



**UNIVERSITY  
OF ICELAND**

**BA Thesis  
in English**

**The Spectacle of Terror and Media Sensationalism  
in Post-9/11 Literature**

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February 2023

**FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND CULTURES**

# **The Spectacle of Terror and Media Sensationalism in Post-9/11 Literature**

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February 2023

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This thesis satisfies 10 credits towards a BA  
in English in the Faculty of Languages and Cultures,  
School of Humanities, University of Iceland

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## Abstract

This thesis explores four works of literature dealing with the September 11 attacks, namely Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, Frédéric Beigbeder's *Windows on the World*, Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers* and Amy Waldman's *The Submission*, and reflects on how they portray different aspects of the event. Two main aspects of the event are taken into consideration: the attacks themselves and the reaction they elicited from journalists; concepts and terminology pertaining to the field of performance studies (PS) are employed to link the two together and analyze the entire event as a performance staged before an audience. The novels *Falling Man* and *Windows on the World* deal with the former aspect, their main characters having firsthand experience of the attacks, which are described in a detailed and realistic manner. Additionally, both novels are of interest to the field of trauma studies, as they contain elements suggesting that psychological trauma is being experienced (or has been experienced) by their characters. The spectacle of the attacks is also the subject of Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*, a work of comics which relates its author's experience of the attacks and their aftermath. Unlike other works covered in this thesis, *In the Shadow of No Towers* ditches realism in favor of a more creative approach to its subject matter, which consists of visual puns and imaginative reinterpretations of the imagery of the attacks. Finally, Waldman's *The Submission* deals with the latter aspect, with the author making use of one of her characters, Alyssa Spier, to satirize mainstream American media's sensationalistic coverage of the attacks. Waldman's portrayal of journalism is overwhelmingly negative, with particular emphasis being put on the simplistic (and typically negative) representation of Islam and on the negative consequences that this narrative has on the Muslim community in the United States.

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## 1. Introduction

Although terrorism as a phenomenon has a centuries-old history, few instances of it incarnate its distinguishing traits quite to the same extent as the attacks that were carried out on 11 September 2001 (Schechner 335). If the goal of terrorism is to unsettle the largest possible number of people, the September 11 attacks, and more specifically the two plane crashes that targeted the World Trade Center (WTC) in New York City, succeeded in doing so on an unprecedented scale (335). What made this possible was the spectacular nature of the attacks.

Spectacle is a necessary component of terrorism, its graphic and theatrical quality being what sets it apart from other acts of violence (Schechner 335; Richardson 320). Terrorism seeks to do more than just kill, the threat it poses goes beyond just the material damage it causes; rather, its goal is to sow fear and chaos, subvert a preestablished order of things and upset the balance of the society (or parts of society) it targets (Schechner 335; Richardson 320). Likewise, the September 11 attacks were not just about killing: while their death toll was by far the highest out of any other terrorist attack in history, it was still lower than what it could have been had they been carried out under even slightly different conditions (“Worst Terrorist Strikes”; Schechner 338). This trade-off was made in exchange for something that would be of far greater value to the terrorists than a high body count, that being visibility (Schechner 338). To this day, the 9/11 attacks retain their legacy as “the mother of all terrorist actions - and the most stupendous media event ever”, meaning that the terrorists’ strategy was a success (338).

The “extraordinarily performative quality” of the September 11 attacks has made them a topic of great interest for scholars in the field of performance studies (PS) (Schechner 335). In the first chapter of his textbook *Performance Studies: An Introduction*, PS pioneer Richard Schechner explains that “according to performance studies, anything can be studied ‘as’ performance” (12). It is through this lens that Schechner analyzes the 9/11 attacks, which he uses as an example to explore the topic of terrorism in general (335). As Schechner points out, terrorism is highly performative, given its heavy reliance on narrative, symbolism, spectacle, and other factors (335-7). However, if one is to interpret the events of 9/11 as a performance, the attacks themselves are not the only subject worthy of attention.

A performance normally involves an audience, and in the field of PS the study of

the audience and its reaction to what it is spectating is just as important as the performance itself (Schechner 56). In the case of the September 11 attacks, the reactions of one group in particular warrant further inquiry: the media. Where tragedy strikes, a strong response can be expected from journalists and mass media, and the September 11 attacks in particular were planned with media presence in mind (Schechner 338). Everything from the targets to the timing was carefully thought out in order to maximize the media exposure that the attacks would receive, and Western media ended up covering the attacks extensively, in line with the terrorists' design (338-9).

The importance of media coverage of the attacks was not limited to 11 September itself, but remained an integral part of the events in the days, and years, following the crashes, further amplifying and prolonging their resonance (Schechner 338-9). No longer just spectators and repeaters, journalists became storytellers and performers themselves (338-9). The manifest cultural and ideological roots of the attacks offered media outlets an opening to weave a divisive and sensationalistic narrative surrounding them: America, if not the Western world at large, its people and values, was under attack, and the enemy was Islam (Schechner 338-9; Powell 90-1; Kellner 45). Needless to say, this came at the expense of Muslims and other ethnic and religious minorities in the United States, who were targeted by hate crimes with increasing frequency ("Hate Crime Reports Up"). This is precisely what Richardson identifies as one of the defining features of terrorism, "the power [...] to assault relations between someone and the world" (320).

In the twenty-one years following the attacks, several works of fiction have been conceived, written and published as a result of their influence, and post-9/11 literature has had time to develop into its own genre, albeit a small and somewhat specific one (Garner and Szalai). Not all novels falling under this label are strictly about the attacks, with many authors tackling relevant issues or, more in general, trying to capture the atmosphere of early twenty-first century America by means of seemingly unrelated stories (Garner and Szalai). However, there are also several novels which deal with the attacks and their aftermath in a more straightforward way. Fiction whose subject matter is this close to the reality of the events of 9/11 inevitably explores themes of immediate relevance to its events, such as loss and trauma and the influence of journalists and mass media rhetoric.

Both the spectacular nature of the September 11 attacks and the uproar they



caused in Western media are represented in fiction inspired by them: the attacks themselves are described in Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, Frédéric Beigbeder's *Windows on the World* and Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*, which contain scenes set in the proximity of, if not inside, the World Trade Center as it is destroyed; the media response to the attacks and its consequences, on the other hand, are an integral part of Amy Waldman's *The Submission*, which explores the theme of media responsibility in the face of tragedy through the character of Alyssa Spier.

## 2. The Attacks on the Twin Towers and their Literary Depictions

The striking and often disturbing imagery of the attacks is an integral part of their legacy. Images such as the Twin Towers enveloped in smoke (see appendix, fig. 1), legal assistant Marcy Borders covered in dust (fig. 2) or the New York City firefighters raising an American flag at Ground Zero (fig. 3) are not easily forgotten, and their frequent and continuative usage in media has further cemented their status as icons of contemporary history (Almond). Another one of these images, a man in business attire immortalised by Associated Press photo-journalist Richard Drew as he falls to his death from the WTC North Tower (see appendix, fig. 4), would eventually inspire one of the most famous novels of the post-9/11 literary scene, appropriately titled *Falling Man* (Almond; Carbone 198). In this story penned by American novelist Don DeLillo the titular “falling man” appears with multiple meanings: a street performer hanging from an elevated structure imitating the pose of the man in Drew’s photograph; and Keith, the very protagonist of the novel, who figuratively “com[es] down” in unison with the North Tower at the beginning of the story (DeLillo 40; Carbone 198; Richardson 324-5; DeLillo 6).

What made the attacks so visually striking was the terrorists’ mastery of their spectacle, which is apparent in some of the choices made during their planning. Their choice of New York City as a target was a highly symbolic one, befitting the target of a terrorist attack: as Schechner explains, New York is, “to many Americans, simply, ‘The City,’ quintessentially American and global simultaneously” (338). The World Trade Center in particular held a great deal of significance, not only to the city (the Twin Towers were considered “the soul of New York”), but to the United States of America as a whole (Patrick 15). The Towers’ height alone made them stand out among the cityscape and made them a highly recognizable element of the New York City skyline, besides conveying an inevitable sense of power and dominance (15). The importance of the World Trade Center was further reinforced by its function as a commercial hub: thanks to its massive floorspace, it held the title of “the world’s biggest office complex” and was home to “430 businesses from 28 different countries” as of 2001, which made it a place of great economic relevance on an international scale (Patrick 15; “World Trade Center Facts and Figures”). Eventually, the Twin Towers became icons of the city, comparable in scope to “Big Ben for England, or the Eiffel Tower for France”; they became featured on innumerable postcards, which would in turn be a recurring element in stories of migrants

coming to America looking for a better life, cementing the Towers as symbols of the American dream (Patrick 15). However, the significance they carried as symbols of American hegemony turned out to be a double-edged blade, as it made them an attractive target to extremists seeking to bring the Western superpower to its knees (16). Combined with the timing of the crashes (which will be discussed in a later chapter), this well thought-out choice of a target ensured that the attacks would “reach as large a spectatorship globally, and in the West especially, as possible” (Schechner 338).

## 2.1 The Attacks as a Performance: Performance Processes and Dark Play

The performative aspect of 9/11 does not cover the attacks alone, but extends to the planning taking place behind the scenes. To better understand this, it might be useful to analyze how the September 11 attacks worked in terms of performance processes. To this end, terminology from Richard Schechner’s textbook will be employed.

