadcasts are present throughout the film and work to establish this context. Diegetically, the audience learns that the Reagan administration, through austerity measures, has cut federal funding to social programs in an effort to galvanize the private sector. Enter Abel Morales (Oscar Isaac), a Columbian-born man, with a an established and busy home heating oil business, who is trying to actively secure a dominant position in the industry through the acquisition and purchase of a key oil terminal on the fringes of the city. After placing the initial deposit and receiving the blessing of the Jewish Chassidims, the previous owners, Abel is given 30 days to close the deal and pay the remaining amount - a task that proves difficult.

The terminal will allow Abel's company to import and export oil by water. Road transportation has proven to be inefficient. To his misfortune and woe, the company has been beset by a recent series of armed hijacks, targeting the fuel in his container trucks. A disgruntled Abel informs a police officer, who is examining his abandoned and empty truck in a discarded lot outside of the city, that the hijackings are costing him an average of 6000$ per hit, the sum total of which

is 210 000$. Abel suspects the competition is attempting to hinder and stifle his business, and viewers learn that in the past he has been warned and threatened to withdraw and abandon his stake in New York's oil business. Abel, however, is a man of fierce conviction and will not relent. He will do whatever it takes to achieve his goals. Almost everything, for the thought of succumbing to violence to procure his position of power is represented as unsettling for him and against his moral and ethical integrity. Abel will not stoop to the level of a gangster and fight violence with violence; instead, he sees the necessity of operating legitimately by abiding by every set industry and legal standard, and assisting the law when possible.

As the attacks on his trucks persist, Abel's misfortunes continue to balloon, as the Assistant District Attorney's office is investigating him for tax invasion, and what they suspect to be industry wide foul play, such as price fixing. With the possibility of being indicted on several counts, Abel loses the bank's backing. The bank determines that he is a liability, and detrimental to their image and reputation. They refuse to provide him with the loan to secure the terminal, and this proves to be a significant blow. The remainder of *A Most Violent Year* chronicles Abel's frantic and desperate attempt to persuade creditors to lend him the necessary capital, usually on terms that are somewhat unfavourable to the exceedingly vulnerable entrepreneur. Abel's plight is complicated when the truckers are armed with the means to protect themselves against the hijackers. After being severely beaten following a hijack, one of Abel's drivers, Julian (Elyes Gabel), exchanges shots with his assailants on a traffic-heavy autoroute, as they attempt to rob him a second time. No one is injured or killed, but the violent exchange leads Assistant District Attorney Lawrence (David Oyelowo) to put pressure on Abel and his company. Julian is now a fugitive, and Lawrence promises to grant Abel leeway only if he can help bring the driver in.

Class and life circumstance are foregrounded when Abel visits Julian's home in an attempt to find him. While Abel rarely succumbs to violence, he does utilize a number of tactics to elicit the desired response from those he does business with. He pulls a chair close to Julian's wife, tells her that he is her best option, and that he will only support her if she turns her husband in. To a degree, Abel is genuinely concerned with the well-being of his employees, but not to the extent that they will deprive him of, or interfere with, his enterprise. Once Julian is convinced that he must turn himself in, Abel and his attorney, Andrew Walsh (Albert Brooks) drive to the

outskirts of the city to meet the police. They will turn the fugitive in in order to avoid any further damage to their company. While Abel discusses the terms with the police and the Assistant District Attorney, Julien and Andrew wait in the car. A number of sections of the New York skyline are visible during this sequence in the midst of the snow covered, and mostly barren landscape. The outlines of the WTC's towers are visible in the back window of the car above Julian's right shoulder. The WTC is not integrated into the urban material design of the city; but, here it is recreated and reinserted into the frame appearing as a spectre in the background.

The appearance of the WTC at this juncture in the film is not merely random, as it functions as a symbolic and narrative device. Facing incarceration, Julian breaks down in the car and demands to know why Abel is turning him in. An apathetic Walsh explains that Abel is protecting his company and that Julian has caused enough damage. Aside from being a romantic homage to the towers, the presence of the WTC in this scene can be interpreted in a number of ways. Perhaps, the appearance of the towers in the car window is best accounted for by considering the film's melancholic ending. As was previously mentioned, much of *A Most Violent Year* deals with the manner in which one achieves power and wealth. Abel, by the end of the film, has secured the oil terminal and closed the deal. Touring the facility in a celebratory spirit, Abel is confronted by a desperate and delirious Julian, who is once again a fugitive, and is now in possession of a gun. Initially, he holds the gun on Abel, blaming him for his misfortune. Julian struggles to understand how Abel gets to achieve his goals, while he is left to suffer in silence. After Abel informs Julian that he was given a fair chance at wealth and success and that his failure is ultimately his own responsibility and doing, Julian relents, only to turn the gun on himself and commit suicide. The bullet passes through his head, puncturing a hole in the storage tank behind him. Oil begins to leek steadily from the rupture and merges with the blood on the snow-covered terrain. Abel calmly walks towards the tank and plugs the hole with his handkerchief.

