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Nine-Eleven-Two-Thousand-And-One: The Morning After and the Melancholy Streets of Manhattan

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C'est le désastre obscur qui porte la lumière.
– Maurice Blanchot, *L'écriture du désastre*

We [Americans], in games, are not fascinated by death, its nearness and its avoidance. We are fascinated by victory and we replace the avoidance of death by the avoidance of defeat.
– Ernest Hemingway, *Death in the Afternoon*

This essay has grown out of moments in the mornings after September 11th, 2001. It is an attempt to remember events to which I refer, paraphrasing Ralph Waldo Emerson and Maurice Blanchot, as an experience of death. The questions that form the backdrop of this essay are the future political and cultural role of the US in the advancing century, and the role and the responsibility of American studies on both sides of the Atlantic and beyond. With these questions in mind I return to the scene of 9/11 to consider the spectacle of death that was staged there and to see how the representations of life and death in US literary culture may be a useful way of grasping some realities of contemporary American culture and its impact on the rest of the world.

Nine-eleven was a traumatic historical event that saw the brutal irruption of death into the domestic economy of US culture. What this "event" was exactly has not yet been resolved, which may be the reason why most people, I among them, designate "it" by a date, which is a necromantic series of numbers – "nine-eleven-two-thousand-and-one." I shall not try to define 9/11 or pass a judgment on it from the moral or political point of view, but I shall seek to address the relation between that "event" and its semiotic under-

standing. I propose that the drama of 9/11, the difficulty to comprehend it, and the tragedies that ensued from it, may be due in large part to the problematic relation death entertains with its representation. 9/11 revealed the predicament of the representation of death as something that particularly ails US culture and impinges – often dramatically – on the political fictions and realities produced by that culture.

We all remember where we were on September 11th, 2001, at 13.48 GMT, or 8.48 Eastern Time. There are but few occurrences of the sort that make people realize so acutely their situatedness in the world by exposing them to the spectacle of death and making them reflect on their own mortality. A sampling of such events in the last decades may include the assassination of JFK, the fall of the Berlin Wall or the verdict in the O. J. Simpson trial.[1] The traumatic character of these events is essential if they are to produce their effects on a mass of people. It is equally crucial that they be mediated and thereby turned into narratives that blur the borderlines between fiction and historical fact. Such events not only give us an acute sense of topographical and existential situatedness, but they also require that we situate ourselves vis à vis these events, and that we adopt a stance and a position. These events take place at a given moment – death is always sudden; death is given at a given moment. This moment of death interrupts that which may have seemed as the smooth teleological course of an existence. Suddenly personal narratives, intimate fictions, collide with what is represented as the hard facts of reality. Because "death, as a material event, bears a problematic relation to generalization" (Schleifer, "Benjamin" 314), there are as many such stories and places as there are individuals. Some stories are moving, some are ironically funny, most are imbued with a sense of paradox, shock, and surprise. All of them begin with something like, "I remember that I was doing this or that when suddenly – ." All such stories are remarkably unremarkable; what they all record is the clash, at a given moment, between individual stories, the individual realities of individual lives, and the communal fiction of politics.

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[1] It is essential to note that these events do not have a universal value. The 9/11 events became significant because they provided a spectacle of death significant for a given culture. My other examples of spectacular and specular events are all related to the US because they bear witness to the influence of US culture on the global stage. It was particularly striking to see, during the (first) "war on terrorism" that followed 9/11, Afghani who had strictly no idea why US troops were in Afghanistan. For people who had no television – no electricity or running water, for that matter – 9/11 was no more real than a fiction told about a distant fairyland. For them it had not been, it could not have been, the communal spectacle of death that was forced on us/US.

We all remember that when he was first told of the events, the President of the United States, George W. Bush, was visiting a primary school in Sarasota, Florida. A photographer captured the scene in a picture that shows the President receiving the incomprehensible news. In that picture, reproduced around the world in all the media, he is seated with his legs crossed in front of a classroom blackboard that proudly proclaims, "Reading makes a country great." A few hours later, President Bush demanded from us/US citizens and from the rest of the world a very specific form of situatedness and a very specific form of reading. In the dichotomous reading he and his administration proposed in the evening of September 11th, 2001, the political situation was cast as a medieval auto-da-fé in terms of a "momentous fight between good and evil." Against the terrifying and traumatic irruption of death into the US domus, there were only two possible alternatives: *either* you situated yourself on the side of America, *or* you situated yourself against it.