According to Schechner, four parties are involved in the making and execution of a performance: the sourcers, the creative minds who develop the basic idea at the core of a performance; the producers, those who direct the performance and shape the sourcers’ idea into a finished product; the performers, who, under the producers’ direction, put the sourcers’ idea into practice; and the partakers, the recipients of the performance, who spectate and comment on it (60). These four parties form what Schechner refers to as the performance quadrilogue, and the different ways these four parties interact and overlap with one another are what shapes different types of performance (60).

Taken collectively, the terrorists are at once sourcers, producers and performers of the 9/11 attacks. The figure of the sourcer could be identified with Khalid Sheikh Mohammed (KSM), who is credited with conceiving the original plan behind the attacks (Schechner 60; “Suspect ‘Reveals 9/11 Planning’”; “Al Qaeda Aims”). KSM’s initial plan was much more ambitious than the one that was actually executed on 11 September 2001, involving more than twice as many planes and closing with a theatrical speech denouncing the United States and their foreign policy; however, it set the standard for what the actual attacks would look like, with some of the intended targets and the idea of using commercial planes being carried over to the final version of the plan (“Al Qaeda Aims”). It was Al-Qaeda leader Osama Bin Laden who then modified the plan to make it

more realistic by scrapping KSM's speech and narrowing down the list of potential targets ("Al Qaeda Aims"). Assisted by KSM and Al-Qaeda chief of operations Mohammed Atef, Bin Laden also took care of the practical aspect of the organization, selecting personnel, having Al-Qaeda finance the attackers and pulling the strings behind the attacks, effectively fulfilling the role of the producer ("Suspect 'Reveals 9/11 Planning'"; "Al Qaeda Aims"; Schechner 60). Finally, the hijackers who took control of the two planes and crashed them into the World Trade Center are the performers, those who put the plan into action (Schechner 335; 60).

Another concept from Schechner's textbook that might prove useful to understand the performative aspect of the attacks is that of dark play. The definition of dark play as intended by Schechner is a somewhat broad one, understood as "a kind of playing that subverts the rules"; however, there is one key feature that recurs in all its manifestations, that is the involvement of at least one party that is unaware of partaking in it (60; 200).

This is where the victims of the attacks, the civilians who happened to be in or near the World Trade Center when they took place, come into play. The victims are, for all intents and purposes, part of the performance: they are, albeit unwillingly, playing a part in it, they are part of its visual spectacle. Without the dead, the wounded and the traumatized, the performance would not have been possible, their "sacrifice" was vital to the terrorists in order for the performance to have its intended visual and emotional impact. Within the performance quadrilogue, the victims occupy the position of performers alongside the hijackers, the key difference being that, unlike the latter, they are not so much playing as they are being played with (60; 339).

## 2.2 Training for the Big Day: The Terrorist Subplot in *Falling Man*

Before the way literature deals with the more openly performative aspect of the attacks is explored, a short digression about an instance where literature tries to imagine and reconstruct the events taking place behind the scenes might be in order.

Of particular interest from a performance studies perspective is Don DeLillo's *Falling Man*, which contains a terrorist-centered subplot split across three short chapters, one at the end of each of the three major sections the novel is subdivided into. These three chapters, titled after the locations where they take place (the first on Marienstraße in Hamburg, the second in Nokomis, Florida, and the third aboard a plane flying over the

Hudson river), provide a brief fictionalized account of a group of terrorists as they prepare for the 9/11 attacks (DeLillo 97; 217; 303). This group of terrorists is strongly implied to coincide with the real-life Hamburg cell, a group of anti-American extremists that was chosen by Bin Laden and KSM to carry out the attacks (“Al Qaeda Aims”). The novel draws heavy inspiration from the actual story of the Hamburg cell, with references to the apartment on Marienstraße where it was formed, to the flight training the group underwent in Florida and to the training camp it attended in Afghanistan (DeLillo 99; 217-8; 222; 218-9; “Al Qaeda Aims”). DeLillo goes as far as including the real-life Mohamed Atta (more frequently referred to as Amir), a key figure in the planning and execution of the attacks, as a character in his novel, where he oversees and provides guidance to the group (DeLillo 101-2; “Al Qaeda Aims”).

In terms of performance processes, the events taking place in the first two of these chapters (“On Marienstrasse” and “In Nokomis”) constitute what Schechner refers to as “proto-performance”, that is “what precedes and/or gives rise to a performance”; in other words, it consists of the preparation necessary for a performance to be staged (39). More specifically, the stage of training, which according to Schechner is “the fundament of proto-p[erformance]”, is the primary focus of these two chapters (40). Its purpose is for the performer to acquire and hone the skills a given type of performance requires (40). Training for a performance can stretch back several years before its fruits are put into practice, and the skills it provides are not necessarily learned with a single prearranged performance in mind; however, in this particular case, most of the training being described is in preparation for one specific performance, namely the plane crashes at the World Trade Center (41). The flight training, which is mentioned twice in the Nokomis chapter, is an apt example of this (DeLillo 217-8; 222). The limited scope [does this work?] of the training can be surmised from the novel itself, but becomes unambiguously clear once the real story of the planning of the attacks is taken into consideration: in an e-mail sent to the Academy of Lakeland in Florida during his search for a suitable flight school, Mohamed Atta claimed that the group he was a part of had “no knowledge” of how to operate an aircraft, and stated the group’s intention to undergo intensive training to become professional airline pilots (“USA v. Zacaria Moussaoui”). Said e-mail dates back to 22 March 2000, around a year and a half before the attacks, which only further reinforces the idea that the terrorists underwent flight training with the attacks on the

Twin Towers as their only goal (“USA v. Zacaria Moussaoui”).

Mentions of the flight training do not occupy much space in the text itself of the novel, but carry nonetheless remarkable weight in the story. Their primary function is that of a narrative tool, whose purpose is to foreshadow the crashes; the fact that the object of the foreshadowing is a real historical event, one that readers of the novel are presumably already familiar with, confers a certain sense of foreboding to the passages in question. Within the story, the flight training appears to be a central part of the group’s daily routine in Nokomis: the first passage where it is mentioned focuses on the group’s progress (or lack thereof), conveying the idea of continuative effort in just a handful of lines; the second one reveals that the group “play[s] flight-simulator games on their computer”, implying that the flight training is important enough to occupy their free time as well (DeLillo 217-8; 222). Such investment of time and energy is well justified by the role this specific part of the training plays in the preparation of the attacks, as it provides the group with the single most crucial underlying skill required to carry them out, that is the ability to operate an aircraft.

But the training the terrorists undergo is not merely physical: a form of mental or spiritual training is taking place as well. Members of the group are made to follow strict religious rules (like growing beards), watch “videos of jihad in other countries” and read “the sword verses of the Koran” (DeLillo 99; 101; 105). Even the physical training is not entirely devoid of a spiritual dimension. This is especially true of the scenes set in Afghanistan, where DeLillo infuses the raw physicality of the training with religious imagery. One scene in particular, depicting the slaughter of a camel by Hammad, the viewpoint character in the novel’s terrorist subplot, stands out due to its ritualistic quality: the act is performed with a sword that had previously belonged to an important man (a Saudi prince), and consists of codified gestures evocative of a rite of passage of sorts (220-1). But to Hammad even the most ordinary things, down to the mere act of existing and taking in the sublimity of the Afghan landscape, serve to strengthen his connection to God and his resolve for the upcoming mission (218-9). The goal of this type of training is likely that of radicalizing the members of the group and getting [I know I am supposed to avoid using the verb “get”, but I can’t think of a more specific word.] them into the mindset necessary to carry out the attacks.

The third, and final one, of these chapters (“In the Hudson Corridor”) starts with

the hijacking of American Airlines flight 11 having already taken place and the plane on its way to the World Trade Center (DeLillo 303-4). It is not long before the aircraft crashes into the WTC North Tower and the point of view switches from that of Hammad to that of Keith Neudecker, the novel's protagonist (306). The performance has begun and is now in full swing.

### 2.3 The Spectacle of the Attacks in Fiction: *Falling Man* and *Windows on the World*

The “show” itself, that is the visual spectacle of the attacks on the Twin Towers, has inevitably been made the subject of a number of books.

Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* opens with a scene set shortly after the crashes: the South Tower is implied to already have collapsed, and Keith, the protagonist, is wandering through the city's chaotic landscape (3-7). Eventually, the North Tower collapses as well, and the vibrations generated by its collapse are felt by the protagonist (6). The description of the attacks that appears in this chapter, while powerful in its own right, does not have the same impact as the others described in this paragraph. The fact that the story opens with the World Trade Center already in ruins results in muted emotional impact, and Keith himself is calmly walking away from the site of the crashes, seemingly insensitive to the chaos unfolding around him (3-7). Even one of the most disturbing images associated with the attacks, that of people falling or jumping from the Towers, is described in a detached, muted manner, the people in question being referred to as simply “figures” (4). The final chapter of the book, the third of the aforementioned terrorist subplot, compensates for the relative calm of the opening chapter by transporting the reader back to the day of the attacks and describing the actual crashes and evacuation from the WTC North Tower (303-16). This time, the point of view is located inside the tower immediately after the impact (306). But besides the point of view, what changes this time around is how much more tangible the presence of death becomes: the death of Keith's friend Rumsey, who had previously been mentioned as a victim of the attacks and whose loss is implied to have deeply affected the protagonist, is narrated as Keith attempts to carry him out of the tower following a gruesome injury (308-11; 26).