Another allegorical use of the WTC can be found in *Watchmen* (2009). This faithful adaptation of Alan Moore's cornerstone graphic novel also recreates the Twin Towers for its landscape using CGI. In *Watchmen* the towers are featured in the backdrop of the Comedian's (Jeffrey Dean Morgan) funeral, a minor detail amidst a bustling sea of images. The sequence begins with an extreme close up of an angel statue in the cemetery. Slowly, the camera dollies upwards and away

from the angel, revealing rows of gravestones, and gradually the skyline in the distance. The camera pulls over the gates of the cemetery, allowing a hearse and funeral party to enter into the frame and the shot nears its closure. As the length of the skyline is gradually revealed during the shot, the towers emerge prominently in the right side of the frame, signalling their retrofitted appearance. Yet, this funeral sequence also conveys and signals the material absence of the towers, for once the Comedian's casket is carried towards the gravesite, the camera is positioned at a low angle beneath the casket, using the legs of the casket carriers to frame the grave, the priest, and

Figure 20: *Watchmen* (2009), dir. Zack Snyder

notably the twin towers in its centre. It signals the death of the towers and reminds audiences of their actual disappearance. Here, the film's images of death and mourning are accentuated by rain accompanied by Simon and Garfunkel's "The Sound of Silence." They are nostalgic images, which are both dark and melancholic. Indeed, Zack Snyder's adaptation of *Watchmen* is an experiment in mimesis as the production team painstakingly and faithfully recreate the panels of the graphic novel for the screen. However, Snyder's film features one major deviation from the source material and that is the film's ending. At the end of Alan Moore's book, a giant teleporting squid lands in New York, triggering an apocalypse - a metaphor for nuclear armageddon. The apocalypse in Snyder's *Watchmen* is launched by an energy signature which emits blue bursts of radiation. Rather than crafting a teleporting squid to unite the world against an alien terror, Adrian Veidt (Matthew Goode) frames Dr. Manhattan (Billy Crudup) in the film adaptation. Bob Re-

hak notes how Snyder's alternate ending can be read as a "response, if a deflected and cryptic one, to the events of September 11, 2001—in particular, the collapse of the World Trade Center's Twin Towers and the scarring of Manhattan—and to the vexed protocols of visualizing a fictional disaster after real-world events have overtaken it."[41] Rehak believes Moore's original ending came too close to the events of September 11th, and that Snyder's ending was an attempt to divert the attacks away from New York in order to de-emphasize the city as Ground Zero.[42] However, efforts of steering destruction away from New York City would subside after *Watchmen,* as urban wreckage would be embraced, appropriated, and exploited by the superhero genre.

A Return to an Aesthetics of Destruction

While the tendency in the aftermath of the September 11th attacks was to avoid depicting the destruction of New York City, so as to not recall the trauma of the events, filmmakers gradually returned to an aesthetics of destruction. Acknowledging the number of post-apocalyptic films of the twenty-first century, Lee Dawdy writes: "The spectacular ruin of the World Trade Centre in 2001 did not so much usher in this era as provide a real-stage set for the representation of a dystopic postmodernity already underway. Its image is burned into our collective cortex, and there is no amount of academic skepticism that can entirely dispel the haunting of this ruin—and the suspicion that signals at least the end of an empire."[43] Genre films such as *The Avengers* (2012), and *Man of Steel* (2013) feature climactic battles that take place in NewYork City, in which, as Karen Randell puts it, the "urban wreckage reverberates with the look of 9/11."[44] In *The Avengers*, New York City is levelled following a face-off between earth's mightiest heroes and a swarm of alien invaders led by the maniacal Loki (Tom Hiddleston). As the supernatural beings square off, innocent New Yorkers flee from the battleground. Their flight is impeded by falling debris and exploding shrapnel. Describing a "9/11 aesthetic" Randell writes:

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[41] Bob Rehak, "Adapting Watchmen after 9/11," *Cinema Journal* 51.1 (2011): 155, accessed June 1, 2018.

[42] Bob Rehak, "Adapting Watchmen after 9/11," 157.

[43] Shannon Lee Dawdy, "Clockpunk Anthropology and the Ruins of Modernity," *Current Anthropology* 51. 6 (December 2010): 766, accessed August 15, 2017.

[44] Karen Randell, "It Was Like a Movie, Take 2: Age of Ultron and a 9/11 Aesthetic," *Cinema Journal* 56.1 (2016): 141, accessed May 15, 2018.

> There is in these movies a repetitive set of sounds: helicopter blades; emergency services sirens; screaming and shouting, particularly the phrase "Oh my God"; and a repetitive set of images: aerial shots of a devastated modern city; vertically falling high-rise tower blocks; emergency responders, particularly firefighters; stunned, injured people; people running from dust clouds; falling debris and falling paper. These effects echo and often replicate the images of 9/11 in extraordinary detail in a way that is not seen in more realist cinema.[45]

Randell goes on to argue: "There is now an iconography of this urban wreckage in film after film that has a proximity to the 9/11 site" which in turn allows "a resonant memory to reemerge each time it is repeated. There is something about this ash-cloud-filled image of the destroyed city that provides and insists on the neurotic repetition of a resonant trauma—unresolved and underexplored in realist cinema—that has a power to affect."[46] Likewise, the polarizing *Batman v. Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016) begins where *Man of Steel* left off—in a city quickly succumbing to rubble and destruction. Bruce Wayne (Ben Affleck) is in the fictional Metropolis, a stand in for New York. Terror erupts around him. Wayne, whose alter-ego is Batman, finds himself powerless and vulnerable as Superman (Henry Cavill) and General Zod (Michael Shannon) square off above the vertical city, wreaking havoc and destruction.