We all remember that moment, on September 11th, 2001, when the borderlines between fiction and reality, between the imagination and the real, between the message and the medium, between the sacred and the profane, between the economic and the religious, between history and myth, all those borderlines that we knew to be wavering, uncertain, mooted and disputed, came crashing down on us/US all in a thunderous noise and a cloud of dust that obliterated the sun. The time was 13.48.46 GMT, or 8.48.46 Eastern Time. We all remember – I remember I was about to celebrate my younger daughter's birthday, for she was born on September 11th, and I felt that I too was born on a September 11th, and that the 21st century was born then.

Not only can 9/11 be seen as a watershed between two historical periods (and coincidentally between two centuries in *one* of the world's calendars) but it can primarily serve as a divide between two ways of *reading* the realities of our world. It is a critical moment which represents, from the critical point of view, a decisive step from a modern to a postmodern world. 9/11 may be seen as the tragic touchstone closing modernism and opening onto the postmodern era, an era dominated politically, economically and culturally by the US on the global stage. If we have learned anything from the experience of death of 9/11, it may be that we urgently need a different way of reading the realities of our globalized polity. If reading can make nations great, 9/11 has blatantly shown the necessity of a reading of the world that would take issue with the US erasure of death in its own culture. The dichotomous discourse that emerged in the aftermath of 9/11 indicated a desire for a melancholic return to times when death was not part of the US cultural economy; it also showed that in a world transformed by contagion and reac-

tion into a metonymy of the melancholy streets of Manhattan, the US was refusing to do its morning work.

For many people, 9/11 was a mediated event, something that took place in representation, primarily on TV, but also in pictures, reports or articles. Death was on representation "live" but it was also a material event. "9/11," the generalized historical event, was transformed into an empty signifier made of a mysterious series of numbers, and circulated around the globe on TV and the Internet as the result of fast-emerging narratives and counter-narratives. But even as it was becoming a fiction, a show and a commodity producing a considerable cash flow, it was also a painfully long series of personal realities. The realities of the lives brutally interrupted by death formed a paratactic and elliptical collage that was melted together into more unified narratives that were utilized to support a dichotomous and melancholic reading of the situation. Between the parataxis of individual realities and the fiction of a dichotomous official discourse, 9/11 begged the question of the representation of death as an essential articulation of contemporary US culture and the political fictions and realities that culture produces. The simple quilted memorials that sprung up on the streets and in the parks of Manhattan for the people missing in the towers bore witness that death has a problematic relation to generalization, and that the texture of an adequate and ethical response to 9/11 could only be paratactic and elliptical.

"Death," Sarah Goodwin and Elisabeth Bronfen propose, "stands as a challenge to all our systems of meaning, order, governance, and civilization" (4). This too was demonstrated by 9/11. Death upsets systems of meaning, order, governance and civilization because the latter are predicated on our capacity to represent the world we inhabit, and because death challenges our capability to represent those realities. This is particularly true of US culture where death appears as such a threat that it has been ousted from the domestic economy of that culture. "Representation" has a vexed and disputed history, a history that establishes the Western notion of fiction and therefore of "reality." Especially when it appears as synecdoche, "representation" is the key concept to many political systems, most notably in our representative democracies in which when the President speaks s/he speaks as/for the entire country. This is not the place to explore the Aristotelian echoes of the word, nor the immense tradition that derives from it in the arts, politics and psychoanalysis.[2] I shall only retain that "representation" is indispensable to the pro-

[2] Goodwin and Bronfen note: "The importance of death to any theory of representation is clearest if we remember that the term *representation* comes to current critical usage from essentially two sources: politics and psychoanalysis. It is not always evident how the two meanings relate

duction of fiction. Also that a "representation," whether it produces a political fiction – such as a President speaking for/as an entire country – or any other sort of fiction, implies a performance and a dramatic staging. The representation of death of 9/11 was a cultural performance and a spectacle staged in the US domus whence it had been ousted, or where it had been confined to the attic.