An even more detailed account of the ongoing attacks can be found in Frédéric

Beigbeder's *Windows on the World*, set at the eponymous restaurant on top of the WTC North Tower in a span of less than two hours on the day of the attacks, ending with the building's collapse (6; 306). The protagonist and narrator Carthew Yorston and his two sons Jerry and David are inside the North Tower when it is struck, leading to a detailed, graphic and emotionally charged step by step narration of the immediate lead-up to the crash and its aftermath (3; 55; 59). Things start to turn south at 8:45, when Jerry, excited, directs his father's attention to the approaching plane and Carthew and the other customers realize something is wrong (55). When the point of view switches back to the events taking place inside the restaurant two minutes later, the plane has already crashed into the building (59). The account of the tragedy that follows, as opposed to the one found in *Falling Man*, spans a large portion of the novel.

There are multiple similarities in the way DeLillo and Beigbeder depict the ongoing attacks in their respective novels. Elements shared between the two descriptions consist mostly of the ways the crash affects the environment inside the North Tower, including (but not limited to) the shaking tower, the smoke seeping through the air vents and the smell of fuel (DeLillo 306-9; Beigbeder 59-60; 84-5). Perhaps the most interesting difference between the two novels can be found in the moment of the first impact: in *Windows on the World*, where the point of view is located inside the tower since before the crash, the chapter immediately preceding it creates some anticipation for the fateful moment; in *Falling Man*, on the other hand, the impact serves as the trigger for the switch from Hammad's point of view inside the plane to that of Keith inside the North Tower, resulting in the reader being catapulted into the action (Beigbeder 55-6; DeLillo 306).

## 2.4 Trauma Theory and Recurring Patterns in Post-9/11 Novels

Because of the nature of the events that took place on 11 September 2001, novels which deal with the September 11 attacks tend to exhibit particular traits which are meant to evoke the way people experience traumatic events. These traits are the primary object of study of the discipline of trauma theory (or trauma studies), which analyzes how psychological trauma translates into writing (Balaev 360).

One of the features of greatest interest to trauma studies is the repeated act of returning to the moment when the traumatic event was experienced (Caruth 1-2). Trauma studies link this trait to the phenomenon of traumatic neurosis, which "is marked by the



‘compulsion to repeat’ the memory of the painful event with the hopes of mastering the unpleasant feelings” (Balaev 362).

This can be seen in *Falling Man*, where the attacks are frequently revisited through the memories of its characters. Barring the last chapter of the novel, where the terrorist subplot circles back to 11 September 2001, the description of the attacks as an ongoing event in *Falling Man* is limited to its very first chapter, while subsequent chapters follow the daily lives of the characters in their aftermath (DeLillo 3-7; Litt). The pivotal moment is placed at the beginning of the novel almost as if to lay a foundation, to fix a point in time which the characters, willingly or not, will repeatedly return to multiple times throughout the novel (DeLillo 3-7). Each of these recollections reveals new details, and allows readers to gradually piece together a richer picture of the events that transpired on that day.

The trigger of one of these flashbacks comes in the form of a briefcase found in Keith’s possession in the early chapters of the novel (DeLillo 43). Shortly before Keith examines the briefcase and pries into its contents, the narrator reveals that he had unthinkingly carried it out of the North Tower during his escape and all the way to the apartment of his ex-wife Lianne, establishing a connection with the moment where he unexpectedly shows up at her doorstep on the day of the attacks (43-5; 10). Keith eventually tracks down the owner of the briefcase, a woman named Florence Givens, and the two bond over the shared experience of the evacuation from the North Tower (64-73). Florence recalls in detail (though, as Keith notes, not always in chronological order) the events transpiring from the moment of the crash to her exit from the building (67-72). The most glaring inconsistency in Florence’s account of the day of the attacks concerns the very moment of the impact, which she claims she felt before she heard the sound of the incoming plane, although she herself acknowledges that “she was dazed and had no sense of time” (67-8). She then goes on to recount everything she remembers about the evacuation: the sprinklers going off, the smoke, the crowded stairwell, even apparently trivial details such as the sight of a familiar maintenance man wielding a crowbar and the presence of a guide dog (which she describes as “some totally calming thing”) (67-72). But perhaps the most striking part of her narration is the brief glimpse of the outside world that Florence describes as the evacuation reaches completion:

[...] then we came out and passed some windows and saw the plaza where it’s a

bombed-out city, things on fire, we saw bodies, we saw clothes, pieces of metal like metal parts, things just scattered. This was like two seconds. I looked two seconds and then looked away and then we went through the underground concourse and up into the street. [...] In the smoke all I could see was those stripes on the firemen's coats, the bright stripes, and then some people in the rubble, all that steel and glass, just injured people sitting dreaming, they were like dreamers bleeding. (DeLillo 72)

This passage stands out as the most detailed description of the attacks for a large portion of the novel, surpassed only by the one found in its last chapter. The fact that Florence is able to recall the event so vividly is supported Pederson's claim that trauma enhances the memory of those going through it, rather than causing them to forget, contrary to what previously believed (Pederson 339).

Another telltale sign of a traumatic experience is dissociation. Pederson claims that when recalling a traumatic event "the victim may slip outside his or her own body", citing one account where the person involved "felt as though [they were] a spectator watching what was happening to [them]" (339-40). This occurs *Windows on the World*, whose narration continuously alternates between two different points of view: that of protagonist Carthew Yorsten, narrating a first-person account of his visit to the World Trade Center with his sons (the odd-numbered chapters); and that of Beigbeder himself narrating and reflecting on the attacks from atop the Tour Montparnasse in Paris (the even-numbered chapters) (Beigbeder 3; 6-7). While Beigbeder himself already provides a detached external point of view on the events, parts of Carthew's own narration seem to imply that he is an omniscient narrator in his own story, observing his last moments from the outside; the first instance of this happening occurs in the very first chapter Carthew narrates, which ends with the words "In two hours I'll be dead", and his consciousness (strictly as part of the narration) is preserved even after he and his sons have "died for nothing" (5; 306). In other chapters still, it is as if Carthew is observing himself through the eyes of his younger son David, the narration becoming tainted by the child's imagination (132-4; 138-9; 196-7).

Novels about 9/11 have been known to emphasize and/or play with the flow of time in their stories. Both DeLillo's *Falling Man* and Beigbeder's *Windows on the World* are apt examples of this, and their radically different approaches to their temporal

structures have a remarkable effect on their respective stories.

*Falling Man* consists of two plots, which come together to form a circular structure. While the main plot moves away from the day of the attacks, which constitutes its starting point, the aforementioned terrorist subplot moves towards it, anticipating the pivotal moment (DeLillo 3-7; 97-106; 217-27; 303-16). If the events of *Falling Man* were to be laid out in chronological order, 11 September 2001 would act as a watershed, with the two storylines situated on opposite sides (see fig. 1).

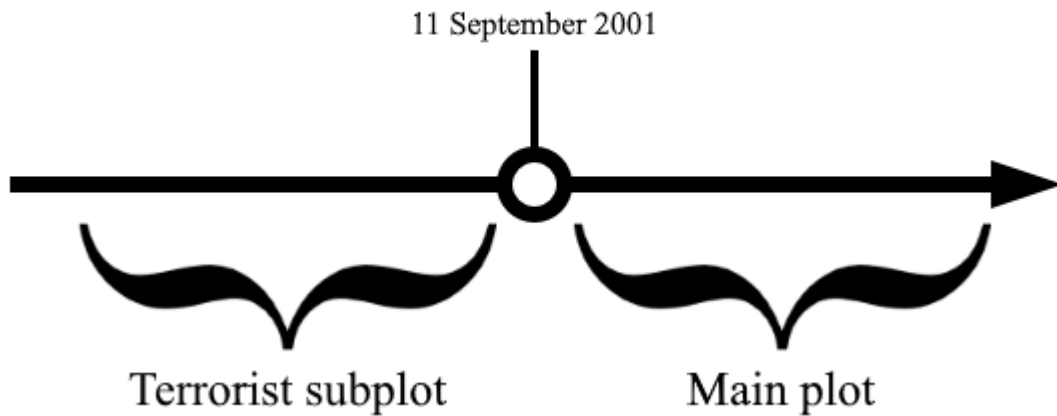


Figure 1. The events of Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* ordered chronologically.

In the novel, however, they are narrated parallel to each other, and, as a consequence, the day of the crashes no longer constitutes a turning point in the story, instead marking its beginning and end (see fig. 2) (3-7; 303-16).