Figure 21: Bruce Wayne (Ben Affleck) in *Batman V. Superman: Dawn of Justice* (2016), dir. Zack Snyder

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[45] Karen Randell, "It Was Like a Movie, Take 2: Age of Ultron and a 9/11 Aesthetic," 138.

[46] *Ibid*., 138.

Wayne darts around the collapsing city, and soon finds himself shielding a child from falling debris; this is communicated from a high angle shot. A crucial eyeline match is subsequently employed, as Wayne's eyes angrily catch sight of Superman and Zod as they collide with a large, unidentifiable vertical. It is Wayne's act of looking upwards, and the angle at which the flight-born supernatural beings collide with the high-rise structure that recalls the decent of the hijacked plane into the WTC. Indeed, Randall posits how the fictional parallel universes of the superhero world operates to remind viewers that the city is "essentially vulnerable" in the post-2001 context.[47] Destroyed city imagery signifies further that "the city is no longer a site to be saved but rather a site to be sacrificed; 9/11 imagery is no longer prevented…it is permitted."[48] Randall thus suggests a shift in representations of urban destruction since the early post-2001 years.

Portrayals of the vertical collapse of New York City occur likewise in *Spider-Man: Homecoming* (2017). The flaming decent of the Stark plane in New York City towards the end of the film is seemingly designed to specifically trigger and recall the decent of the planes into the WTC. The memory of the events is re-imagined through the imagery of destruction. Indeed, the connotations of the city's destruction and death shifts in the post-2001 era, as they are produced by the use and design of genre films, leading one to perhaps consider to what end humanity will continue to envision their doom. Randall observes how the imagery of destruction in genre films operates as a "wound" in the "American psyche."[49] But how much does this CGI urban landscape of destruction contribute to a healing process, or even provide therapeutic catharsis? Rather, this aesthetics of destruction, through its reappropriation of the chaos of September 11th, comes across as exploitative, and shows no signs of relenting.

The Spectre that Haunts the Frame

The retrospective revisitation of pre-2001 New York City films is marked by the presence of the WTC, as the eye is inclined to search the frame for the fleeting vestiges of the structure's preserved material form. While a number of films, as we have seen, employ the towers to sym-

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[47] *Ibid*., 140.

[48] *Ibid*., 138.

[49] *Ibid*., 139.

bolic effect, mainly as a neoliberal symbol, other films index the towers as a result of their prominence on the skyline. Indeed, the abundance of the WTC in moving images stems from cinema's tendency to capture the skyline and the urban landscape from a long shot, in order to assist the viewers in establishing the identity of the city and placing them within its setting. Part of the reason for the strong afterlife of the towers relates directly to several key aesthetic concerns raised by the German classical film theorist, Siegfried Kracauer. Hundreds of films possess the ghost of the Twin Towers, with certain films permitting a more protracted haunting.

Kracauer posits an aesthetics which focuses on film's "particular capacity to reanimate and reconfigure material objects."[50] Writing on the basic assumption behind Kracauer's material aesthetics of film, Miriam Hansen argues that the former believes that film operates as "an extension of photography and therefore shares a marked affinity with the visible world around us" as Kracauer claims that "films come into their own when they record and reveal physical reality."[51] While there is the ability to make reality visible, even at its most particular, film, like the photograph, is restrained by its own technical and material constraints. The realistic potential offered by the film medium lies in its photographic technology, in the photochemical process itself. Visual data are inscribed on the celluloid strip and a specific moment in time is captured at the instance of exposure.[52] In "Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality" (1960), Kracauer discusses the camera's ability to capture the anonymous state of reality, like the leaves that ripple in the wind, and to render the flow of movement perceptible by drawing attention to it.[53] While Kracauer stipulates the scientific potential of the camera, the minutia and details of physical nature which it helps to reveal, he likewise considers the lone face in the crowded square that draws the spectator's attention, becoming ethnographic as the images capture the face of humanity and the architecture of the city, being persevered by the camera. Kracauer writes: "If photography is a

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[50] Miriam Bratu Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno*, (Berkeley and Los Angeles: California University Press, 2012), 5.

[51] Miriam Bratu Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno*, vii.

[52] *Ibid*., vii.