9/11 and the difficulties to comprehend it have confirmed that, as Bronfen and Goodwin write, "much of what we call culture comes together around the collective response to death" (3). Such a collective response to death is what took place in New York, one of the most represented cities in the world, and one with the highest iconic and representative power. The skyline of Manhattan was to be the stage on which this unique cultural and political drama was to be performed. The history of New York's skyscrapers is part of the history of modernity for which the destruction of the WTC served as a last act, or maybe already, an epilogue. That specific form of architecture grew out of American soil and very early on called to be represented in writing or in photography, with such celebrated pictures as Alfred Stieglitz's *Flatiron Building*. The echoes of the aesthetics defined by and through this architecture resonate in many US literary authors from Henry James to Paul Auster. On the other hand, Stieglitz's or Edward Steichen's photographic representations of this architecture transformed the buildings into a form of reality so deeply ingrained in Western eyes that they have gradually become indistinguishable from modernism itself.

This prototypically American architecture that served as a setting for 9/11 was designed from the beginning as a response to the scarcity of commodifiable space. Its design was the product of a cultural and economic logic that sought to maximize profit through the use of land. Skyscrapers seem to be produced by a sort of natural "necessity" in the course of economic events. But in fact, such an interpretation of their sleek and smooth modernist aesthetic has created a unified fiction, which, as Peter Brooks has it, "leads us away from the violence inherent in it, by pushing us toward the ending" (van Alphen 38). 9/11 brutally revealed that under its bold façade, the skyscraper conceals an accumulated violence metonymically comparable to the energy accumulated by its elevation toward the sky. In addition to being a modernist icon, the skyscraper reifies an ambitious and aggressive conception of space and society. As they have continued to grow increasingly higher towards the sky, these buildings have exceeded their initial meaning of capitalist suprem-

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to each other. The common denominator, of course, is power, and the body politics defends itself against a powerful enemy common to the physical body" (4).

acy and cultural domination and have come to represent an ideal of almightiness that has placed them in the realm of myth. Their bold and stupendous verticality, the formidable energy that emanates from their frames and the economic and political power they stand for transcend their mundane function, which is to economize space and maximize profit. In so many ways, skyscrapers have become modern cathedrals where the values of modernism have been both produced and worshipped. Despite their relatively young age – the Flatiron was built in the early years of the twentieth century and the Twin Towers would have celebrated their 30th anniversary in 2003 –, these buildings, like cathedrals, have rapidly been associated with timeless and everlasting power. As such, they are a form of architecture that denies the eroding action of time, the work of history and the presence of death. This architecture – whose masculine character only needs to be adumbrated to become blatant – seeks to occult death by trying to proclaim the timelessness and the immortality of the power it reifies.

The Twin Towers represented the summum of such power, and the 9/11 aggression was aimed at the icon of US modernity and capitalist power in a globalized economy. Naturally, it is possible to see 9/11 as a historical inevitability, as the product of the combination of ideology and technology. In his 1988 work on the urban and architectural development of New York, Geoffrey Moorhouse wrote in a tone that now sounds grimly ironic: "It was always on the cards that the really high skyscrapers and . . . aircraft . . . would one day collide in New York; and it is perhaps more surprising that this did not happen until 1945" (30). But 9/11 was more significant than an accidental collision between two forms of technology; it was the collision between history and death and a culture, reified in its architecture, that had for a long time ignored them. 9/11 and the destruction of the WTC can be read as the finale of a sense of a metaphysical crisis that has been haunting the discourse of modernism from the poetry of T. S. Eliot to the critical work of George Steiner. The irruption of death into a plot in which it was present but always erased or obfuscated created a void in the New York landscape where, instead of the towers that once stood as the synecdoche for US imperial power, there was now a big nothing. The destruction of the World Trade Center that scarred for a while the Manhattan skyline has made metonymically visible a yawning chasm in US culture. Death appeared as that void; it is into that chasm that US literary and cultural studies have the responsibility to look.