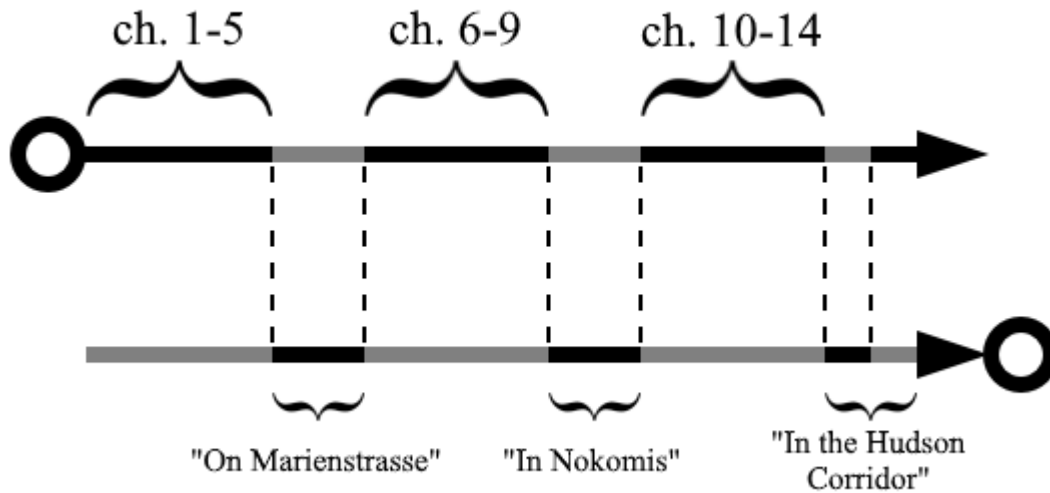


Figure 2. The events of Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* as they are narrated in the novel. The topmost line represents the main plot of the novel, while the one below represents the terrorist subplot. Each dashed line marks a switch from one plotline to the other.

The last chapter of the novel leaves off where the first one begins, joining the two plots together and resulting in what could effectively be described as a circular structure (3-7; 303-316).

The juxtaposition of these storylines also creates a dissonance in tone between the two plots. The tone of the main plot, barring the occasional climax, is mostly oriented towards the diffusion of its initial tension: the story begins with Keith having survived the crashes at the World Trade Center and follows him and Lianne as they slowly readjust to their daily life after the traumatic experience (DeLillo 3-7; Litt). Conversely, the subplot centered around the terrorists preparing for the attack is characterized by an ominous sense of inevitability. The three chapters which make up the subplot are littered with references to the real story of the planning of the attacks (the mention of Amir's full name, the group undergoing flight training, etc), which serve to remind readers, conscious of what these hints are leading up to, of the coming tragedy (101; 217-8; 222). Ultimately, the goal of this structure might be that of making the reader experience the very trauma

that for the majority of the novel its protagonists have been working to overcome, enacting the aforementioned motif of repetition on a novel-wide scale (Caruth 1-2).

Unlike those taking place in *Falling Man*, the events of *Windows on the World* are narrated following a strict chronological order; instead, the novel's main gimmick consists of the subdivision of its story in many short chapters, each covering a single minute on the morning of 11 September 2001, totalling "an hour and three-quarters" (Beigbeder 6). The increased emphasis placed on a relatively short interval of time and its rigid subdivision make several chapters, especially the ones set inside the WTC North Tower, remarkably dense with information, which in turn results in a significant dilation of the time of the narration. Pederson cites "depictions of experiences that are temporally, physically, or ontologically distorted" as a characteristic of the representation of trauma in text, and mentions the slowing down of time as an instance of this (339). Thus, as the reader is faced with the more verbose chapters of the book, they can feel how the flow of time during the tragedy (as well as the tragedy itself) is experienced by the protagonist: the traumatic event takes longer to get through as time appears to slow down, and memory of the event is enhanced, as conveyed by the length and density of detail of said chapters (339-40).

## 2.5 Storytelling Through Visual Art: Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadow of No Towers*

If the visual impact of the crashes is such an important aspect of the attacks, then comics should be a particularly attractive medium to authors seeking to tell a story about them. Perhaps the most notable work of comics produced and published in the wake of the 9/11 attacks is Art Spiegelman's collection of comic strips titled *In the Shadow of No Towers*. In his work, especially in its earlier instalments, Spiegelman makes full use of the comic medium to convey the spectacle and the horror of the attacks in creative and effective ways.

In the first strip, one of the collapsing towers is described as "glowing", and drawn as a reticle of fuzzy, brightly coloured lines surrounded by a reddish orange smoke, likely representing the building enveloped in flames (see appendix, fig. 5) (Spiegelman 1). The image of the glowing tower appears in each of the ten strips which make up the series,

and sometimes its appearance changes, distorting in the fifth, and slowly fading to grey in the tenth (and last one) (see appendix, fig. 6) (5; 10). This recurring image and the way it evolves throughout the work is likely a representation of Spiegelman's own relationship to the tragedy and his struggle to overcome the trauma it caused; in fact, the entire series was likely intended as Spiegelman's effort to make sense of the 9/11 attacks, as implied in the introduction to the work by lines such as "it took a long time to put the burning towers behind me" or "I wanted to sort out the fragments of what I'd experienced" (Spiegelman introduction). *In the Shadow of No Towers* covers a time period of three years, and yet in a majority of the strips the tower is still burning, or "glowing", like it did immediately after being struck; this may be interpreted as a visual metaphor for Spiegelman reliving the trauma of the attacks in the subsequent years, echoing the motif of repetition and return central to Caruth's model of trauma theory (Spiegelman 1-10; Caruth 1-2). Following this reasoning, the tower(s) "seem[ing] to get smaller" and fading to grey at the end may represent Spiegelman finally coming to terms with the events of 11 September 2001 and overcoming the trauma (Spiegelman 10).

In a curious analogy, the towers are equated to shoes (see appendix, fig. 7) (Spiegelman 1). This image is a play on the idiomatic expression "[to] wait for the other shoe to drop", which means "to wait for the next, seemingly unavoidable (and typically negative) thing to happen" ("Wait for the Other Shoe to Drop"). The use of this expression is particularly fitting to draw an analogy to the September 11 attacks, given how, just like shoes, the Twin Towers of the World Trade Centers were paired. Whether the fall of the "first shoe" refers to the one of the towers being struck by an airplane or collapsing as a result of the crash, the implication is the same: the other tower is bound to suffer the same fate (Spiegelman 1). In the last strip of the series, the image of the falling shoe(s) is reworked into a rain of cowboy boots to represent the Republican Presidential Convention taking place in New York in 2004 (see appendix, fig. 8) (10). Given how Spiegelman had dedicated one of the previous strips to commenting on the increasingly polarized political climate of the United States following the attacks, it is likely that the use of the "shoe drop" metaphor in this panel is intended to criticize the inevitable and unwanted politicization of the tragedy, as reinforced by the line "Tragedy is transformed into Travesty" (Spiegelman 7; 10).

What makes *In the Shadow of No Towers* stand out among other works of post-

9/11 literature is the very medium it uses to tell its story. Spiegelman does not limit himself to portraying the attacks exactly as they happened, instead taking advantage of the freedom that drawing offers and making full use of his imagination. The introduction to *In the Shadow of No Towers* states this clearly: Spiegelman wanted to portray his own experience of the attacks, untainted by the images that were being propagated by the media (Spiegelman introduction). In addition to the two above examples, a panel in the sixth strip depicts the streets of New York City enveloped in flames and tormented by monsters (see appendix, fig. 9) (Spiegelman 6). Notably, this panel does not seem to refer directly to the attacks: the strip where it appears narrates Spiegelman's encounters with a homeless woman on the way from his house to his studio, and the caption in the lower left-hand corner of the panel reads "Her inner demons had broken loose and taken over our shared reality...", referring to the woman in question (6). Nonetheless, the imagery of the panel contains elements which unmistakably link the scene to the plane crashes at the World Trade Center: the background is dominated by two skyscrapers cartoonishly broken into pieces, likely representing the Twin Towers, and among the demons there are two grotesquely deformed planes with monstrous-looking mouths (6). Unlike other pieces of 9/11-related media, what makes this panel so effective is not the realistic, unfiltered portrayal of the events, but rather how it captures the fear that they caused and translates it into an image that is easy to understand and digest.

### 3. Media Coverage of the Attacks and its Literary Depictions

“It still looks like an accident, the first one. Even from this distance, way outside the thing, how many days later, I’m standing here thinking it’s an accident.” [...]

“The second plane, by the time the second plane appears,” he said “we’re all a little older and wiser.” (DeLillo 170-1)

This is how Keith from Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* recounts his first impressions of the plane crashes at the World Trade Center while watching footage of them his wife (169-71). Keith’s words likely reflect what crossed the minds of many bystanders upon witnessing the first crash. By the time President Bush himself was notified of the crash, within ten minutes of it occurring, it was still being classified as an accident (Routley).

When the second plane hit the South Tower, it became clear that the first crash had not been an accident. Both crashes had been intentional, deliberate and carefully planned.

A careful look at the events suggests that the attacks were staged with a clear goal in mind: to ensure that their spectacle would reach as many people as possible (Schechner 338). The crash of single plane was somewhat unlikely to be caught on camera, if not by accident, but if a second one were to follow up shortly thereafter, it would find hundreds of eyes and camera lens already pointed at the Towers and waiting for it (338). The choice of the time at which to strike is of particular interest to Schechner, who points out that having both crashes occur before the workday had reached the time of maximum activity led to fewer people being killed than what could have been possible had they taken place a mere two hours later; he explains this choice on the terrorists’ part as the best possible compromise to make the attacks coincide with major news cycles across the entirety of the Western World, “the morning news cycle in New York and midday in Europe” (338).