[53] Siegfried Kracauer, *Theory of Film: The Redemption of Physical Reality*, (New York, Oxford University Press, 1960), 69.

function of the flow of time, then its substantive meaning will change depending upon whether it belongs to the domain of the present or to some phase of the past."[54] According to Hansen, "the photograph ages and outlives its referential context, the objects or persons depicted appear to be shrinking or diminishing in significance—in inverse proportion to memory images" which, according to Kracauer, "enlarge themselves into monograms of remembered life."[55] Thus, in Hansen's reading of Kracauer's material aesthetics of film, she observes a "tension between history and that which history has discarded."[56] Photography begins to "occupy the intermediary zone that appeals to Kracauer: the ragpicker, the intellectual seeking to gather the refuse and debris, the ephemeral, neglected, and marginal, the no longer fictional."[57] In light of this aesthetic argument, moving images of the WTC that were captured prior to the attacks redeem a portion of physical reality that has since been lost, for its filmic trace is the fleeting visual vestige of its former material wholeness. Many fictional films document the structure itself.

While there are a number of films that preserve the presence of the Twin Towers, a new phenomena occurs in the 21st century in which the presence of this monument now resonates strongly with its absence. Walter Benjamin writes that "Historical 'understanding' is to be grasped, in principle, as an afterlife of that which is understood; and what has been recognized in the analysis of the "afterlife of works,"[58] Moving images of the WTC are temporally layered, leading the viewer to oscillate between the past that is represented and the present that is continuously defined by the structure's absence. Inevitably, certain films permit this temporal oscillation in greater measure—a consequence of a given film's formal and stylistic arrangements. The use of the long take at the end of Chantal Akerman's *News from Home* (1977) becomes particularly haunting in this regard, as the viewers, depending on their state of knowledge, will likely be inclined to recall the absence of the WTC, not that this is not already the case with other films,

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[54] Miriam Bratu Hansen, *Cinema and Experience: Siegfried Kracauer, Walter Benjamin and Theodor W. Adorno*, 33.

[55] *Ibid*., 33.

[56] *Ibid*., 33.

[57] *Ibid.,* 33.

[58] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* (Cambridge: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 460.

which index the towers. Here, however, the monument's absence is accelerated given the prolonged temporal duration of the shot. As Benjamin notes: "It is not that what is past casts its light on what is present, or what is present its light on what is past; rather, image is that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation."[59] The towers appear ghostlike in films in the post-2001 context, and their indexation in *News from Home* is revelatory of the double meaning they come to acquire, indicating an altered landscape.

Figure 22: *News from Home* (1977), dir. Chantal Akerman

News from Home is composed of a series of hyper-realist vignettes situated throughout New York that become intimately tied to the city and its grid. Akerman employs a fixed-frame, structural aesthetic, as she records the faces of the crowd in the metro and on street corners for prolonged periods of time; she does not venture to the tops of any skyscrapers, rather, her perspective is stringently tied to the ground-level movement of New Yorkers. As these various long takes and moving camera shots unfold, Akerman reads letters her mother sent her from Europe

[59] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project,* 463.

while she was still a student in New York. Now she has returned to New York to film, and *News from Home* operates as a chronology of her time living away from home. It is in a "past-tense form" that "reminds us of the importance of the filmmaker's presence at the site of recording, her experiential tie to her depicted environments."[60] The final shot consists of a Staten Island ferry departing from New York and suggests Akerman's own return home and the closure of a chapter in her life. The camera is invisible, mounted on the moving boat, and the shot begins with only a small legible section of urban space visible. As the ferry distances itself from the city, the camera lingers on the urban skyline. New York appears in the background like a receding "fortress," guarded by an ever-growing stretch of the Atlantic ocean.[61] Gulls fly before the lens as they soar above the boat. Eventually, the WTC emerges into the left hand side of the frame, lingering for a sizeable portion of the shot's approximate eleven-minute length. Initially, only one tower is visible, as the movement of the ferry is slow and gradual. The second tower enters ominously into the frame. The gulls and waves, amidst the drumming engine of the boat, sound nonchalantly, suggesting a quiet and contemplative moment in time that is ultimately fleeting.

The towers in the post-2001 context return to haunt the final shot of *News from Home*, actively evoking the moving image as a ruin of its profilmic moment. Akerman documents New York City in the 1970s, but the significance of this documentation shifts after 2001. With the final ferry shot, the eye actively gravitates towards the presence of the towers in the frame. This is not to say the eye never gravitated towards the structure prior to 2001, for as we have seen, the towers possessed the ability, given their sheer size, to commandeer the frame, whereby the structure could be said to lure the eye of the viewer. The Twin Towers were after all omnipresent in their glistening ornamental stature, offering a slice of height and touristic thrill. One sees the presence of the WTC in *News from Home* and is reminded of what the skyline once was, for the shot is punctured by the absence of the structure. Such an absence seeps into the image and pertains to the hauntings of involuntary memory. Tim Edensor writes:

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[60] Kenneth White, "Urban Unknown: Chantal Akerman in New York City," *Screen* 51:4 (Winter 2010): 368, accessed February 7 2018.

[61] Catherine Russell, *Experimental Ethnography: The Work of Film in the Age of Video*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 168.