To consider the spectacle of death in US culture from the European side of the Atlantic may appear as a very presumptuous attempt at best, a voyeur-

istic and a very irreverent one at worst. Amongst the indispensable attempts at situating oneself after 9/11, one consists in stating the obvious: the aggression against the WTC and the Pentagon on September 11th, 2001 was a crime; the indiscriminate exaction of lives cannot be excused, let alone condoned. Although it is impossible to consider these events as if they had no political or historical roots, claiming that the US "deserved" what happened because of its arrogance is not only dubious intellectually, but downright dishonest and ludicrous. No safe geographical, critical, or cynical distance can provide the appropriate stance to contemplate the yawning chasm opened by 9/11.

9/11 was a shocking experience of death that has forced us/US to ask the question that opens Ralph Waldo Emerson's essay "Experience": "Where do we find ourselves?" The irruption of death into a space that seemed immune to it or that denied it posed the question of history, that is, the question of the past, of memory and mourning, but also of future and responsibility. Emerson evokes these questions in the opening lines of his essay when he describes human life and more generally culture as a staircase of history and destiny: "[T]here are stairs below us, which we seem to have ascended; there are stairs above us, . . . which go upward and out of sight" (471). Every step of the staircase is a given historical moment, but the moment of realization of where we stand is the moment when death is given.

Where (and how) we stand is the question 9/11 posed in paradoxical terms. Although "9/11" happened "live" and had been from the very start a representation of death, it was a material event, a material irruption of death onto the US political and cultural scene. We all knew that people had actually died, or were dying before our stupefied eyes, yet very few images representing people dying or dead were actually shown. At the same time, more or less deliberately inflated numbers of casualties were reported by the media to counteract the impression of unreality that "infotainment" channels had contributed to creating over the years. "Be the first one to know," was then the slogan of CNN. But know what? "Reality," supposedly, but how do you know that what you see *is* real? Regina Barreca comments on our fiction-reality predicament:

> Just in case you thought there was no distinction between representation and reality, there is death. Just in case you thought experience and the representation of experience melted into one another, death provides a structural principle separating the two. See the difference, death asks, see the way language and vision differ from the irrevocable, the real? (174)

There is no cheating with death; no semblance, no seeming – or so it seems. In Barreca's words, death provides something like Sigmund Freud's "principle of reality" (67): it makes real that which could otherwise be faked. For thousands of people in New York, across the nation and around the world, 9/11 was an experience of death that wounded them most intimately. For them, despite the paradoxical representation that was constantly commodifying it as a spectacle, death was real, irrevocable, certain. It had showed that no matter how close we may get to the ones we love, their death, which cannot be generalized or summed in a unified narrative, always makes them other.

It is this irrevocable certainty of otherness that Emerson seeks to grasp in "Experience." He poses the question of the relation between the "direct" and irrevocable experience of death and its refashioning within (US) culture. In the passage that forms the cornerstone of this much-wrought essay, Emerson refers to the untimely death from scarlet fever of his five-year-old son Waldo. From all the accounts we have, it seems that Emerson suffered immensely from the loss of his child; it even seems that his mental sanity may have been at stake as the result of the death of the young Waldo, and yet he writes:

> [T]his calamity . . . does not touch me: some thing which I fancied was part of me, which could not be torn away without tearing me, nor enlarged without enriching me, falls off from me, and leaves no scar. . . . *I grieve that grief can teach me nothing*, nor carry me one step into real nature. . . . Nothing is left us now but death. We look to that with a grim satisfaction, saying, *there at least is reality that will not dodge us*. (473, emphasis added)

Emerson's text presents us with a *gap* in experience. We should learn from experience the experience of death, yet after 9/11 we wear the mourning of an experience that has taught us/US nothing.