#### 3.1 The Role of Journalists on 11 September 2001

Just as planned, the first crash caught the attention of the media, and the response was immediate. It only took two minutes from the impact for the first live feed of the attacks to be broadcast on television by a nearby camera crew (Routley). A minute later, word of the crash got to the Associated Press, which led to most major television networks interrupting their regular programming to cover the event (Routley). By the time the



South Tower was hit seventeen minutes later, the world's eyes were already on the World Trade Center, and millions of people watched in real time as the second plane hit its target (Routley).

Much like the terrorists responsible for the attacks, the journalists reporting on them have occupied multiple positions of the performance quadrilogue described by Schechner. They started out as partakers, given how they were the first intended receivers of the performance: their witnessing of and reaction to what was happening was vital in order for the attacks to be rebroadcast to a much larger audience (Schechner 60). Their role then quickly shifted to that of producers (60). In this case, the use of the term "producers" is intended as an interpretation of Schechner's definition of "'link' persons, building bridges, making connections": mass media were by far the most important distributors of the performance of the attacks, and thus acted as a link between the terrorists (performers) and the people who would watch the broadcast of the still unfolding events on television, which made up the remainder of their intended audience (Schechner 60; Routley).

Finally, in the aftermath of the attacks, journalists replaced the hijackers as the main performers, acting as storytellers (Schechner 60). Powell describes the role of mass media as that of "distributors of ideology", whose purpose is to organize information in order to maximize its effectiveness from a communicative standpoint, thus essentially crafting a story (93). The specific pieces of information that are highlighted as salient depend on the target of the narration (which in the case of news stories concerning 9/11 was largely made up of white Christian Americans), which can come off as heavily biased as a result (93). Journalists covering the September 11 attacks can be said to have been performers in a make-belief performance, one distinct from a make-believe performance in that it intentionally blurs the line that separates performance from reality (Schechner 16). While journalism as a whole operates under the pretense of telling the truth, and can thus be interpreted as make-belief by definition, coverage of the 9/11 attacks incarnated the definition of make-belief to an even greater extent, having been shaped by a narrative with a clear propagandistic intent behind it (Schechner 16; 338-9).

### 3.2 The Spectacle of the Attacks as Entertainment

In *Windows on the World*, just as the first plane is about to strike the North Tower,

Carthew instinctively associates the impending crash to a scene from a disaster movie, listing in a bitter tone some of the tropes associated with the genre (Beigbeder 55-6). To those viewing the attacks from outside, the crashes at the World Trade Center may indeed have appeared like scenes from a disaster movie (Schechner compares them to the 1974 film *The Towering Inferno*, also referenced in *Windows on the World*), and on some occasions they were actually treated as such (Schechner 339; Beigbeder 60). It was reported that as soon as on 14 September 2001 DVDs containing footage of the attacks were being sold in Yueqing, China, where they were “displayed next to Hollywood movies” (Schechner 338). A tragedy that had left thousands dead and many more injured and traumatized in its wake was thus trivialized and profited from as if it were a form of entertainment like any other, a mere three days after it had taken place.

Things were different near the epicentre of the attacks, where they were a highly sensitive subject matter and would remain an open wound in the American collective psyche for the days, and years, to come. The scope of the tragedy called for exceptional tactfulness in its handling. Journalists covering the ongoing attacks sought to portray the horror of the crashes in a respectful manner, prioritizing good taste over shock factor and sensationalism (Mogensen 39). Reporters did their best to find a way to accurately convey the gravity of the situation, but the more disturbing imagery, which included “people burning to death or hitting the ground after jumping from the towers”, was omitted out of consideration for the viewers (39). Gary Tuchman, a National Correspondent for CNN, was quoted as saying “you want to tell the truth, but you don’t want to make people so sick they can’t watch it” (40).

In the aftermath of the attacks, however, American media outlets started treating the attacks more and more like entertainment (Schechner 338). Unlike the case of the DVDs sold in Yueqing, the subject of the entertainment here was not the voyeuristic glee of witnessing the World Trade Center’s destruction; instead, mainstream American media took a propagandistic approach, framing the events according to a narrative which followed what Kellner calls the “clash of civilizations” model (Schechner 338; Kellner 44). Titles such as “America Under Attack” or “America’s New War” were employed in the coverage of the attacks mere hours after the crashes (Schechner 338-9). Terrorism, which had up until that point been a relatively minor concern in the United States (this would still be the case with domestic terrorism), became a matter of utmost importance

(Powell 90). The narrative of this newly declared “War on Terror”, largely shaped by President George W. Bush’s rhetoric, was heavily ideologically charged, painting a picture where America, Christianity and even civilization itself were being threatened by Islamic terrorism (Powell 90-1; Kellner 44). In other words (Bush’s own, to an extent), the struggle America was about to undertake was one of good against evil (Kellner 45).

### 3.3 Art Spiegelman’s Criticism of State-Affiliated Media

The appeal and immediacy of the visual medium are not the only value that comics have to offer to discourse surrounding 9/11. Historically, comics and cartoons have been widely used as an instrument for satire or social critique, making them a suitable medium to discuss an event with such political implications as those of the September 11 attacks (Hopkins).

This is the case with *In the Shadow of No Towers*, where Spiegelman devotes multiple pages to his perception of mass media and politics in the wake of the attacks (Spiegelman 1-2; 4-5; 7-10). In the introduction to his collection, Spiegelman denies any pretense at satire or political commentary, claiming to “work too slowly to respond to transient events while they’re happening”; nonetheless, several of the strips which make up the series comment on the tense political climate of post-9/11 America, with Spiegelman himself claiming in an interview that part of what inspired him in its making was the idea of “a present in which one feels equally threatened by both Bush and bin Laden” (see appendix, fig. 10) (Spiegelman introduction; 2; Witek 264). In his work, Spiegelman portrays the media as an increasingly pervasive and oppressive presence in the daily life of post 9/11 America. Panels from his comic strips depict him “drowning in newspaper headlines”, reading to the point of developing “news poisoning” and becoming paranoid as a result (see appendix, fig. 11) (Spiegelman 8).

Spiegelman was an outspoken critic of the state of American mass media following the September 11 attacks. According to him, in the aftermath of 9/11, major American media outlets had grown increasingly subservient to the Bush administration, and he ascribed this reactionary tendency to fear that their access to information might be cut off in retaliation if they were to paint the government in a bad light (Witek 264). The same criticism extended to *The New Yorker*, for which Spiegelman had worked as a cover designer since 1992, leading him to resign from the magazine after a decade-long

collaboration (Witek 263-4; “Art Spiegelman”; Witek 266).

*The New Yorker*'s alleged conformism and propensity for censorship had repercussions on Spiegelman's work, as it refused, though not to the cartoonist's surprise, to publish *In the Shadow of No Towers* (Witek 264-5). The series was instead published on the German newspaper *Die Zeit*, that had originally commissioned it, while the only magazine willing to publish it in the United States was the Jewish-oriented *The Forward* (264). The resistance *In the Shadow of No Towers* encountered on its way to publication in the United States only served to further prove Spiegelman's point, demonstrating the unwillingness of mainstream American media to entertain points of view that might pose a challenge to the administration (Witek 264).

### 3.4 Amy Waldman's *The Submission*: The Character of Alyssa Spier

The premise of Amy Waldman's *The Submission* is one of uneasy peace destined to be shattered. Two years after the September 11 attacks, a contest has been held for artists to design a memorial to the victims (Waldman 3-4). After the winning entry has been selected by the jury, it is revealed that its author belongs to the most maligned group of people in America, the one deemed responsible for the attacks: he is a Muslim, or so his name suggests (19-20). Mohammad Khan, frequently referred to as Mo throughout the book, is an American citizen, born in Virginia of a couple of Indian immigrants; he has never practiced Islam, he has a steady job as an architect at an American-based firm, and considers himself an American above all else (31; 34; 29-30; 31). But the media, as well as a large portion of public opinion, do not care about such nuances. The fragile balance of the situation is upset when the chairman of the jury in charge of choosing the design for the memorial, is informed that the winner's identity has been leaked to the press, and copies of the *New York Post* containing the shocking news are already circulating (64-5). The article in question, bearing the catchy and inflammatory headline “MYSTERY MUSLIM MEMORIAL MESS”, is accompanied by a generic picture of a menacing-looking man in a balaclava (65).

The author of the article in question is soon revealed to be Alyssa Spier, who will personify journalism as a whole throughout the novel and act as a tool for the author to explore the theme of media coverage of the 9/11 attacks (Waldman 65). It is worth noting that before writing *The Submission* Waldman herself had worked as a reporter for the

*New York Times* and as a national correspondent for *The Atlantic*, and had concerned herself with such topics Islam and the War on Terror; thus, it is likely that her experience as a journalist influenced her in writing the novel (“Amy Waldman” [American Academy]; “Amy Waldman” [Radcliffe Institute]). Waldman’s portrayal of American news outlets in the context of post-9/11 discourse is far from flattering, and the character of Alyssa in particular stands out among the book’s main characters for being flat and lacking any redeeming qualities.