> Ghosts haunt the regulated city and the impossible dreams of totalization. Sites of reified memory, like other overcoded spaces, are haunted by ambiguity and multiplicity. The ghost is a disembodied entity which can provoke memories that are strangely familiar, conjuring up a half-recognizable world through the empathetic contact it makes; but it can also provoke a sense of the ineffable and mysterious which is unavailable to representational fixing. These ghostly qualities are partly captured by the notion of the uncanny or *unheimlich*, wherein the familiar and homely suddenly become strange.[62]

While writing specifically on discarded industrial ruins, Edensor's theorization of ghosts and hauntings relates to aspects of the WTC in the post-2001 period. Moving images of the towers are in a state of indeterminacy, haunting in their liminal state, not of rejection and obliteration, but through its presence and the destruction that caused its absence.[63] The phantom-like presence of the WTC seen from the water in *News from Home* seizes hold of the film's space and rekindles the past through a confrontation that is unexpected.[64] The experience of profilmic New York in the 1970s becomes altered by the sight of the structure, and by the thought of its absence that returns to haunt the mind. Such are the qualities of moving images of the WTC in the post-2001 period. The sight of the structure as fleeting, or protracted as it might be represented, interrupts the flow of a film.

This chapter was primarily concerned with the absence of the WTC, or more specifically, the manner in which the appearance of the WTC in the post-2001 context comes to communicate its absence, haunting both the frame and landscape with its profilmic trace The attacks of September 11th, which resulted in the destruction of the Twin Towers, prompted their erasure from film. The 21st century has been categorized by a series of discursive shifts affecting the use and representation of both the towers and New York City in film. After a consensus in Hollywood, New York was conservatively and sympathetically rendered, as portrayals of urban destruction were initially avoided up until a cycle of genre films, or superhero films, began to systematically depict the destruction of the city in order to metaphorically link it to the chaos and terror which had erupted on September 11th. This aesthetics of destruction may operate on one level as cathar-

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[62] Tim Edensor, "The Ghosts of Industrial Ruins: Ordering and Disordering Memory in Excessive Space," *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 23 (2005): 835, accessed March 12, 2018.

[63] Tim Edensor, "The Ghosts of Industrial Ruins: Ordering and Disordering Memory in Excessive Space," 836.

[64] *Ibid*., 837.

tic, aiding the American population to grapple with the wound left by the terrorist attacks. On another level, however, this destruction of the city can be viewed as exploitative, and indicative of a lack of meaningful discourse on the wreckage of the attacks in popular American cinema. Meanwhile, disaster films after 2001 that are set in New York City no longer depict the destruction of the WTC; rather, the tendency when depicting the towers following the attacks has been to recreate and reintegrate them back into the landscape as visually intact, and void of any threat. The towers retain their neoliberal and financial symbolism in the post-2001 context, and filmmakers, as the century has progressed, have exploited this discourse. Despite the wound left by their absence, filmmakers appear to have understood this monument's history of symbolic oppression and, thus, continue to represent it as an object of precarity. The meaning of the towers has, however, fundamentally changed in the post-2001 context. The towers were originally a symbol for empire, hegemony and, rather utopian ideals. Now their appearance in film, whether from films shot prior to the attacks, or after, articulate a strong sense of loss - a break from America's illusion of its exceptional self.

Conclusion

Developing this research entailed compiling a list of films which represented the WTC both prior to, and after the attacks of September 11th; this demanded a great deal of vigilance when retrospectively revisiting films made in New York City before the attacks, and when examining films released following it, but set in New York during the 1973-2001 period, when the towers could be located within the landscape and frame. An academic study of moving images of the WTC had not previously been conducted, which is not to suggest that viewers had yet to remark the phenomena of the towers in film. One can look to the internet, and online video platforms, like YouTube, for detailed visual compilations of the towers. For example, users like "leia176oo" and "aaltra94" have both assembled multi-part video series composed of hundreds of shots of the WTC.[1] Shots of the structure are taken from a disparate number of films, and its representations are shown in rapid succession and juxtaposition. Many of these shots, from films such as *Manhattan* (1979), or *Die Hard with a Vengeance* (1995), capture the towers in the backdrop of the frame, distinguishable, but seemingly inconsequential amidst the plethora of other urban structures surrounding it. The profilmic Twin Towers penetrate these shots in the post-2001 context. Other shots taken from films such as *Godspell* (1973), or *3 Days of the Condor* (1975), place the towers in the foreground of the frame, almost as a romantic fetish.