"We look at death with a grim satisfaction, saying, there at least is reality that will not dodge us," Emerson writes – but reality does dodge us/US, and there's the rub. US culture is not ignorant *of* death; it may be, on the contrary, that it suffers from an *excess of knowledge*, and that the trust in that knowledge and in a technical expertise resulting from a long scholarly, political, and institutional practice have led to representing death in ways that are unable to bring that experience home. "[S]ome unfriendly excess or imbecility neutralizes the promise of genius," Emerson writes (474), but he adds that this may only be a lesser danger, for, he continues, "The grossest ignorance does not disgust like . . . impudent knowingness" (475). Death is thematized

and even blatantly hypertrophied in many facets of US culture, including foreign politics, Hollywood films, television, or the steady application of the death penalty. However, beyond this unbearable sweeping generalization lurks the disquieting sentiment that in US culture "[d]eath qua the real . . . is what representations [of death] try to screen out" (Goodwin and Bronfen 13). 9/11 has revealed death as the purloined letter of US culture. It is everywhere for everyone to see, yet in spite of all the work done by students of American culture and literature acting in turn as archeologists, detectives, epistemologists, grammarians, hermeneutic scholars, or librarians, death seems to have taught the US nothing.

Now that personal stories subside, where do *we* find ourselves, on another morning after 9/11? Another way of posing the question would be to ask how the US is going to do its work of mourning and project itself into the future. Whither American civilization? Whither America? The anxiety of the question comes from the near homonimity of "whither." Where is America? Where is it going? But also, is America, its power, and the sense of its exceptionalism withering?[3] This is also a way to ask what ails American civilization and causes the trembling in the voice asking the question and moves us/US, the students of America, to assume our responsibility. For it is ultimately a question of responsibility we are asking, when we ask, "Whither America?" Jacques Derrida formulates this question of responsibility in terms uncannily evocative of the rhetoric or the parlance that has been surrounding 9/11:

> No justice – I do not even mean "law" or "right" – appears to be possible or even thinkable without a principle of *responsibility*, which extends beyond any living presence . . . to all those who are not yet born or those who are already dead, whether they be the victims of wars, political violence, extermination, racism, colonialism, or any other form of oppression by capitalist imperialism or any other form of totalitarianism. . . . [W]ithout this responsibility and this respect for justice for those *who are not here*, for those who are not yet present or who are no longer present, what sense would there be in asking the question "where are we?" or "where shall we be tomorrow" – the question *whither?* (15-16, my translation)

The effacement of death in US culture – the absence in that culture of what Derrida calls the "responsibility and respect for those *who are not here*" – makes it impossible for the US to assume its responsibility for its history and

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[3] I am indebted to Jacques Derrida for this double reading of "wither" and "whither," which poses the question of a historical direction and the sense of historical responsibility.

for the history of its responsibility. For the students of America, to try to learn from the experience of death, to include it into the economy of language and culture may provide the possibility, or even the necessary condition, for an ethical attitude toward their historical responsibility, which may, in turn, become the key that unlocks a conception of the future of US culture.

Including the experience of death into our economies of language and knowledge may be the only responsible attitude toward the future. But is not death the negation of the future? Is it not the certain proclamation that there is no future? "Death will come," Blanchot writes, "without our having to approach it, without any work on our part, without having to worry about it." "That's true, but at the same time, that is not true, for," Blanchot continues, "that which makes me disappear from the world cannot be founded in that world, and is thus, in a way, not guaranteed, not sure" (*Espace* 117). Death, Blanchot proposes, is an event that takes place outside the dichotomy of the known and the unknown. Death is a form of knowledge, even as it is knowledge's other. In order to learn from the experience of death, it is necessary to relinquish the certainties provided by what Emerson calls "unfriendly . . . imbecility" on the one hand, *and* "impudent knowingness" on the other (474, 475). To learn from death, then, cannot consist in applying a method to the unknown and making it known. The devotion to the task that unlocks a responsible future consists in importing the un-certain into the economy of the known.