Unlike others, Alyssa does not seem to have any personal connection to the attacks. Some of the book’s most prominent characters, namely Claire, Sean and Asma, have lost people dear to them in the Towers, and thus are motivated, for better or worse, by their grief and desire for justice (Waldman 4; 69-70; 88). Instead, what motivates Alyssa are her ambition and the pressure she faces as part of her job. Her primary goal is to improve her status as a journalist, which is what leads her, very early on in the story, to quit her unfulfilling job as a reporter for the *Daily News* and switch to the *New York Post* (134; 74-5). These two factors are instrumental in shaping Alyssa’s attitude towards her job: her detachment from the attacks makes it easier for her to approach the issue without any personal feelings getting in the way, while her desperate and single-minded desire to make a name for herself as a journalist is at the root of her questionable professional standards.

In addition, Alyssa often makes Muslims the target of her writing, although it is somewhat unclear to which degree this is the result of actual prejudice or simply her riding the wave of the ongoing controversy. Alyssa’s first column at the *New York Post* is, for the most part, a collection of clichés about Islam; notably, some of these (“its oppression of women, its incompatibility with democracy...”) appear to have been carefully selected in order to make her sound progressive, suggesting a conscious attempt to mask a deep-seated bigotry (Waldman 139). Whether or not Alyssa actually holds these stereotypes to be true, the fact remains that she is willing to exploit them and perpetuate them to further her agenda, which speaks to the lack of consideration that she has for Muslims as people. However, there is one scene towards the end of the novel which seems to clear any lingering doubts surrounding Alyssa’s beliefs: as an angered Mo approaches her after she has confronted him, she flinches, expecting him to attack her (334). While this may have been merely a physiological reaction caused by Mo’s threatening

demeanor, there is a strong indication that she may actually believe her own claims about Muslims' violent tendencies, or have internalized them over the course of the story (334).

Alyssa's writing style is sensationalistic, heavily biased and aimed at sparking outrage. This is, at least in part, a product of the work environment she encounters after switching to the *New York Post*: its loose requirements in regards to sources, as well as Alyssa's own hesitation to work for the newspaper seem to suggest that it is one of the city's less respected publications (Waldman 74-5). In a conversation with Chaz, her editor at the *New York Post*, Alyssa is advised to display confidence in her writing and to leave no room for doubt, questioning or nuance; Chaz claims that "people want to be told what to think" or "that what they already think is right", showing little consideration for his readers' critical skills and encouraging Alyssa to act accordingly (134-5). Alyssa herself, according to the narrator, disagrees with this approach, having "no ideology, believ[ing] only in information"; however, that is not to say that she does nothing to direct her readership's opinion in a way that suits her agenda (135; 76). Alyssa's intentional use of an ominous-looking picture of a masked man in the article revealing that a Muslim had won the memorial contest can only be interpreted as a deliberate choice, one intended to force the readers to make an instinctive association between Islam and terrorism and shape the tone that the discourse surrounding the memorial will assume from that point on (65).

While Alyssa knows which buttons to push in order to cause indignation in her readers (and has no qualms doing so), it is implied that the actual quality of her writing is rather lackluster. The first column she writes for the *New York Post* opens with a simplistic, if not somewhat tautological, statement with the clear intent to escalate an already spiralling controversy: "The problem with Islam is Islam" (133; 139). Despite its flaws, this opening sentence is catchy, concise, and perfect for what it tries to achieve, that is to spark outrage; however, the remainder of the column struggles to match its initial momentum, relying on trite stereotypes to substantiate its thesis and losing its focus halfway through (139-40). The portrayal of Alyssa as an incompetent writer who relies on controversial topics and outrageous headlines to broaden the appeal of her writing might be Waldman's way of poking fun at tabloid journalism, implying that its sensational manner of treating its subject matter is not backed by any actual quality or substance.

### 3.5 Lou Sarge: Alt-Right Ante Litteram

Alyssa Spier is not the only face of mainstream media in *The Submission*. Another notable figure is radio host Lou Sarge, a minor character, but still a recurring presence in the novel. Much like Alyssa, Sarge opposes Mo's design and contributes to fueling the controversy surrounding the memorial contest (Waldman 269).

Lou Sarge, "New York's most popular right-wing radio host", is portrayed as an abrasive man, who has made increasing use of an aggressive rhetoric against Islam following the September 11 attacks (Waldman 50-1). His first appearance is in chapter 5, in a televised debate on racial profiling where he is being pitted against Issam Malik, the head of the Muslim American Coordinating Council (50). While Malik puts forth reasonable arguments and calls for Muslims to be treated with dignity and respect, Sarge is provocative and deliberately tries to make his opponent's argument sound ridiculous, while at the same time demonizing Muslims (50-1).

Sarge's way of conducting [can this verb be used to refer to the performance of a single person/party in a debate?] the debate is highly reminiscent of the debating tactics commonly employed by political commentators aligned with movements now commonly grouped under the "alt-right" label. The term "alt-right" or "alternative right" was coined in 2008, half a decade after the events of *The Submission*, and the movements associated to it gained traction in the mid-2010s, after the novel itself was published; nonetheless, important parallels can be drawn between Sarge and modern representatives of alt-right movements ("Alt Right"; Dafaure). Both are known for spreading their ideology through channels other than traditional newspapers, Sarge through the radio and the modern alt-right through social media platforms like 4Chan, Reddit and Twitter ("Alt Right"). Furthermore, alt-right movements, despite their diversity, are often united by a shared concern for "white identity" and the threat political correctness (PC) allegedly poses to it, believers in which Sarge could easily appeal to thanks to his aggressive anti-Muslim rhetoric ("Alt Right"). Dafaure notes how a common strategy employed by the alt-right is that of intentionally making outrageous statements to prove that their opponents, typically representatives of PC culture, are "overly sensitive" and "overemotional" (Dafaure). A similar dynamic takes place between Sarge and Malik as they discuss racial profiling. Sarge's response ("You want us to search little old ladies waiting to board their

planes just so Muslims won't feel bad?") to Malik's argument does not have any substance to it, but rather seems to hinge on its aggressive and derisive tone, which the radio host uses to dismiss his opponent's call for empathy (Waldman 50-1). It is also particularly noteworthy how the primary target of Sarge's ridicule is Malik's genuine concern for the feelings and dignity of Muslims; as a result, Sarge ends up dehumanizing an entire religious group all the while treating its members as a monolith and reducing them all to potential terrorists (50-1).

Overall, Sarge fits right in with other news outlets depicted in *The Submission*. While his boisterous and unprofessional style sets him apart from the more traditional news outlets depicted in the novel, his agenda does not run contrary to the dominant narrative being promoted by mainstream American media, which sees Islam as a threat to the United States and American society.

### 3.6 Fear of Terrorism Degenerates into Mass Hysteria

The days immediately following the plane crashes at the World Trade Center saw a spike in cases of racially-motivated aggressions in the United States ("Hate Crime Reports Up"). In two days alone, the Council on American-Islamic Relations claimed to have received half a year's worth of reports of harassment. Attacks reported "range[d] from families being spat and yelled at, 'Go back to your country,' to assaults on people and businesses" ("Hate Crime Reports Up").

The way mainstream media have covered the attacks has played a significant role in influencing public opinion on the topics of Islam, terrorism, and the correlation between the two. News outlets frequently conflated Islam with terrorism and set it in binary opposition to American society and democracy (Powell 90; Kellner 44). Some journalists writing about Islam-related topics in the years that followed tried to be more careful with their portrayals of the religion, prefacing their articles with disclaimers stating the impossibility of accurately portraying its complexity, but these would often be rendered useless by "an onslaught of evidence to prove the brutality of Islam" (Alsultany 166). The tone of the coverage mattered as well: according to Gadarian, exposure to sensationalistic coverage of terrorism, especially when accompanied by frightening and/or emotional imagery, can lead to an increase in support for aggressive counterterrorism measures and foreign policy; this was the case in the period following



the September 11 attacks, which saw increased support of military intervention in the Middle East and an abrupt improvement in President Bush's approval ratings (Gadarian; "Bush and Public Opinion").

In *The Submission*, Amy Waldman narrates how animosity towards Muslims is reignited following Mohammad Khan's selection as the winner of the memorial contest (65). Needless to say, the media play a pivotal role in exacerbating the already existing tension between American society and the Muslim community: it is Alyssa Spier's "MYSTERY MUSLIM MEMORIAL MESS" article that causes the scandal to erupt in the first place, and her subsequent coverage does nothing but fan the flames of the controversy (65). After the matter is brought to public attention, the situation does nothing but escalate, leading to Mo being threatened and harassed, and culminating with the fatal stabbing of Asma Anwar, a Bangladeshi immigrant who had lost her husband in the 9/11 attacks (157; 327-8). In the process, the meaning behind Mo's memorial design is misinterpreted and twisted due to its (possibly coincidental) Islamic influences, resulting in people viewing it as a "Trojan horse" aimed at colonizing America and encouraging further terrorist attacks (147-9). These accusations come about solely because of Mo's background, and the double standard is subtly pointed out by the article that first draws attention to the design's similarity to Islamic gardens (148).