These compilation series posted by "leia176oo" and "aaltra94" are primarily a celebration of the monument's life and formal beauty, and are of immense archival value given that they contain the visual vestiges of the structure as materially intact. With an absence of critique regarding the structure the assemblies of moving images falls prey to nostalgia, and reminds the viewer of what once was quintessential to the New York City skyline. These montages permit the dense, visual cinematic history of the WTC to be accessible in one online place for viewers to enjoy, and to retrospectively revisit without having to watch an entire film, where the towers are often only fleetingly indexed. However, to simply view sequestered shots of the WTC in rapid montage is to view the structure as separated from its filmic context. In film there are important calculated uses

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[1] "aaltra94," *World Trade Centre in Movies Parts 1 to 12*, YouTube, December 1, 2012, accessed June 13, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=t4gHGYaWzvE&t=223s; "leia176oo", *WTC in Film Parts 1 to 4*, YouTube, April 3, 2018, accessed June 13, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LjOBQ5-WDlE&t=488s.

of the towers, as in *Fight Club* (1999), when the towers are the final structure in the financial district to explode, and are composed in the center of the frame. They are employed as the ultimate symbol of the consumer and neoliberal economy, but only come to be identifiable as such through the narrative threads that lead up to its climactic demise. To view the shot in isolation is to not necessarily comprehend its critical context, for there is indeed a need to view films in their entirety. Gathering fragments of the WTC from fictional films and assembling them into montage has its archival merits, but the sequestering of this structure results in a loss of a significant portion of its historical record. Its indexation and representation within a film can articulate a deeper and more critical meaning. Ultimately, part of the phenomena of moving images of the WTC in the post-2001 period is the spectator's ability to discern the structure within the landscape, as they actively view the film.

Scrolling through the comments below these compilation videos, one also unearths a series of personal anecdotes which tells of many peoples' final experience of the towers, along with statements which reveal where they were on the tragic day America's imaginary was shattered. The message threads below these compilations function as a site for online communal mourning and reminiscences, providing an exception to the often slanderous and dismal abyss message threads swerve off into in the age of social media. September 11th, 2001 transpired around the same time as digital technology experienced exponential innovation and greater democratization. Government agencies were provided with a panoply of tools at their disposal to counteract terrorism, and this has resulted in an erosion of privacy and a loss of civil liberties and rights.

After the collapse of the towers, the USA Patriot Act (Uniting and Strengthening America by Providing Appropriate Tools Required to Intercept and Obstruct Terrorism) was quickly passed by Congress.[2] In the name of national security, provisions in the Patriot Act permitted illegal government spying, along with government-sponsored torture programs.[3] This is not to forget the rise in allegations claiming illegal detentions, illegal search and seizures, racial profiling, and

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[2] Mathieu Deflem and Shannon McDonough, "The Fear of Counterterrorism: Surveillance and Civil Liberties Since 9/11," *Global Society* 52 (2015): 70, accessed January 22, 2018.

[3] Mathieu Deflem and Shannon McDonough, "The Fear of Counterterrorism: Surveillance and Civil Liberties Since 9/11," 71.

improper methods of questioning and coercion.[4] Mathieu Deflem and Shannon McDonough write: "Fear justifies and motivates the use of surveillance, while the expansion of surveillance produces a cultural fear of its capabilities and consequences.[5] September 11th altered the course of American and global history. The burning WTC and its subsequent collapse signalled the start of a new chapter, one defined by fear and xenophobia. The ubiquitous rise of the panoptic modalities of discipline and control - varying forms of digitized surveillance - have effectively eroded the distinction between both private and public spheres. They have permeated throughout society without limitation, or interruption in space and time, and have rendered the actions and inactions of all of its members visible, especially along racial lines, in what amounts to an attempt to achieve a total social order amidst the chaos of a shrinking and globalizing world. As Foucault argues: "the circuits of communication are the supporters of an accumulation and a centralization of knowledge…it is not that the beautiful totality of the individual is amputated, repressed, altered by our social order, it is rather that the individual is carefully fabricated in it…"[6] Such are the effects of September 11th on 21st century society, as one finds difficulty in living in anonymity and off the grid. To move in urban and crowded zones, is to leave a distinct trace and imprint of the body in a particular place and at a specific time, for the digital eye of order voyeuristically and knowingly watches over all. HBO's 8-part mini-series *The Night Of* (2016) thoroughly details this modern plight. Nasir "Naz" Khan (Riz Ahmed) is a Pakistani American college student accused of murdering a woman in New York City on the Upper West Side after picking her up in his cab. While it is never made clear whether Naz committed the crime or not, the audience is led to believe that the murder was involuntarily committed and, in law, the defence would be automatism. The prosecution team, in spite of their racial prejudice, struggle to convict Naz as they are unable to prove his guilt. They are, however, for the most part, capable of determining when and where Naz was prior to entering into the victim's apartment. Caught by surveillance cameras, Naz' trajectory the night of the crime is easily ascertained. *The Night Of* is in effect a post-2001 text that represents the state and identity of the city after the attacks. Anonymity has given way to

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[4] *Ibid*., 74.

[5] *Ibid*., 76.

[6] Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, (New York: Random House, 1995), 216-217.

visibility, and this proves to have a social formative baring on Naz, as his innocence has been stripped away by the end of the mini-series.