This daunting move seems to contradict the avowed aim of experience, which consists in expanding the domain of the known. To fulfill the task, that is, to respond to "those who are not here," death and knowledge must not be accounted for within a mutually exclusive pair of terms whose contradiction can only be resolved in the blinding light and the climax of final revelation. Blanchot writes that no work or movement is necessary to find death – death will find us/US. But this may precisely be the key to the experience of death as knowledge and knowledge's other. We do not need to look for the other; we can even barricade ourselves against otherness, or we can do the work and include that otherness into our economy. Death can be the other of our lives; we can even reserve that otherness to others: zero dead in *our* lives, zero dead in *our* neighborhood, zero dead in *our* country – *Zero dead! Zero dead! Zero dead!*

It is time we returned to the streets of Manhattan. One of the striking characteristics of the representations of the destruction of the WTC was what one commentator called their "high invisibility content" (Frodon). Indeed, the victims were invisible, and so were the assassins. The pain, the terror, the

political targets, and the effects, of multifarious nature, triggered by the event – all were invisible. Death was rendered invisible through a long chain of metonymies that reduced the dead to "human commas" in a fiction from which death had been banned. In a grim analogy that compared the people throwing themselves out of the burning buildings, the dead were no subjects; they were not the text; they were only its punctuation.

Death was screened out in many images of 9/11 and was replaced by the melancholy aesthetics of a Manhattan transformed into a post-civilization Wasteland. There were no visible dead people, but in contrast there were dust-covered, unrecognizable, and zombie-like survivors whose haggard errancy was captured on camera. The lost look in the eyes of the shocked survivors was contrasted with the steadfast determination inscribed in the photographic portraits of many "heroes," the men of the New York Fire Department, in particular. These images suggest that, as Schleifer has it, "death is both inherent in the life of the tragic hero and it is also its limiting Other" ("Benjamin" 317). The heroism of these men bravely facing death was immediately embedded into a cultural narrative into which they snuggly fit. Thus the photos of the men of the NYFD were associated with, and sometimes even shown together with, mythic images of US soldiers in battle, such as the Pulitzer Prize photo showing marines hoisting the US banner on Iwo Jima during the Pacific war. This melancholic aesthetics was the result of what Blanchot calls a "trick of the ego [which] consists in sacrificing the empirical ego in order to preserve a transcendental or formal 'I.'" In this conjuror's trick, "the ego destroys itself to save its soul, or knowledge, which includes ignorance" (*Désastre* 26). This aesthetized heroism displaced the singular experience of death and replaced it with a virile rhetoric of action and a form of charm and seduction that is difficult to resist. The sex appeal of these heroes turns death into a feminine other that must be conquered or seduced and the pictures show the transformation of the feminine vernacular of death into a new morning of patriarchy in which [these heroes] can waken the old powers of the Allfather's World.[4]

The photos that portray the heroic action and defiance of death of the survivors who emerge like Lazarus from the rubble, or of the men of the NYFD who look death in the eyes and say "let's dance," constitute what Susan Sontag aptly calls "melancholy objects" (49). They constitute the nostalgic vision of a landscape left in ruins by the violent irruption of otherness. Notwithstanding their aesthetic appeal, which seeks to bring the emotion of

[4] Freely adapted from Gilbert and Gubar (261); I am indebted for this passage to Ronald Schleifer who quotes and analyzes Gilbert and Gubar (*Rhetoric* 20).

death home, they evacuate the violence that has led to the calamity by superimposing on that calamity another level of violence. The world has been torn to pieces but melancholy is at work to negate the intervention of death. As Peter Halter says in another context of modernist reconstruction, "[T]he heap of oddly connected details seems at first to consist entirely of random debris of some world 'distressingly broken up,' [but there] are enough clues to enable the reader to realize that they might be constituent parts of some meaningful 'whole'" (118). This is what most representations of 9/11 did: they longingly reconstituted a whole in which the un-certain, which is death, was dragged into the realm of the known and the recognizable.