One incident in particular stands out as representative of the rampant islamophobia in *The Submission*: during a rally organized to protest against the selection of Mohammed Khan's memorial design, Sean Gallagher, one of the leaders of the manifestation, forcefully removes the headscarf of a Muslim woman protesting the unfair discrimination of Muslims (Waldman 191; 195). What makes this moment important is the symbolic value of Sean's gesture, which targets one of the most recognizable symbols of the Muslim faith. Sean himself is conscious of the import of what he is doing, motivated in part by his perverse desire "to see what was so valuable it had to be covered" (195). Sean's inconsiderate gesture would be met with support by other extremists and followed by a number of copycats, the first of whom would notably praise him and frame the aggression as an act of courage (196; 210). The epidemic of headscarf pullings that sweeps across the country in emulation of Sean's provocation was likely inspired by the real-life phenomenon of aggressions targeting people "easily identified as Arabs or Muslims" in the wake of the 9/11 attacks (Waldman 210; "The September 11 Backlash").

Unsurprisingly, women wearing hijabs were among the most common victims of this sort of incident (“The September 11 Backlash”; Mineo). However, there were also reports of attacks targeting Sikhs, who were erroneously identified as Muslims because of their turbans (“The September 11 Backlash”; “Hate Crime Reports Up”).

Stories, both real and fictional, of discrimination against Muslims have not lost their relevancy. To this day, over twenty years after the attacks, Muslims in the United States are still being subjected to discrimination on the grounds of their religious background (Mineo). There is an entire generation of young Muslim Americans that were born around or after 11 September 2001 that has had to grow up amid the prejudice that has been attached to their religion since the attacks; ever since childhood, the lives of these young people have been highly politicized and dedicated to the rehabilitation of their religion in the public eye [does this make sense as a sentence?] (Mineo). Another important takeaway of post-9/11 literature concerns journalism and the power and responsibility it entails, especially in moments of great tension and/or emergency. Both Amy Waldman’s *The Submission* and Art Spiegelman’s *In the Shadow of No Towers* are examples of this, as they target the failings and biases of American news outlets in the wake of the attacks: the former criticizes how the news contributed to the climate of prejudice that the attacks had caused; the latter comments on the media’s subservience to the government and the concurrent polarization of the political climate in the United States (Spiegelman 7). These two works are especially relevant nowadays, as people are trusting news outlets less and less, with “undue political influence” being one of the most commonly cited reasons for their perceived unreliability (Coster).

## 4. Conclusion

The September 11 attacks have left a deep mark in the collective psyche of the United States of America. Part of the reason why they had such an impact is the extraordinary level of care that went into their planning, which was aimed at making them as memorable as possible; another important factor is the massive and inevitable resonance that news outlets gave to the attacks in the time that followed, which the minds behind the attacks took into account and exploited. Due to their theatrical quality, which by far surpasses that of any prior terrorist attack, the 9/11 attacks have been analyzed by scholars in the field of performance studies, which offer the possibility to connect the attacks proper to the reaction they elicited from mass media and the public and analyze the entire event as a performer-audience interaction. The attacks have also spawned a genre or current of literature, which has, throughout its two decade-long history, explored both of these aspects.

The spectacle of the crashes has been well represented in such novels as Don DeLillo's *Falling Man* and Frédéric Beigbeder's *Windows on the World*. There is a noticeable gap in the amount of space these two novels dedicate to the description of the attacks, with the former using them as a frame to tell a story about its victims and the latter having them occupy a majority of its length; nonetheless, both depict the ongoing attacks in a fair amount of detail. Another work which deals with the spectacle of the attacks is Art Spiegelman's collection of comic strips titled *In the Shadow of No Towers*, which differentiates itself from the former two thanks to its use of images as opposed to prose, as well as its imaginative, rather than realistic, approach to the portrayal of the attacks. All three of these works also present traits which suggest that the characters have experienced (or are experiencing) psychological trauma, offering scholars of trauma studies a number of openings for analysis.

The media reaction to the attacks, on the other hand, features prominently as a theme in Amy Waldman's *The Submission*; more specifically, what is explored is the narration mass media have made of the correlation between the attacks and Islam and its repercussions on the Muslim community in the United States. Waldman's novel paints a scathing picture of journalism in the wake of the 9/11 attacks, one where most media outlets have chosen to prioritize sensationalism and outrage over an accurate representation of the ongoing events. In this scenario, the characters of Alyssa Spier and

Lou Sarge act as satires of news outlets pushing biased agendas for their own benefit and sowing division among the people in the process.

Finally, *The Submission* and *In the Shadow of No Towers* both serve as cautionary tales. The theme of prejudice so thoroughly explored in the former and that of media responsibility and bias prominently featured in both are still relevant over twenty years after 11 September 2001, during a time when Muslims are still being discriminated as a result of the attacks and faith in the reliability of the news is declining.

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## Appendix



Figure 1. Marty Lederhandler. The Twin Towers enveloped in smoke. *CNN*, 10 September 2021, <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2021/09/us/9-11-photos-cnnphotos/>. Accessed 6 January 2023.



Figure 2. Stan Honda. “Dust Lady.” *CNN*, 10 September 2021, <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2021/09/us/9-11-photos-cnnphotos/>. Accessed 6 January 2023.



Figure 3. Thomas E. Franklin. “Raising the Flag at Ground Zero.” *CNN*, 10 September 2021, <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2021/09/us/9-11-photos-cnnphotos/>. Accessed 6 January 2023.



Figure 4. Richard Drew. “The Falling Man.” *CNN*, 10 September 2021, <https://edition.cnn.com/interactive/2021/09/us/9-11-photos-cnnphotos/>. Accessed 6 January 2023.



Figure 5. One of the Twin Towers represented as a reticle of glowing lines. From Spiegelman, Art. *In the Shadow of No Towers*. Viking Adult, 2004, p. 1, *Internet Archive*,

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Figure 6. The “glowing tower” fades to grey. From Spiegelman, Art. *In the Shadow of No Towers*. Viking Adult, 2004, p. 10, *Internet Archive*,

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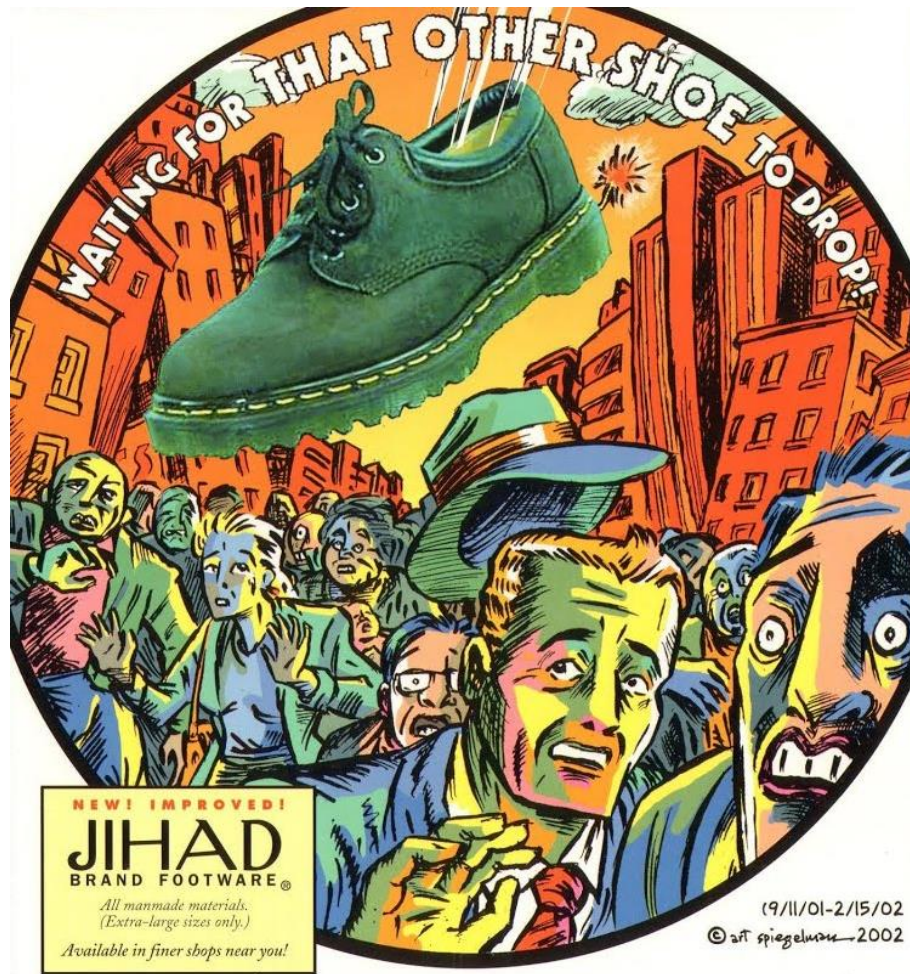


Figure 7. The collapsing tower represented as a falling shoe. From Spiegelman, Art. *In the Shadow of No Towers*. Viking Adult, 2004, p. 1, *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/intheshadowofnotowers/In%20the%20Shadow%20of%20No%20Towers%20%28Pg.%2001%29.jpg>. Accessed 8 January 2023.