As evidenced in the compilation videos of "leia176oo" and "aaltra94," there are several hundred films which depict the towers, and this list continues to grow, especially as filmmakers experiment with new methods for reintegrating the towers into their films. The "9/11 aesthetic" is far from worn out, as modern day anxieties and fears continue to harken back to the attacks. 2018 alone continues to see the release of films which pay homage to this destroyed structure. In *Avengers: Infinity War* (2018), Thanos (Josh Brolin) travels to the fictional planet, Vormir, where he has been led to believe the powerful "Soul Stone" to be hidden. He ventures up to a mountain's peak where he encounters a twin vertical structure. Thanos is told by the Soul Stone's guardian, the Red Skull (Ross Marquand), that in order to procure the precious and powerful stone he must first sacrifice that which he loves most. The sacrifice demands that Thanos offer his daughter, Gamora (Zoe Saldana) to the stone and its guardian, and this entails throwing her off of a precipice located between the twin verticals. These verticals seem to deliberately mimic the form of the Twin Towers, and they appear at a crucial juncture in the film, moments prior to Thanos' inflicted state of remorse and melancholia. They signal a shift in tone that is subsequently defined by loss and desperation It is not everyone who will gaze upon the verticals of Vormir in *Infinity War* and associate them with the Twin Towers, but as Randell has argued, the Marvel universe has a history of creating images that metaphorically recall the wanton destruction of September 11th, and the loss that came after. Nearly two decades after the attacks, scholars contend that Americans have yet to surpass the trauma caused by the attacks. Anna Froula believes that Americans have turned to "film and television representations to try to understand these events as they continue to unfold…"[7] Although it has yet to be released at the time of this writing, the trailer for *Skyscraper* (2018), is filled with imagery that explicitly recalls the destruction of the towers, and warrants brief consideration in light of its relevancy.

In *Skyscraper*, Will Sawyer (Dwayne Johnson), is a retired military man with a prosthetic leg, who provides security assessment for "The Pearl," which he then describes in the trailer as

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[7] Anna Froula, "What Keeps Me Up at Night: Media Studies Fifteen Years After 9/11," *Cinema Journal* 56.1 (2016): 111, accessed May 30, 2018.

being the most “advanced super-tall structure in the world.” There is hesitation in his voice, as Will Sawyer mentions that “nobody knows what would happen if something were to go wrong.” The trailer, following these words, immediately depicts terrorists hijacking the enormous sky-scraper, and the 97th floor of the building is immediately seen ablaze. The manner in which "The Pearl" is seen burning evokes the burning upper floors of the WTC prior to its collapse on September 11th. Will Sawyer must break into the burning superstructure in order to save his family. Ultimately, both *Infinity War* and *Skyscraper* are testaments to the continued damage the terror attacks of 2001 has had on the American psyche; it is still an unhealed wound that requires mending. These dynamics in representation will continue to play out in American cinema.

The scope of this work could not take into consideration every momentary image of the WTC. Instead, an effort was made to identify key contexts for these fleeting and fragmentary representations, and to consider the appearance of the towers both prior to and after the terror attacks. Films such as *The Dream Team* (1989), and *Home Alone 2: Lost in New York* (1992), evoked the towers as a landmark to marvel and gape at; these are romantic representations which helped solidify the iconicity and importance of the towers on the New York City skyline from both a touristic and geographical directional perspective. The WTC substantiated and added to the grandeur and splendour of New York, but as was discussed, the construction of the towers came at a time when the city began to be plagued by great income disparity, and consequent precarity. In effect, the construction of the towers was symptomatic of the uneven urban development of New York City. Funds were diverted away from the public, and efforts to improve dilapidated low-income housing were abandoned in favour of privatization.

Lots surrounding the WTC were left barren and underdeveloped while, in stark contrast, the newly inaugurated towers glistened in their fresh, ornamental stature; later, it housed the *nouveau riche* of the neoliberal market, and effectively became a zone of privilege reserved for the select few. Public observation decks were opened only gradually. In this regard, neo-noirs like *Taxi Driver* (1976) and *The American Friend* (1977), through the strategic narrative and visual placement of the WTC in the frame, criticized the structure’s capitalistic sensibility along with its existence in the city; this was also by way of their gritty and grimy evocation of New York - a place of transience and instability. Especially in *The American Friend*, the towers appear to op-

press those who wander the streets far below, which is to say that while one may mourn the loss of the towers in the post-2001 period, one cannot ignore the number of films which evidence a strong critique of the WTC in the urban fabric of the city. These films problematize the monument's consolidation of class power, and consequent bifurcation of power.

Such critical sentiments are foregrounded more explicitly by the destruction of the WTC in disaster films in the 1990s. Asteroids and tsunamis collide with the towers, leaving the structure in flames, or demolished to a heap of rubble and debris. While, retrospectively, this type of spectacle takes on new uncanny meanings, it also situates the towers as a key financial node in the transnational market structure that, once destroyed, signals and accelerates the arrival of the apocalypse, or varying forms of widespread panic and systemic collapse. The towers are represented as a point of vulnerability in the city, an appendage that once severed, leaves the nation and globe profoundly withered and scathed. As a financial monument, the towers were understood as a center for the flow and transfer of capital, and disaster films recognized this practical and symbolic configuration, along with the potential harm its destruction could solicit on an integrated global economic system. The attacks of September 11th were by no means random, as the destruction of the WTC was strategically calculated by al-Qaeda, as they knew full well that an attack of such magnitude would inflict harm on the financial regimes of the United States and other countries with vested economic ties to global capitalism.