What these photos render is the longing for a ruined ideal world, a longing expressed by screening out the violence upon which this world was built. They pose the difficult question of the representation of death, especially in US culture, in which the power of the means of representation – the press, television, cinema – tends to impose a pre-written dichotomous narrative. But the experience of death can probably only teach something when it is read against the grain of its melancholic aesthetics. Such is the case of British film director Stanley Kubrick. In his films that so often represent and take issue with the violence endemic in the US, Kubrick has sought to capture the effacement of death and represent it in ways that would make the work of mourning possible. In his unnerving 1980 *The Shining*, Kubrick recounts the story of a young boy, Danny, who feels the haunting presence of death despite its screening out. The story takes place in a hotel Danny's demented father is supposed to take care of during wintertime when the hotel is closed. We learn that the hotel was built on an Indian burial site; the sleek and ethnically picturesque aesthetics of the place are reminiscent of the exterminated Indians but at the same time they erase their presence and deny, in Derrida's words, "respect for justice for those *who are not here*." Kubrick's camera pans the place full of Indian curios and rugs; because he has "the shining," that is, a faculty to perceive the presence of "those who are not here," Danny understands that much evil is hidden under the polished finish of a luxurious recreation place designed for the descendents of the perpetrators of the Indian massacre.

Several scenes of the film are particularly effective in showing an explosion of long-repressed violence that is contained in a sanitized architectural design. Encounters with ghosts and floods of blood escaping from the elevator doors are among the shocking scenes of the film. The shock comes not so much from the violence itself – as spectators used to fictional and non-fictional images of our time, we have grown callous –, but rather from the

rupture of discursive and aesthetic continuity created by such scenes. The most chilling of those scenes may be that of Danny playing with a large kitchen knife near the bed on which his mother has fallen asleep. During long seconds of tension, Danny, who seems to be in a trance dominated by "the shining," walks about the room muttering strange sounds or a strange word, half growl and half incantation. He finally takes his mother's lipstick and in blood-colored letters traces the word he has been muttering on the door and it reads REDRUM. When the mother finally wakes up in the finale of the scene (a finale very much reminiscent of the shower scene of Hitchcock's *Psycho*) she reads the word in the mirror opposite the door – "MURDER"!

Kubrick seeks to put on the screen what many accounts and representations of 9/11 have sought to screen out, namely that the violence that exploded that day in Manhattan was not only violence that came from outside the US domus, but was in large part a domestic violence that had been suppressed. The problematic otherness or othering of death is also readable, *in absentia*, in certain photos when they are read against the grain of their heroic aesthetic. Such is the case of an eerie 9/11 photograph by Samantha Appleton captioned *Morgue* (in Baravalle). It shows a zombie-like rescuer looking through the window of a place transformed into an improvised mortuary. The photo, which is taken from inside the place, produces a strange distortion effect, and the rescuer is seen through the window. Because the letters of the word "morgue" were sprayed on the outside, the photographed red letters that occupy most of the picture read "EUGROM." The melancholy caption presents the emergency and the necessary improvisation of the situation, but the camera, not unlike Danny in Kubrick's movie, captures the uncanny presence of death turned into an undecipherable palimpsest or a grotesque spoonerism in an inscrutable fiction. "EUGROM," like Danny's "REDRUM" remains unreadable within the dichotomy of the real and the fictional or any other dichotomy. These words, which are no longer words and yet more than sounds, speak of the experience of death in a language that it may be urgent for us/US to learn to read.

"A writer [*l'écrivain*] is a person who writes in order to be able to die and who holds his power to write from an anticipated relation with death," Blanchot writes (*Espace* 114). 9/11 was a shock for us/US because it has shown that the experience of death cannot possibly happen as the gross national product resulting from an accumulative economy of knowledge where we excavate the ore of the world to become richer and impose the power of our self-centered economy on the world. The experience of death can only surface from an abrasive contact with the world that makes the self ragged and

poorer. It is an economy where the self gives itself up in the contact with the world through what Blanchot lightly and obscurely calls the "friendship for things" (*l'amitié pour les choses*). The experience of death wears the self out, it makes it thinner, it makes it threadbare, hardly a self anymore. The experience of death teaches nothing if it serves as a remembering of the known, the chosen, the familiar; it must be a recalling of the dismissed, the unknown. That which we commonly call experience is useless, for "death, on the human horizon, is not a given; it is that which must be *done* – it is a *task*" (*Espace* 118). Accomplishing the impossible yet absolutely necessary experience of death is the task that now awaits us/US.

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