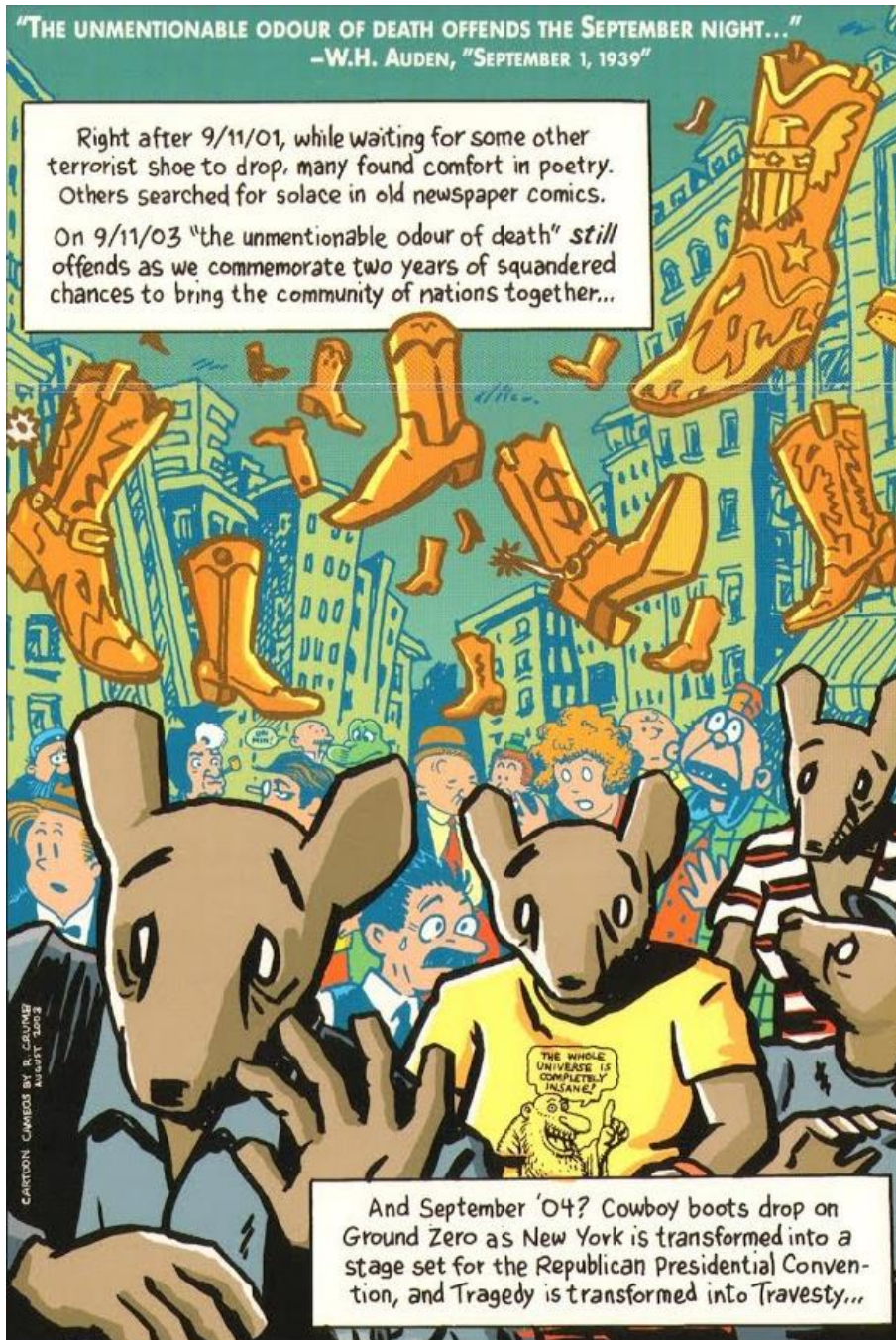


Figure 8. The falling shoe becomes a rain of cowboy boots. From Spiegelman, Art. *In the Shadow of No Towers*. Viking Adult, 2004, p. 10, *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/intheshadowofnotowers/In%20the%20Shadow%20of%20No%20Towers%20%28Pg.%2001%29.jpg>. Accessed 8 January 2023.



Figure 9. New York City tormented by monsters. Notice the two skyscrapers, likely representing the Twin Towers, and the two plane-like monsters. From Spiegelman, Art. *In the Shadow of No Towers*. Viking Adult, 2004, p. 6, *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/intheshadowofnotowers/In%20the%20Shadow%20of%20No%20Towers%20%28Pg.%2001%29.jpg>. Accessed 8 January 2023.

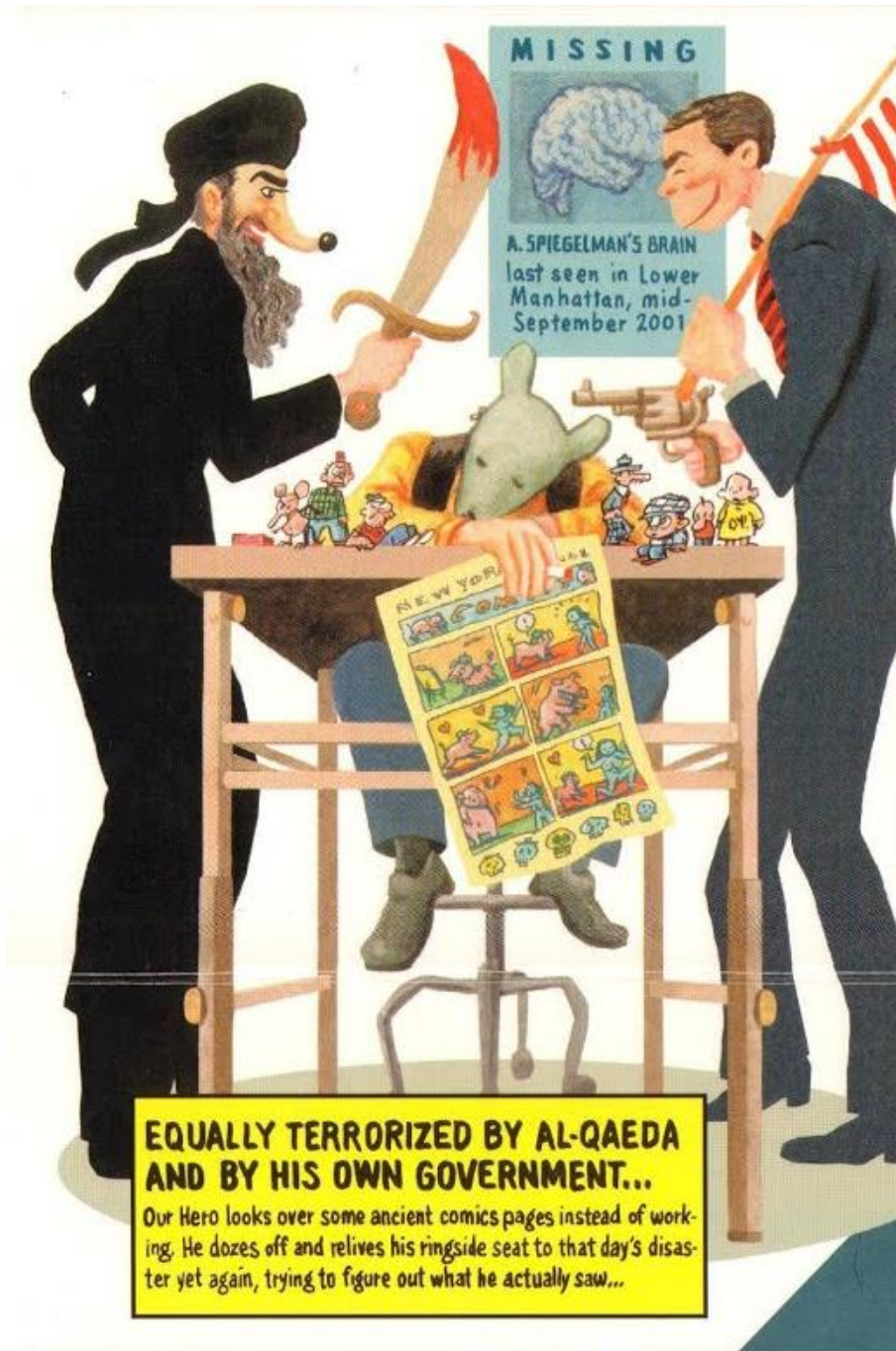


Figure 10. Osama Bin Laden and President George W. Bush looming over Spiegelman (represented as a mouse). This panel mirrors Spiegelman's claim of feeling "equally threatened by both Bush and bin Laden" following 9/11 (Witek 264). From Spiegelman, *Art. In the Shadow of No Towers*. Viking Adult, 2004, p. 2, *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/intheshadowofnotowers/In%20the%20Shadow%20of%20No%20Towers%20%28Pg.%2001%29.jpg>. Accessed 8 January 2023.



Figure 11. Spiegelman “drowning in newspaper headlines”. From Spiegelman, Art. *In the Shadow of No Towers*. Viking Adult, 2004, p. 8, *Internet Archive*, <https://archive.org/details/intheshadowofnotowers/In%20the%20Shadow%20of%20No%20Towers%20%28Pg.%2001%29.jpg>. Accessed 8 January 2023.