Prior to its destruction, films like *Escape from New York* (1981) and *A.I. Artificial Intelligence* (2001) developed futuristic renditions of New York City where the WTC continued to dwell on the skyline. While the WTC appears in these two films, it has nonetheless been abandoned, and is seen as gradually succumbing to ruination. The towers have lost all of their splendour and have been absolved of their romantic sensibility; they are treated anachronistically, and continue to exist in an imagined future defined by totalitarianism and oppression. The collapse of the towers in 2001, however, prompted a sympathetic and conservative representation of New York City. Critiques of the WTC in film subsided immediately following the attacks, as patriotism and nationalism were strongly celebrated and encouraged. In an effort to respect historical reality, the towers were scrubbed and cut from a number of films and television series and, initially, not shown at all. The zeitgeist stipulated the sight of the towers on screen as difficult for audi-

ences to witness. However, certain directors such as Spike Lee, with *The 25th Hour* (2002), refused to stray from developing a meaningful local dialogue in response to the events of September 11th. He chose to actively capture and incorporate New York's state of mourning and grief into the film. There is a hapticality present throughout the film, especially in the images which depict city workers removing the rubble and debris from the ruins at Ground Zero. Spike Lee's representation of New York in the aftermath of the attacks is void of any specific patriotic or nationalistic mandate pedalled by the government, yet it is ultimately an exception in this regard. For the most part, films developed a black and white rhetoric in response to the terror attacks, where they were apt to situate America as the victim, and represent, all too often, the visible minority as the enemy. Scholars, such as Guy Westwall, have written on this aesthetic at length, examining the pervasiveness of this binary in action and war films. *American Sniper* (2014) *and Jack Ryan: Shadow Recruit* (2014) fall into this category of cinema. These films depict an encounter with the burning and smouldering WTC. It is the image of the towers succumbing to ruination which incentivizes the protagonists from these films to take up arms and enlist in the American military.

In one capacity, the WTC appears on screen in the post-2001 period merely through the popularized news footage of its destruction; its destruction is no longer caused by an apocalyptic, natural disaster, as it did in the 1990s. The death of the city takes on new connotations in the post-2001 period. The iconic ruins of the twin towers come to stand in for the event itself; and the troubles confronting first responders have augmented the trauma of the attack, attached it more directly to the working and middle classes. Genre films, specifically superhero films, evoke the terror of September 11th via the complete destruction of the city. As villainous aliens and idealized all-powerful heroes battle in the city, it is the citizen that is left to suffer and die due to their futile inability to avoid the rubble and debris falling from collapsing verticals above. These genre films continue to be released *en masse*, and continue to be designed to reverberate with a look of wreckage that actively recalls the terror attacks. Imagery of the attacks is no longer prevented, but permitted; these superhero genre films further possess a resonant trauma that is unresolved and

underexplored in realist cinema[8] The reverberation of terror and destruction pervades in genre film, but is often absent from dramatic works.When the WTC is reintroduced to film in the post-2001 period it tends to be by way of CGI. The skyline must be rebuilt for period films, and the towers are always represented as materially intact, and void of threat. However, the towers are never merely present; this is true not only of the pre-2001 period, but of the post-2001 period. *A Most Violent Year*'s (2014) usage of the WTC recalls the manner in which films released in the 1970s and 1980s represented it as a financial and neoliberal monument at the centre of a precarious and oppressive New York City. The structure's reappearance need not stringently be glorified, or romanticized, as it was never totally defined as such prior to its destruction. In the years to come, the structure will continue to be scrutinized as it reappears in film; this demands vigilance on the part of the spectator given its iconicity.

In many regards, Chantal Akerman's *News from Home* (1977) was the foundation for this research. The protracted presence of the Twin Towers on screen during the final long take of the film led this writer, upon first viewing, to recall the events of September 11th and to focus on the fact of the structure's absence in the physical world. Such an experience is cerebrally immersive as the eye gravitates to and ponders the presence of the towers in the frame; it becomes a moment of remembering profilmic New York. Of course, one can hardly generalize and suggest that every spectator who witnesses the towers post-2001 will be inclined to contemplate the events of September 11th and the absence of the structure; rather, this is to emphasize the strong afterlife that moving images of the WTC inherit, and to heed the image as a ruin of its profilmic moment. The significance of films which contain the trace of the WTC shifts. The Twin Towers, in all of the films in where they appear, haunt the frame. It is a powerful ghost-like object that survives in the image, as an encounter with the past. Through collectively assembling these fleeting fragments, one arrives at a better understanding of the convoluted history of September 11th. The structure will be remembered by those who gazed in awe, but it will also be remembered by those who slipped into the fissures of capitalism, and found themselves alone and abandoned on society's fringes.

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[8] Karen Randell, "It Was Like a Movie, Take 2: Age of Ultron and a 9/11 Aesthetic," *Cinema Journal* 56.1 (2016): 137-141, accessed May 30, 2018.

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